National College for School Leadership

Annual Enquiry 2005
Case study

Sevenoaks Talented And Gifted (STAG) Networked Learning Community

Christopher Noden & Helen Barrett

Networked Learning Communities

"I've gained a lot of confidence out of this and feel special."

Year 8 pupil researcher

It was an excellent summer school and we felt lucky to be involved. My child loved it and I noticed how she seemed to mature and gain confidence. She used to hate going off on her own to join a group.

Parent

Impact on children: attainment

This report sets out to address the following question: 'To what extent has the provision of the Sevenoaks Talented and Gifted (STAG) Networked Learning Community (NLC) led to improvements in pupil engagement, motivation and self-esteem?'

The network's provision for gifted and talented students includes the 'pupils as researchers' project carried out by Year 8 gifted and talented pupils, and the summer school and master classes for Year 4 gifted and talented pupils. The pupils as researchers project aims to improve engagement and attainment and aid the transition of pupils from Key Stage (KS) 2 to KS3. All projects aim to impact on participating pupils' engagement and motivation to learn. The STAG network has conducted a wide range of learning-based projects, ranging from school in-service training (INSET) and teacher research projects through to classroom-based activities for pupils such as puzzle challenge days. The fieldwork for this case study focused on two pupil-centred projects:

- summer school and master classes for Year 4 students
- pupil research project conducted by Year 8 pupils, looking at issues affecting transition to secondary school

This report summarises the impact that these two projects have had on pupils, while also providing some generic impact data for the network as a whole. From 2002 to 2004, the percentage of pupils who have achieved Level 5 and above in the three core subjects at KS2 has increased at a higher rate for STAG schools than in Kent as a whole or nationally. In English, attainment at Level 5 and above has increased between 2002 and 2004 for STAG schools, while it has decreased in Kent and across the country as a whole during the same period. In maths and science, there have been greater increases at Level 5 and above for STAG schools than in Kent schools as a whole or nationally.

All the network leaders and headteachers interviewed felt that one of the main impacts of the STAG network has been to provide a more concerted impetus for schools to focus on the attainment of high-achieving pupils. Many of the interviewees indicated that one of the effects of network activity appeared to be an improvement at the higher attainment levels. Figures 1, 2 and 3 provide some confirmation of this.

Figure 1: Percentage of pupils achieving Level 5+ in English at Key Stage 2 in STAG, Kent and national schools, 2002-2004

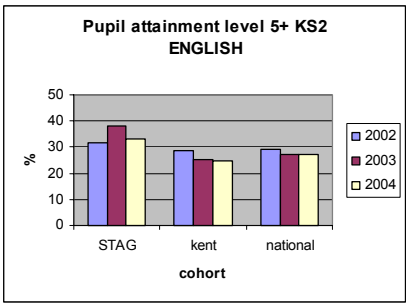


Figure 2: Percentage of pupils achieving Level 5+ in maths at Key Stage 2 in STAG, Kent and national schools, 2002-2004

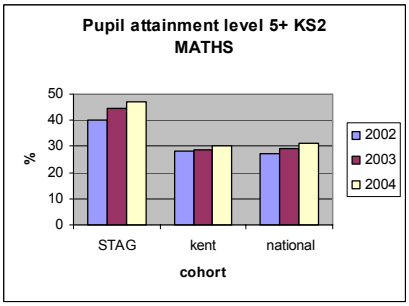
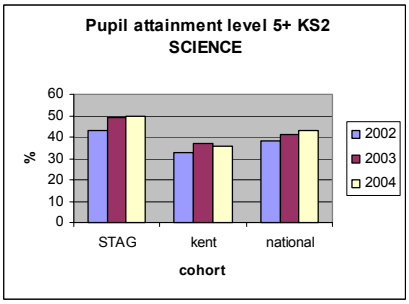


Figure 3: Percentage of pupils achieving Level 5+ in science at Key Stage 2 in STAG, Kent and national schools, 2002-2004



These network-wide upward trends would be expected if the overriding ethos and focus of the network was having a positive impact.

Quantitative attainment data was not available for individual pupils as they came from nearly 20 different schools. Nevertheless, one of the headteachers claimed that attending the summer school had a significant impact on one individual.

> *"One of our two pupils who attended summer school has made great strides in maths this year and I'm sure the summer school helped – he's dyslexic but has progressed suddenly very well … The focus on [gifted and talented pupils] has been part of school improvement and [the number of our pupils at] Level 5 has gone up this year. We have 100 per cent maths Level 4 and above for the first time."*
>
> Headteacher

Impact on children: achievement and engagement

Confidence and self-esteem

Both of the pupil-centred projects appear to have had significant impact in terms of raising levels of pupil confidence and self-esteem.

The result of being invited to participate in such projects was reported positively by several pupils. They recognised that they had been invited to participate as a result of their particular talents and abilities: "It felt good that somebody had seen how good at working you were and that you are one of a small group out of a much larger year group" said one Year 8 pupil. Three out of nine parents of pupils who had attended the summer school reported a long-term increase in confidence in their children almost a year after the event. Several pupils explained that they now felt more confident when speaking up in class. The opportunity for the Year 8 pupil researchers to visit primary schools and to interview younger pupils as part of their work was highlighted by the pupils and their teachers as having had a significant effect in improving confidence, as were the subsequent visits to present their findings.

The dissemination of the results of the pupil research projects has proved much more high profile than originally anticipated. The students' work has featured significantly both in the network and beyond. Along with the co-ordinating teachers, pupils have presented their findings in network primary schools, at recent Year 7 taster days and at parents' evenings. Recently, their work featured as part of a learning conversation at the NLG Annual Conference 2005. This exposure has increased levels of confidence and self-esteem further as the pupils realised that they were involved in a real research project which was having a real impact across the country.

Relationships, communication and social skills

All of the pupils interviewed identified the formation of new friendships as important in the success of the projects. In particular, the Year 8 researchers had not known each other well before the project but felt that they had developed better team-working skills and strong individual bonds which they would not otherwise have done: "It was the first time I had to get to know lots of people at the same time" said one Year 4 pupil. This was confirmed by a head of year.

> *"Having a mixed ability group [of pupil researchers] worked very well. The boys were initially aware that there were some low and some high achievers but by the end there was clearly real equality. Everybody [was] listening to each other's ideas – it made them realise that everyone can have good ideas, whatever band they are in."*
>
> Teacher and head of year

Both groups of pupils also spoke of improved relationships with their teachers: "The teachers trust us more now. The research also helped us work more as a team," as one Year 8 pupil put it. All pupils reported that the projects had given them the opportunity to work with different people in new and unusual settings. They felt that this had helped them to thrive. The Year 8 pupil researchers reported that the process of interviewing other pupils and analysing the results had been beneficial to their communication skills.

Attitude to learning

Participation in each of the two projects was voluntary. The students cited a wide range of reasons as to why their learning was both effective and enjoyable in these situations

> *"I enjoyed the timetable and skipping round best. We all did different things every day and I liked the presentations at the end of the week."*
>
> Year 4 pupil, Summer school

> *"Master classes are more fun than normal classes. Instead of so much writing like at school, we did far more action things, just describing what we did instead of having to write it down. It was more of a challenge as well."*
>
> Y4 pupil, Summer school

Extra-curricular learning projects clearly have the advantage of allowing flexibility of learning style and environment. Pupils from both projects identified that the projects had showed them certain styles and ways of learning which were enjoyable and which catered more effectively for their individual needs.

The teachers leading the research projects also identified an increased level of responsibility in pupils as the project progressed. While a small number of pupils dropped out due to the additional workload required, those that remained developed a strong attachment to the project and a more positive attitude to the learning.

> *"The girls have certainly become more responsible and independent over time. By the end of the project I was saying: "This is what you've got to do" and they went away and planned it and did it."*
>
> Year 8 teacher

Skills and knowledge

The projects had a number of specific learning outcomes for the pupils involved. The pupil researchers identified a high degree of improvement in their understanding and knowledge of research skills, in particular designing, delivering and analysing questionnaires. A number of the students indicated that they had successfully applied their new research skills in other subject areas since. Both the teachers involved confirmed that the pupil research model encouraged the specific acquisition of knowledge and skills, particularly in the area of data analysis.

For the summer school and master classes, new knowledge and understanding were gained on environmental and ecological issues. Almost a year on from the event, the pupils were still able to recall a significant amount of detail about the activities and their own learning.

> *"We investigated mini topics which we'd never done in school, like global warming."*
>
> Year 4 pupil, Summer school

> *"We did some maths which we hadn't done before – length, depth and breadth. It made it much easier when we came to do it in class."*
>
> Year 4 pupil, Summer school

Other impact

The research for this report set out specifically to look for impact on pupils. However, other areas of impact were also identified during the course of the fieldwork. Some of these impacts were reported strongly and consistently enough to warrant mentioning in this report.

There were clear indications that network activities have stimulated individual teachers and schools to assess and alter their practice, and the structures and processes of their schools.

> *"I am undoubtedly going to use these girls to lead and help other projects in the future. I am also going to suggest that we have a gifted and talented working party as we have different working parties across the school each year."*
>
> Year 8 teacher

> *"Action research has blossomed at our school directly as a result of the network."*
>
> Headteacher

The two headteachers who were interviewed identified two teachers in particular who had gained in confidence and whose practice had been positively influenced by exposure to network activity. The network co-ordinator is being asked increasingly by the wider local cluster of schools and by Kent local education authority (LEA) as a whole to provide input into staff development events. In particular, the transition work produced by the student research project and the gifted and talented policy development work has been taken across the network and beyond.

The STAG co-leader and LEA adviser both indicated that the prompt and effective establishment of primary strategy networks in the locality owes much to the lessons learned and disseminated by STAG's member schools: "We have already got the mechanisms and relationships established for the primary national strategy learning networks (PNSLNs) to work well" remarked a STAG co-leader.

School processes: what contribution has the network made?

Schools in the network employed a range of successful strategies which could be described as high leverage in terms of advancing the achievement of the network's aims. These have been gathered under three broad headings.

Selection and involvement of pupils

The two teachers involved in the pupil research project used similar methods to select pupils for participation. These teachers made an informal presentation to Year 8 form tutors and asked them to identify pupils with gifts and talents in one of a range of areas (including ICT, communication and presentation skills, statistics, art and design and other skills necessary to create an effective research team). The teachers made it clear that the target group was not to comprise simply pupils who were the highest academic achievers. The resultant pupil research groups represented an effective balance of skills and abilities. Many pupils expressed pleasure and pride in being invited to participate, and, far from engendering a negative stigma for taking part, teachers and pupils both confirmed that they gained status from participating. A number of pupils asked if they could join the project as it developed.

Another strong feature of the pupil research project was the degree to which the pupils felt part of the project planning. While the theme of the research (transition) was pre-determined, the pupils reported a genuine involvement in the choice of research question and methodology, as well as in the detail of project planning.

Conversely, the pupils who were invited to attend the summer school and master classes were identified largely on the basis of their academic achievement and were selected by a teacher at each school. One outcome of this approach was that the pupils reported not wanting to tell their friends about their experience at the summer school, nor talk about it on their return to school.

Involvement, buy-in and professional development of staff

The secondary teachers who led the pupil research project had been assigned to do so by their headteachers. Initially, the teachers had expressed reservations due to time commitments and unfamiliarity with the pupil research model. As experienced and committed professionals, however, the teachers invested planning time in the project and saw it through to completion. Both members of staff were extremely positive about the outcomes for pupils and for their own professional development.

> *"I had to be almost pushed into this initially because I'd just done my own MA and thought "Here I go again", but as soon as we started I recognised this was different and I was pleased to be involved."*
>
> Teacher, Pupil research project

Both teachers indicated that for any future pupil research projects they would ensure that other colleagues were more involved in order to disperse the experience and share the workload.

The summer school and master classes were led by a combination of staff from state schools and the independent Sevenoaks School. The co-ordinating group for the summer school reported that the time expended in finding committed and skilled staff was worthwhile, as the quality of teaching was judged very high. The teachers themselves reported a high degree of learning from each other to the network leaders: "One of the spin-offs for us was that the two teachers involved learned a great deal from the other teachers about teaching in the primary phase and the state sector" reported the deputy head of Sevenoaks School.

Alignment of school and network priorities

A strong alignment was reported between the priorities of individual network schools visited and the overall aims of STAG. The focus and objectives of the network have been honed over a three-year period and communicated strongly across its constituency. Analysis of the steering committee and co-ordinator minutes reveals that all individual schools have contributed to the formulation of the network's learning focus and the planning of individual projects, encouraging this harmony between school and network objectives.

While the extent to which individual network schools addressed the gifted and talented focus varied, this did not appear directly to affect participation nor the reported impact of activity. The girls' school, for instance, reported that work on gifted and talented was 'relatively embryonic'. Conversely, at some of the primary schools, a high level of attention was awarded to this area. In all cases, however, there had been sufficient and appropriate input from the network co-ordinator and from teachers to ensure that projects fitted the current identified needs and priorities of each school. A Year 8 teacher said: *"This project has highlighted [to other staff] that we can do really interesting work with our girls and that they don't have to be high flyers to achieve"*.

Network characteristics

Context

Established in 2002, STAG serves over 5,000 pupils and comprises 2 secondary, 12 primary, 1 junior and 1 infant school. An inspection of Kent LEA conducted just prior to the establishment of the STAG network revealed a need to provide greater levels of challenge to the authority's more able pupils. This finding prompted the leaders of STAG to place provision for gifted and talented pupils at the heart of the new network's agenda for learning. However, operating in an authority such as Kent where school admissions are determined by selection according to a narrow field of academic ability has presented peculiar challenges to the STAG network leaders. The grammar school system creates the potential for intense selection and competition between schools. It can also distort the view of what constitutes gifted or talented ability. Some teachers and parents from within the network were of the view that pupils who fail to pass the 11-plus exam were by definition neither gifted nor talented. The two single-sex secondary schools in the STAG network provide for those pupils who do not pass the 11-plus exam.

This context means that the leadership of the network has had to work hard to alter the perception of 'ability', particularly in terms of what is meant by 'gifted and talented'. Our interviews with teachers and network leaders indicate that pupils who do not pass the 11-plus exam are often stigmatised as failures, sometimes quite openly. The STAG network has therefore faced two central challenges, to:

- counter the sense of intense competition that existed among and between STAG schools
- develop a broader and more inclusive perception and understanding of 'gifted and talented' ability

The STAG schools are also part of a larger cluster of schools established by Kent LEA. STAG has therefore frequently been able to share practice, expertise and learning in the area of gifted and talented across the whole cluster. Most notably, this is through the contribution of the STAG network co-ordinator to the various cross-cluster activities. Several non-STAG cluster schools are keen to make use of the gifted and talented work of the network. For example, the Year 4 summer school was open to pupils from some non-STAG schools. Interviews indicated that whilst this NLC is pleased to be able to provide support to other schools, it is determined to maintain its own identity, and particularly to avoid its resources being spread too thinly or its focus becoming diminished in the face of wider initiatives.

In the original submission to become a funded NLC, part of STAG's stated aims and objectives was to raise standards of achievement by focusing on 'improving teaching and learning for gifted and talented pupils'. It was also intended that all pupils would benefit from the development of joint working arrangements and the sharing of expertise across schools.

Focus and purpose

From its inception, STAG had a clearly defined focus and purpose, although the participating schools have not been afraid to change and develop it over time. Just prior to the formation of STAG, an Ofsted report of Kent LEA had highlighted a general lack of appropriate extension and enrichment activities for gifted and talented pupils. When the schools came together to submit a bid to become a funded NLC, this theme was agreed by all as a strong one. The focus of STAG has shifted over time to one of improving the identification and development of the gifts and talents of all pupils. Visits to three of the primary schools gave a visual indication of this shift, as each school had a display area where pupils' individual gifts and talents were recorded and celebrated publicly.

Despite this movement towards achievement for all, support remains to ensure that those with academic ability are still stretched by additional activities. One of the parents interviewed expressed this as follows.

> *"The best thing [about the summer school] was a week of free activities aimed at the brightest children … So often summer activities focus on sport, music etc which not all children want to do. It also celebrated intellectual ability which is often overlooked."*
>
> Parent of Year 4 pupil, Summer school

Recognising the criteria for effective continuing professional development (CPD), the audit of provision for gifted and talented students conducted in the early days of the network ensured that the development work that followed was firmly rooted in a network-wide evidence-base. Results of the audit were summarised and disseminated to all network schools, using the data gathered to inform decisions about the chosen network focus.

Co-ordination

Many respondents thought the appointment of a motivated and highly skilled network co-ordinator was critical to the success and sustainability of the network. As an experienced and skilled practitioner, the co-ordinator has worked hard to develop strong links with all the schools. This was apparent in the visits conducted for the research. Demonstrating strong leadership herself, the co-ordinator possesses a clear commitment to the value of networked learning and an enthusiasm for the network's work. Prior to her appointment, she served as a senior member of staff at one of the network schools. This has given her a degree of credibility with colleagues in the network, as well as useful local knowledge. The co-ordinator demonstrated an ability to research and filter possible network activity and resources from other areas.

> *"I have attended a number of NLG and other conferences and events and used materials where appropriate. For example, I saw a great presentation by some pupil researchers from another area and used this and the NLG materials to plan our pupil research project."*
>
> Network co-ordinator

The network co-ordinator has presented a series of sessions to governors, school staff and parents designed to raise the profile of a more inclusive approach to the identification and labelling of gifted and talented students. The network has also been supported by Nick Peacey from the Institute of Education. His role, in particular, has been to develop network-wide gifted and talented policy and to support teacher research projects to help put these policies into practice.

The creation of a gifted and talented (GAT) co-ordinator in each of the network schools has also been key. This group of GAT co-ordinators is now well established and has a regular programme of meetings. These meetings have become a forum for developing policy and practice as well as an opportunity for STAG to disseminate ideas and promote forthcoming activities to all schools.

Leadership

Interviews during the fieldwork and an analysis of network records and planning documentation indicate that STAG has benefited from strong and consistent leadership. Such leadership capacity arises from the efforts of the two co-leaders, strong support from the LEA critical friend and others, and consistent reinforcement from the network co-ordinator.

Another key feature has been the consistency in vision offered by the two co-leaders. These two primary headteachers have fulfilled the duties of co-leader in providing support and strong leadership for the network since the beginning. In other respects, the structure of the network appears fairly traditional and hierarchical in form, with leadership arising most obviously from the network steering committee.

However, the dynamic nature of the organisation was again revealed through reference to leadership opportunities becoming more distributed across the network.

> *"The increased amount of networked and collaborative learning within the network has prompted thinking, discussion and action around the notion of distributed leadership. For example, the network has determined that staff other than heads will form the steering committee that drives the network student council initiative."*
>
> Network co-leader

> *"There is now much more support within the network … There is now a support group for ICT, Foundation Stage, GAT … There have been lots of spin-offs in terms of establishing support groups."*
>
> Network co-leader

Promoting and demonstrating collaboration

There was evidence of powerful and authentic collaboration between all network schools and at various levels. This was demonstrated by the records and minutes of the:

- STAG steering committee
- GAT co-ordinators groups
- action research partnership meetings
- network-based INSET and CPD where attendance is recorded as regular and consistent, and where the contributions made are detailed as significant

In contrast to individual schools organising discrete activity, STAG pupils and parents also recognised collaboration as a major strength of the network. The parents of summer school pupils, for example, were generally positive about the project and were most positive about the mixing of pupils from different schools. Eight out of nine parents who evaluated the summer school rated the mixing of pupils from different schools as 'very good'.

A number of the staff interviewed confirmed that prior to the formation of STAG, the degree of collaboration between network schools was limited. The competition generated by the system of selection, combined with falling rolls in some areas were cited as reasons for insularity in the past. The development of genuine collaboration between schools was attributed to the network's concerted focus on learning and a wide range of hands-on pupil activity provided by the network.

> *"Looking back pre-network we were very isolated, whereas now we are much more willing to share. Learning walks is one example – they are now being taken up by the cluster as well, from headteachers to pupils."*
>
> Headteacher

Collaboration for STAG now means much more than simply school-to-school activity within the network. The schools in the local cluster and across Kent are now viewed as partners. Extending beyond the network, the partnership with the independent Sevenoaks School has also flourished. This independent school already has a history of collaboration with the state sector, but STAG has enhanced this provision by offering the infrastructure, management and leadership capacity to manage and run the summer school successfully.

> *"We have a history of working with local primary schools … but the link with STAG has been a huge bonus, providing joint funding and resources. Alison [the co-ordinator] could take on*

the management of the summer school, hence the good take-up, little drop-out and a huge demand for it again this year."

Deputy headteacher, Sevenoaks School

Inclusiveness

In 2004, concerns arose between the STAG steering committee and co-ordinator that the two secondary schools were less involved in the network than the primary schools. It was therefore decided to undertake some new network activity specifically designed to re-engage the secondary schools. This was how the pupil research project came about. The theme of transition from KS2 to KS3 and the model of pupil as researchers were chosen for three reasons. First, Kent LEA had identified transition as a problem across the county as a whole. Second, the theme would be likely to lead to the strengthening and re-establishment of cross-phase links within the network. Third, the research model allowed the two secondary schools to invite a wide and mixed-ability group of pupils to participate.

The research project succeeded on all these counts. There has been a high degree of cross-phase work and the presentation and leaflets produced to aid transition will be used in future years. The results of the research have already been used by LEA officers in school improvement work, and the secondary schools felt that the model had encouraged participation by pupils with a much wider range of skills and abilities.

HEI support

The network has benefited from ongoing input from the co-ordinator of the Special Educational Needs Joint Initiative for Training (SENJIT) at the Institute of Education, University of London. In particular, this external HEI link has assisted the network in developing and linking its policy and practice in the areas of gifted and talented pupils, and has specifically supported a series of teacher research activities.

Running effective projects on the ground and in the classroom

Interviews with school staff and headteachers exposed the unanimous view that one of STAG's key strengths has been its ability to translate its strategic focus into real projects that directly impact on the learning and experience of individual pupils. A network of 16 schools can easily become lost within the myriad of other national and local initiatives looking to impact on performance, standards, and teaching and learning. A network with limited resources can also become too concerned with strategy, policy and planning.

STAG demonstrates an effective balance between strategic focus and project delivery. The impact data at the beginning of this report suggests that this balance is increasingly producing dividends for all the schools.

In a climate in which schools have become increasingly used to launching new, short-term initiatives on a regular basis, one indicator of success and effectiveness is teachers' and schools' willingness and desire to repeat successful projects. There is enthusiasm for the continuation of all of the projects referred to in this report. For example, there is a growing commitment to enquiry within STAG: both secondary schools indicated that they are planning further pupil research projects following the perceived success of this year's project. There is also a wider and more established range of enquiry-based activity which STAG has promoted, largely through action research projects for groups of teachers. A series of networked learning walks for headteachers, teachers and pupils has had an impact on the exchange of practice and developing teaching and learning strategies. These were referred to in several of the interviews as significant network activities though they were not related directly to the projects under review.

Conclusions

STAG has led to direct, measurable impact in terms of the achievement and engagement of pupils in a number of areas. There is also some evidence that pupil attainment has increased as a result of its work. Key areas of pupil impact identified by a detailed look at the pupil research project and the summer school and master classes are self-confidence and self-esteem, motivation to learn, team working, collaboration and specific areas of knowledge.

Several specific in-school and network characteristics have been identified as critical in the delivery of these impacts. The main characteristics cluster around:

- clear focus, grounded in research and an audit of need
- strong leadership and co-ordination
- good balance between strategic planning and delivering pupil-focused projects
- long-term commitment to collaboration at a variety of levels (leadership, teacher and pupil)

STAG is viewed positively by its leaders and its constituents and is deservedly held up as a successful example of networked learning. The research has also picked out a number of recommendations.

- The most successful projects observed were generally those that had a strong focus on the inclusion of all pupils. The pupil research project was assessed as more likely to have lasting impact on the pupils involved and the network as a whole, compared with summer school and master classes, which were felt to be more insular.
- All the pupil interviews indicated that pupils had experienced a lot of learning about learning, and they had a number of constructive ideas about how this could be transferred to the classroom. It is hoped that the proposed network student council will be used to harness some of this energy and knowledge for the benefit of all schools in the network.
- There is a risk that the network will become over-reliant on the efforts of its co-ordinator to both initiate activities and drive them forward. The co-ordinator's post has recently been confirmed for a further 12 months. Along with the network co-leaders, the co-ordinator has indicated an awareness that leadership and management needs to be increasingly distributed across the network during the forthcoming year, if sustainability beyond the life of the NLC programme is to be assured.
- As STAG is now in its third full year of operation and its direct funding ends within 12 months, it is recommended that increased investment is made in the evaluation of its impact. If STAG and its constituent schools are able to clearly identify how and where the network has made a strong impact, future resources can be better targeted and there will be a greater determination for the network to sustain itself.

Acknowledgements

The researchers and authors of the report found the co-ordinator, leaders, staff, pupils and parents of STAG to be, without exception, keen to be involved in the research process. There was a unanimous willingness to be challenged about practice and to enquire into where and how a positive impact had been realised by pupils, combined with an openness to discuss where network activity had not been so effective. This openness was refreshing and helpful to the process of producing this report. The authors would particularly like to thank Alison O'Brien, the STAG network co-ordinator, who acted as associate to the process, supporting this work in many ways including arranging the visits and interviews, and collecting other data.

Methods and sources

This case study has been constructed with reference to primary and secondary data and a series of interviews and conversations during May and July 2005. All interviews were transcribed and analysed by gathering comments under key themes.

Interviews

- 1 Network co-ordinator
- 1 Network co-leader
- 2 Primary headteachers
- 2 Secondary school teachers (leaders of pupil as researchers project)
- 1 Senior deputy headteacher (independent school)
- LEA critical friend

Focus groups

- 5 Year 5 students (2 from Chevening School and 3 from St Thomas School)
- 10 Year 8 students (8 from The Wildernesse Secondary School and 2 from Bradbourne Secondary School)
- 4 Year 6 students (all from Dunton Green Primary School)

Documents

- 9 Parent evaluation questionnaires (summer school)
- 6 Teacher evaluation questionnaires (summer school)
- 37 Pupil evaluation questionnaires (summer school)
- 7 Teaching assistant questionnaires (summer school)
- NLG Submission document
- NLG Annual review materials
- Minutes and documents related to network meetings
- Observation of learning conversation at NLG annual conference
- Pupil work from the summer schools and master classes
- Copy of all pupil as researcher materials (questionnaires, analyses, final presentation and leaflet)
- KS2 core subject results for STAG schools

Appendix 1: Project descriptions

The projects that were investigated in detail for this report were as follows.

Pupil research project for Year 8 pupils

The two secondary schools in the network have both had groups of Years 7 and 8 pupils involved in a pupil as researcher (PAR) project. Pupils were invited to participate after being identified as having particular gifts or talents in areas that would be useful to the projects. These included ICT, maths, art and design, questioning and communication skills. The pupils were given the task of undertaking a piece of research into issues affecting transition from Year 6 to Year 7. The two groups each worked with an experienced and key teacher who helped them to set their own research question, design the methodology and analysis of the research and choose the medium for disseminating the results.

The boys from The Wildernesse Secondary School designed a questionnaire for Year 6 pupils at local primary schools, got them to complete it, analysed the results and produced a PowerPoint presentation to deal with pupils' key concerns prior to starting Year 7. The presentation is of extremely high quality and incorporates animation and music. The group of girls from Bradbourne School developed a questionnaire for the whole of Year 7 at their own school, analysed the responses and produced a leaflet to be given to Year 6 pupils prior to transition to secondary school. The 2 groups began as groups of 12 but both reduced slightly in number over the course of the project. A high level of personal motivation was required as a significant portion of the project work took place outside lesson time.

The PAR project is characterised as a non-traditional gifted and talented initiative, in that participating pupils were a broad mix in terms of their academic ability, achievement and engagement. Indeed, both the teachers involved in the project reported that some colleagues were highly sceptical about the likelihood of some of the pupils completing the project successfully. "Why have you got [pupil x] in the group? I didn't think (s)he was gifted or talented" was a question that both teachers were asked by colleagues. In both cases, the co-ordinating teachers expressed pleasure that these pupils had surpassed the low expectations of some colleagues.

Figure 4: A still from the presentation produced by pupils of The Wildernesse Secondary School which was aimed at smoothing the transition to secondary school for Year 6 pupils

Summer school and master classes for Year 4 pupils

For the gifted and talented summer school, 38 Year 4 students attended a week-long event in August 2003. The summer school was hosted by Sevenoaks School, an independent school with a strong history

of working collaboratively with local state primary schools. The summer school was attended by Year 4 pupils who had been identified as talented in the areas of science, maths and ICT. Schools were asked to identify one or two pupils whom they felt would benefit from the project. The 38 pupils who attended the summer school were also invited to attend 3 Saturday master classes over the course of the following year, one during each term.

The summer school and master classes had a themed focus on ecology and environmental issues and the curriculum learning was largely in the areas of science, maths and ICT. The key features of the sessions were that they had little focus on writing and more on experiential learning. Pupils were in small groups, and the physical learning environment was of a very high standard.

The summer school was staffed by five experienced teachers (including two from Sevenoaks School) and used six Year 12 pupils to act as assistants during the week. These were a mixture of state and independent pupils.

The summer school and master classes are characterised as being traditional activities for gifted and talented pupils, in that they extended and enriched the learning experience of a group of pupils who were already at the higher end of academic achievement in their schools.