

# National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL)

## Light bulb moments: school-to-school support



National leader of education, Barbara Rogers, shares her experiences of supporting other schools in the North West and how to achieve those light bulb moments.

### Building relationships

Having worked with many different schools as a national leader of education (NLE) I'd say that the key ingredient of success has got to be relationship building – making sure that leaders and teachers feel supported and included, rather than being the recipient of an improvement plan that is being imposed on them.

I have been an NLE since 2012 and recently changed role from Executive Principal to Head of the Teaching School at St Patrick's Secondary School in Salford. We have regularly been awarded funding by NCTL to work with other schools as part of school-to-school support funding. Schools are identified by the local authority or the local diocese, or sometimes schools approach us directly for help. Impacting on outcomes is the purpose of any deployment and is therefore essential.

I always start by working with the client school to create an action plan, ensuring that all parties agree it in detail, including the school governors, so that everyone is clear about the steps involved.

Most schools want to do better and achieve more for their pupils so it's a question of tapping into this shared goal and offering an outsider's perspective on the issues they're finding most challenging. A Headteacher at one of the client schools I've worked with said:

"The NLE assessment was like a light bulb going on in the school."

### Bespoke support

The nature of the support provided will vary according to the needs of the client school. For one school, I organised the deployment of a deputy head from another school outside the local authority to work in the school for 2 days a week using a project-based approach. Whilst in another school, I brokered a whole team of system leaders including an NLE, 3 specialist leaders of education (SLEs) and a national leader of governance (NLG). The team all worked to their own agreed action plans and reported back on progress using a short template, which helped to ensure consistency and to maintain focus on specific outcomes.

I've also learned that it is important to watch out for 'deployment creep' as although you should remain flexible in approach when new issues unfold, it is vital that the support team remains focused on the reasons they were deployed in the first place to ensure that targeted progress can be made.

After meeting with a client school and putting together an improvement plan and a support package, my role is to oversee the progress being made and to offer support and challenge to the people involved.

Our school has a very experienced senior administration manager, which I think has been critical to the success of the deployments. Their ability to organise meetings, keep track of paperwork and oversee finances, has allowed me to concentrate on the brokerage and detail of the support offered to schools. I rely on this person to QA records of visits and like everyone on my team, they contribute to work which enables school improvement of the highest quality to be given, captured and evidenced.

### My school benefits too!

It is my belief that as an outstanding school, we have a duty to support those that are not improving sufficiently, in order to ensure that every pupil has access to a good education. At St Patrick's, we prioritise school-to-school support and over the last year we have restructured the senior leadership team to allow us more time to devote to this, without losing focus on being an outstanding school ourselves.

Training, recruitment and retention of outstanding teachers is a key aspect to being able to deliver high quality school-to-school support. Many of our teachers have been able to progress quickly to middle leadership because of the experience gained in client schools.

This is great for continuing professional development and the experience and knowledge they gain feeds back into St Patrick's.

This work is rewarding on so many levels. I arrive in some schools and first of all need to rebuild confidence or relationships. They have usually been through a difficult time with everyone telling school leaders and governors that despite their best efforts they are not good enough. I feel privileged to work with people when they are at their most vulnerable and I know I have the knowledge and experience to make a difference. I can be their champion by ensuring that they are given time, knowledge and resources to make the required changes.

My advice to anyone thinking of becoming an NLE is to recognise the privilege and opportunity of making a difference as a system leader, impacting positively on the professional lives of other school leaders and together making an improvement to pupil outcomes.