

# Review of the future of school improvement in Derbyshire

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## Final report

Isos Partnership

November 2016



# Executive summary

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## Introduction

The purpose of this project has been to carry out a fast-paced review to gather feedback on and inform strategic decisions about future arrangements for school improvement in Derbyshire. The review took place during the autumn term of 2016, and involved engagements with a range of school and local authority leaders across the county.

## Key findings & recommendations

We structured our evidence-gathering and recommendations around three broad themes, based on our national research and experience of how other, similar local education systems are redesigning support for school improvement.

**Theme 1, the local school improvement offer** – the vast majority of schools value the current advisory service and want to continue to access support from it. They recognise, however, that the service needs to adapt to offer consistently high-quality support and challenge, and they want a greater say in shaping the support to their needs. We recommend developing a new traded advisory offer that schools can buy into for 2017/18, potentially supported with transitional funding from the LA (to subsidise the cost), and exploring a schools-led approach to delivering the service in the future.

**Theme 2, schools-led strategic governance** – there is a clear vision, and commitment to working collaboratively, but a lack of clarity about the long-term strategic direction. With a clear role, action plan and co-ordinating capacity, and links to area headteacher groups and regional partners, the existing Board could provide strategic direction and leadership.

**Theme 3, strengthening partnerships & system leadership** – schools see a vital role for local partnerships and system leadership in the future, but there needs to be a strategic focus on building capacity for school improvement within partnerships and developing greater capacity of, and access to, system leaders in Derbyshire and beyond.

## Taking this review forward – four things that will be required

- 1. Move swiftly to put in place an offer of advisory support that schools can buy into for 2017/18.** Information about this offer will need to be shared with schools this term, with further detail to inform budget decisions next term.
- 2. Establish an advisory group** – to work with the LA to shape the offer for 2017/18 and in the longer term.
- 3. Clear communication** – about the how the roles of key players will fit together in the future local education system.
- 4. Swift, precise, high-quality implementation** – with an ongoing role for the LA to support the transition.



# Introduction: Aims of the review and how we have approached it

## Aims of the review

In summer 2016, Derbyshire County Council commissioned Isos Partnership to carry out a fast-paced, solutions-focused review of the future of school improvement in Derbyshire. The review focused on three key questions.

**1. The school improvement offer** – what should be the offer of local school improvement services and how should this be delivered?

**2. The strategic direction for the local education system** – how should this offer of school improvement services fit within the overall education system in Derbyshire?

**3. Putting this into practice** – what should be the next steps for putting a new offer of school improvement services in place?

This report captures our key findings from this fieldwork, and builds on the evidence and feedback gathered by Derbyshire County Council previously, which was made available to us as part of the review.

## What we have done

During the review, we have:

- ✓ reviewed key strategic documents and data;
- ✓ held workshops with local authority colleagues; and
- ✓ engaged school leaders and strategic partners through 1-to-1 interviews and workshops.

During this time, we have engaged:

- ✓ **school leaders** – headteachers and governors from 49 schools in total – a breakdown of the phases and types of schools is provided on the next page;
- ✓ **system leaders** – 9 colleagues who held system leadership roles (e.g. leading teaching schools) and 4 members of the Derbyshire Education Partnership Board (DEIPB); and
- ✓ **senior Derbyshire County Council colleagues** – elected members, senior officers responsible for children's services, school improvement, finance and traded services, and staff within the advisory service.

## The spirit in which the review was undertaken

We have sought to carry out the review in an open, transparent, iterative and consultative manner. During the review, we found a strong commitment among school and local authority leaders to work together to sustain and build upon the strengths of the education system in Derbyshire. We are grateful to all colleagues who took part in this review, and hope this report will help colleagues to work together to continue improve education for all pupils in Derbyshire.

# Introduction: Who we have engaged during the review

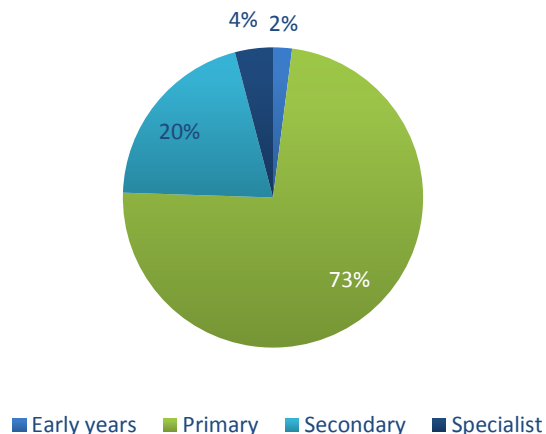
**We engaged a total of 49 schools during the course of the review** – this is equivalent to c.12% of all state-funded schools in Derbyshire. In some schools, we engaged multiple people – e.g. the headteacher and chair of governors.

**We engaged the schools in a number of different ways** – 23 schools took part in 1-to-1 visits or telephone interviews, 15 took part in small group workshops, and 21 (some of whom had also taken part in the 1-to-1s and workshops) took part in a larger workshop for Derbyshire's School Improvement Forum.

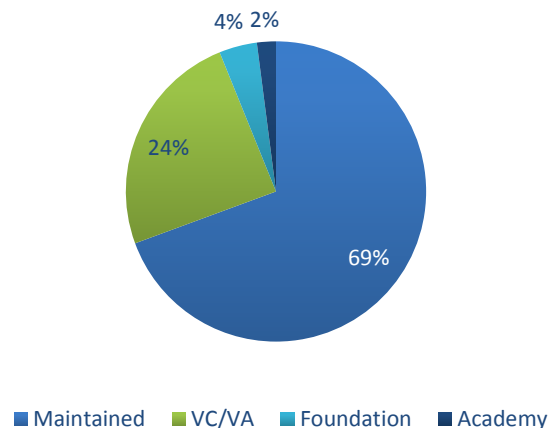
**The majority of schools colleagues who took part in the review were headteachers** – in total, we engaged 47 headteachers and 5 chairs of governors. Several colleagues held multiple roles, for example, acting as a system leader – 9 colleagues held system leadership roles, 3 were Associate School Improvement Advisors (ASIAs) within the advisory service. In addition, 3 colleagues led local networks (e.g. headteacher associations) and 4 were members of the DEIPB.

**Of the schools we engaged, there was good representation from all phases** – the left-hand chart below shows that the majority (73%) were from primary schools, 20% were from secondary schools, while we also engaged colleagues from specialist providers and a nursery school. The majority of schools that took part were maintained schools or voluntary-aided (VA) / voluntary-controlled (VC) schools. Only one academy took part in the review – in taking forward the findings of this review, it will be important to seek out the feedback of secondary academies specifically to gather their views.

% of schools engaged by phase



% of schools engaged by type



## The structure of this report

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- A** Context of the local education system in Derbyshire
- B** Key findings from the review
- C** Recommendations
- D** Next steps – taking forward the findings from this review

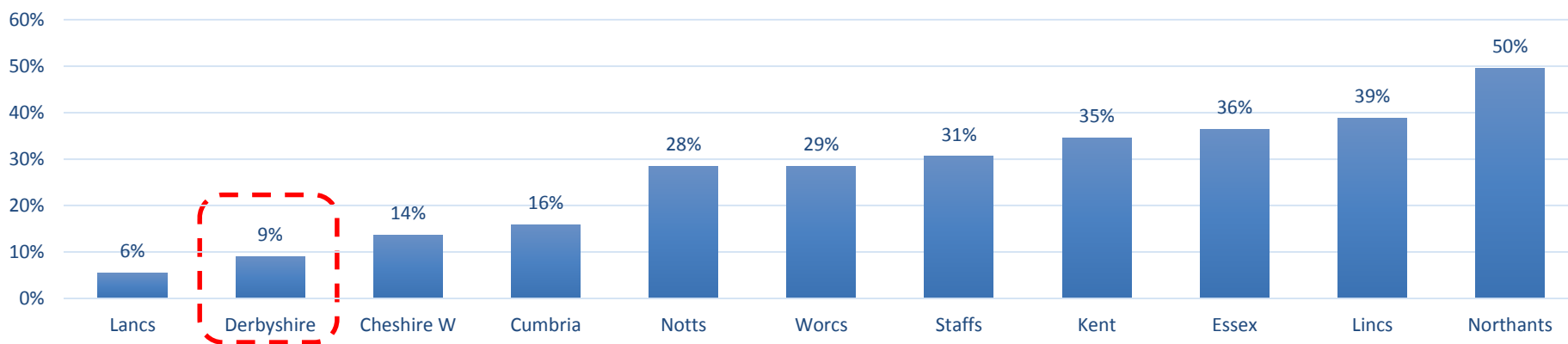
**Derbyshire is a large, predominantly rural shire county in the East Midlands** – the county has lower than average levels of deprivation overall (it is ranked 101 among local authorities in England in the index of multiple deprivation; 1 being the most deprived), but with pockets of deprivation. The size and geography of the county mean the context in each of its constituent parts is very different – the distinctive nature of each district was a strong theme in our review.

**There are currently 416 state-funded schools in Derbyshire** – 8 nursery schools, 350 primary (or deemed primary) schools, 45 secondary schools, 10 special schools, and 3 pupil referral units.

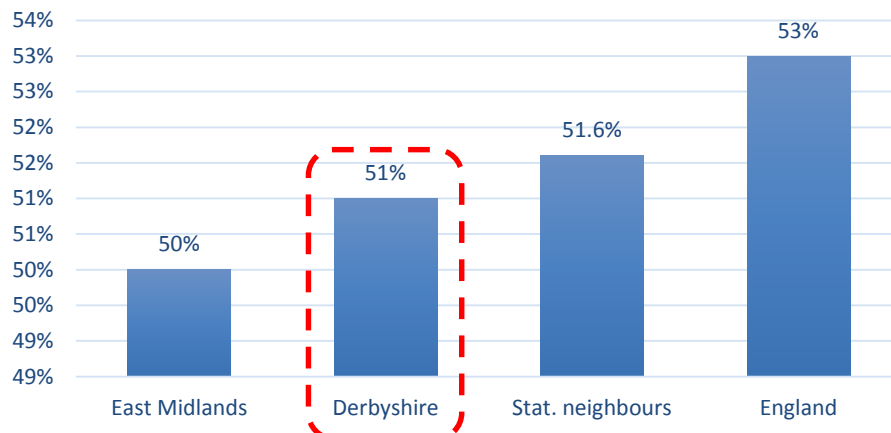
**According to the latest school census data, there were 111,466 pupils in Derbyshire schools** – the average size of a primary school is 180 pupils, a secondary school is 947 pupils, and a special school of 89. Schools in Derbyshire are, on average, smaller than is the case across the county. Furthermore, we know there are a number of very small schools in Derbyshire – 100 schools with fewer than 100 pupils.

**Fewer schools in Derbyshire are academies than is the case among similar local areas** – published data, shown in the table below, indicates that 9% of Derbyshire schools have become academies. As we explain in this document, we heard strong messages from schools of all types about their wish to continue to work with the LA. (By ‘similar local areas’, we mean Derbyshire’s 10 statistical neighbours based on official published data – these are shown in the table below.)

**% academies**



% pupils achieving expected standard in  
KS2 RWM, 2016

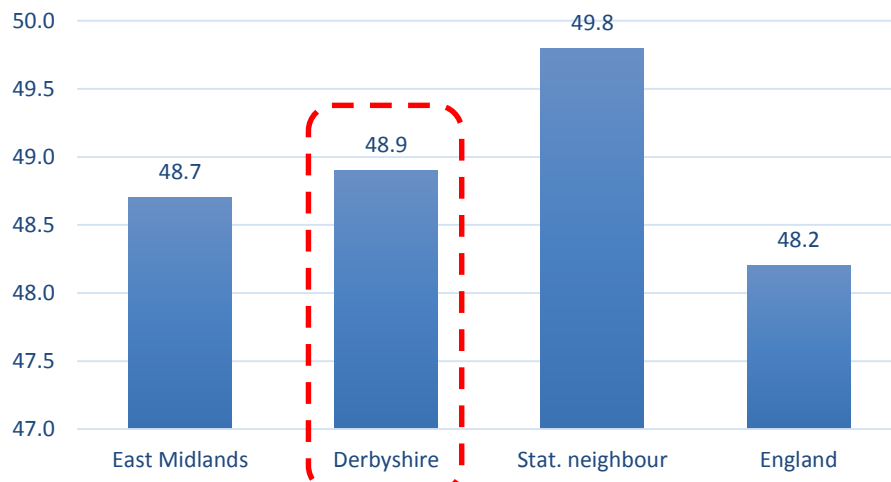


In 2016, Derbyshire pupils' achievement was slightly below the average for similar LAs & nationally.

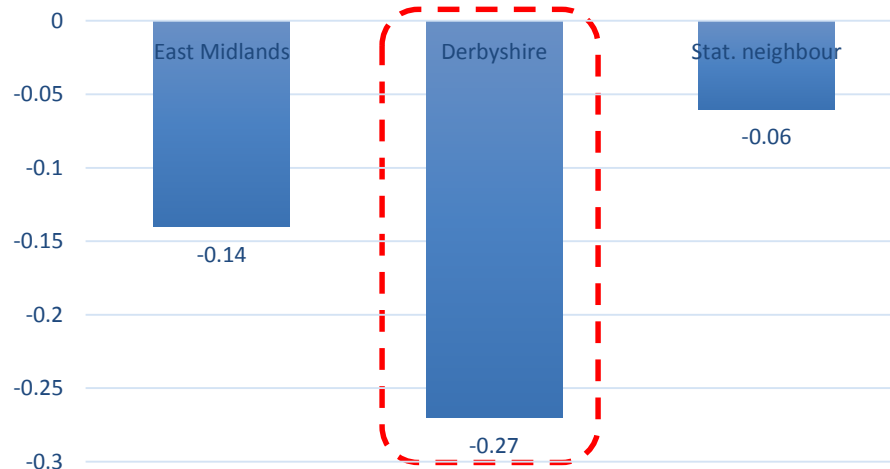
**Primary** – the adjacent chart on the left shows 51% of Derbyshire pupils achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics (RWM) in 2016. This compares to an average of 51.6% among similar LAs and 53% nationally.

**Secondary** – the two charts below show the 2016 attainment 8 and progress 8 scores. Derbyshire's attainment 8 score was lower than similar LAs (although higher than the national average), while the progress 8 score was lower than similar LAs & nationally.

KS4 attainment 8 score, 2016



KS4 progress 8 score, 2016



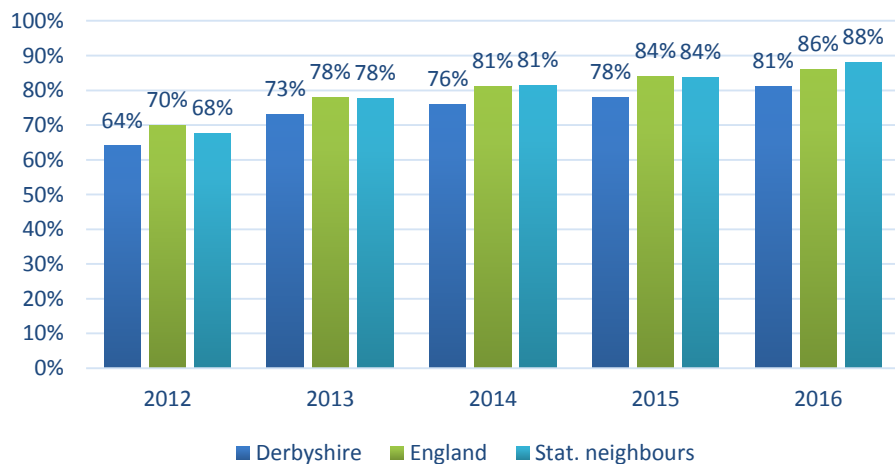
The charts below show the proportion of schools in Derbyshire judged to be good or better by Ofsted (data from March 2016) – the left-hand one shows the data as a bar chart, and the right-hand chart presents the same data as trend lines.

**The proportion of Derbyshire schools judged good or better has increased from 64% in 2012 to 81% in 2016 – a 17%-point increase.** This has matched the national trend, which shows as 16%-point increase during the same period. Since Derbyshire was below the national average in 2012 (64% compared to 70% = -6%), despite this increase, the gap between Derbyshire and the national average has not narrowed significantly (81% compared to 86% in 2016 = -5%).

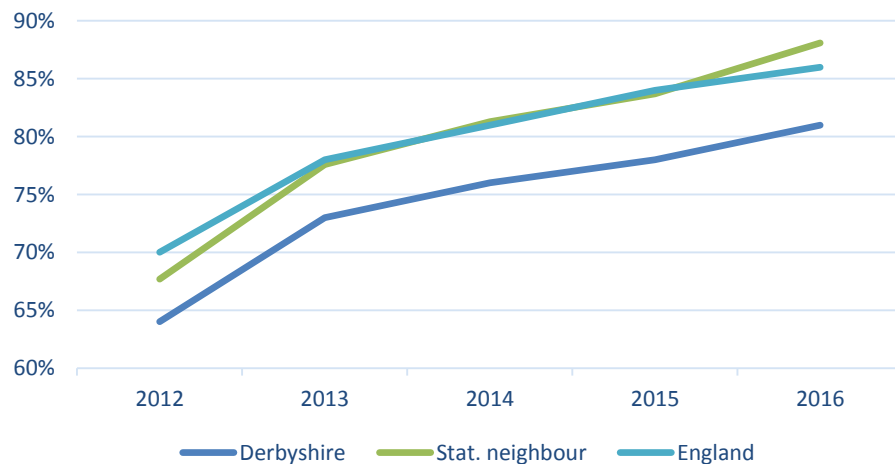
**At the same time, there have also been improvements among similar LAs.** On average, Derbyshire's 10 statistical neighbours have seen an increase of 20%-points during this period. Some local authorities were below Derbyshire in 2012 but have now closed the gap to the national average (Kent, Essex) or exceeded it (Worcestershire).

**Derbyshire also has a lower proportion of schools judged outstanding** – in 2016, 13% of primary schools (nationally 18%) and 12% of secondary schools (nationally 22%) were judged outstanding. These figures are the second lowest among Derbyshire's statistical neighbours. 40% of special schools are judged outstanding (the national average is 39%).

**Trend in % of good+ providers**



**Trend in % of good+ providers**

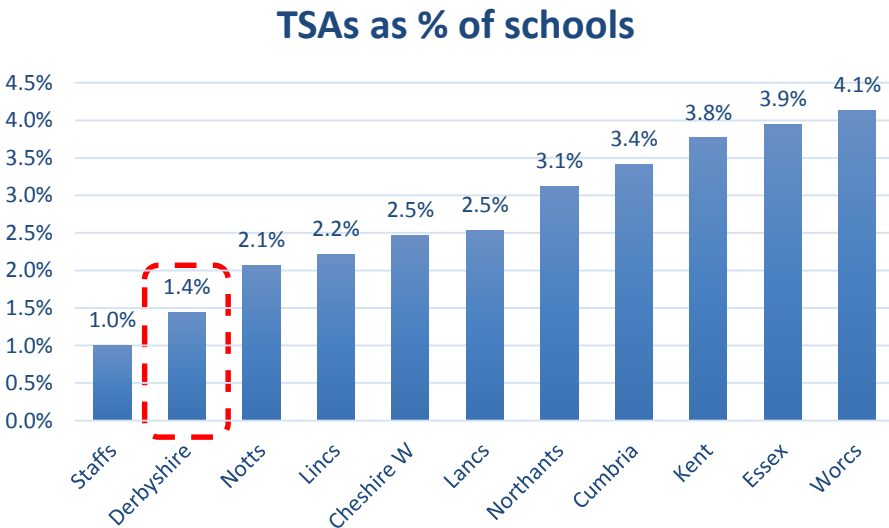
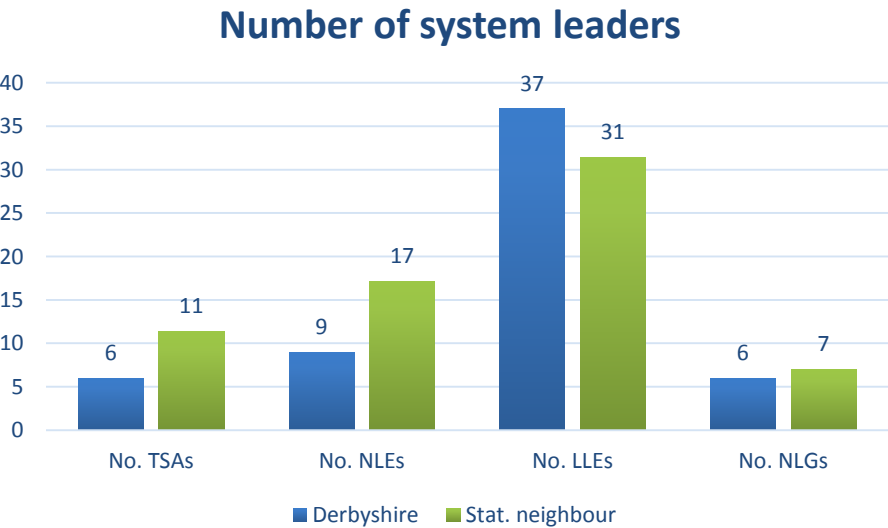




# A Context of the local education system: System leadership capacity

**Derbyshire has fewer system leaders overall than similar LAs** – the left-hand chart compares the number of system leaders in Derbyshire, in different categories – teaching school alliances (TSAs), National Leaders of Education (NLEs), Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) and National Leaders of Governance (NLGs) – to similar LAs. Apart from LLEs, Derbyshire has fewer system leaders than similar LAs – for example, 6 TSAs compared to 11 among similar LAs, and 9 NLEs compared to 17. The right-hand chart shows that, even taking into account the number of schools in a local area, Derbyshire has comparatively few TSAs (the second lowest among similar LAs). We also know that the TSAs in Derbyshire have been established relatively recently, so will be less well-established than other, longstanding TSAs.

**This is linked to the fact that Derbyshire has proportionately fewer outstanding schools than similar LAs**, described on the previous page – given system leadership designations are linked to schools being judged outstanding, this will have limited the growth of system leadership in Derbyshire to some extent. The new criteria around the designation of TSAs and NLEs, which make it possible for schools judged ‘outstanding’ or ‘good’ to apply, came into effect from 9 November 2016 – these present a significant opportunity for Derbyshire, which the system should seek to capitalise upon.



## B Findings: How we have structured our findings

During the review, we structured our evidence-gathering around three broad themes, which are explained below. We selected these three themes based on our national research and experience of working with other, similar local education systems who are seeking to sustain effective school improvement support in a more autonomous local education landscape.

### Theme 1

**The local school improvement offer** – ensuring schools are able to access high-quality school improvement support and challenge that meets the specific priorities and needs of the school.

### Theme 2

**Schools-led strategic governance of the local system** – facilitating the development of a more schools-led, partnership-based approach to school improvement, and avoiding the risk of fragmentation within the local system.

### Theme 3

**Strengthening partnerships and system leadership** – building the capacity for school-to-school support, harnessing the expertise and knowledge within schools to drive improvement, and avoiding the risk of schools becoming isolated.

We have used these three themes to structure the way we have presented our key findings in this section of the report (Part B), as well as the way we have presented our recommendations in the next section (Part C).



## Theme 1 – The local school improvement offer

### a. The vast majority of the schools we engaged value the current offer and want to see it continue.

This was the near-unanimous view among the 49 schools we engaged, and was consistent across all phases and types of schools. Some schools described positive experiences of working with the advisory service, spoke highly of their advisors (both senior advisers and ASIAs) and credited the service with playing a vital role in helping to improve their school. Others had had a less positive experience, but still recognised the need for a central advisory service in Derbyshire. They argued that there was not an alternative local offer of school improvement services that could be accessed by all schools (although some could access the Diocese's school improvement offer), nor is there yet the coverage and capacity of teaching school alliances and other system leaders to fill the gap if the advisory service was no longer available. In annex A, we have included a selection of quotes from school leaders describing how they value the advisory service and would like to see it continue. As one secondary school leader said, support provided by a local authority adviser, who was a former Ofsted HMI, was 'the best school improvement support I have ever had.' Schools argued, however, that the CPD offer was 'more hit-and-miss', could be quite traditional, and was not always able to respond quickly to schools' needs.

### b. They emphasised, however, that the offer needed to be adapted if this was something they would continue to access.

Schools argued strongly that, for them to buy into it in the future, the current advisory service offer would need to be adapted. First, schools argued the new offer needed to be consistently high-quality. Some argued that the consistency of support had suffered in recent years – while there were schools who gave examples of support that had been both impactful and rigorously challenging, there were others who had had a less positive experience. Several schools described being matched with an advisor who did not have the expertise to advise and challenge (e.g. someone with an infants school background supporting a primary school). Schools wanted to access advisors who were trained as Ofsted inspectors. Many were positive about the ASIAs, but others questioned whether all ASIAs provided consistently robust challenge to peer head teachers. Second, schools argued that the advisory service needed to provide a professional service to them – some described a high turnover of advisors, termly meetings cancelled at late notice due to competing priorities, or ASIAs leaving their role at short notice – an inherent fragility in the current model. Colleagues wanted to be able to pick their advisors, or at least for their school's specific needs to be taken into account when selecting advisors.

**Theme 1 – The local school improvement offer****c. Schools are willing to pay into this offer, but in return they want a greater say in shaping it to their needs.**

We tested with schools whether they would be willing to buy back into the advisory service in the future – again, the vast majority said yes, and we included some of the quotations from school leaders in annex A. They argued, however, that if the advisory service was to be funded to a greater extent by schools, they would want a greater say in shaping the offer. Specifically, while they wanted robust challenge (note the fact that many said they would welcome advisors being trained as Ofsted inspectors), they did not want the focus of their advisory support to be *inspection and monitoring*. The perception is that the advisory service, as it is currently configured, is too focused on gathering data and reporting back to the LA. Schools want a future advisory offer to be more focused on providing practical support around teaching & learning, leadership & governance and other aspects of school improvement. Schools also want advisors who can provide or access support specific to the school's needs – e.g. closing attainment gaps, support for vulnerable pupils. Specialist providers emphasised that they needed to access both similar support to their mainstream peers, but also an advisor who understood their sector and with the ability to signpost them to specialist SEND support outside the local area.

**d. Many schools said the professional services they access currently were essential, and wanted to see these continue.**

Again, there were positive examples reported to us of support that schools had received from various professional services that they had accessed from the LA (on a traded basis), specifically HR, payroll, finance and legal services. Many schools, particularly but not exclusively nursery and primary schools, said that being able to access these was essential, and they would be lost without them. Some schools spoke about how effective HR advisory support had been in dealing with complex staffing issues and driving forward school improvement. There were, however, some mixed messages overall, with other school leaders arguing that services like HR and finance were not sufficiently joined-up with school improvement support to maximise their usefulness to school leaders. In fairness, most schools who were less than positive about HR advice were keen to stress that what they found frustrating were the LA's policies and procedures, which they felt were overly bureaucratic and risk-averse, rather than the people providing the HR advice. There were some issues reported to us about mistakes made by payroll services, and dissatisfaction with building maintenance services. The overall message, however, was that schools wanted to be able to continue to access these services from the LA.

**Theme 2 – Schools-led strategic governance****a. There was a clear sense of the vision for the local education system, but a lack of clarity about strategic direction.**

The majority of schools were aware of the *journey to excellence* and the overall ambition that every Derbyshire pupil is able to access a school that is good or better. Colleagues felt this was a laudable aim. They were, however, less clear about the overall strategic direction for the local education system, specifically how this aim was to be delivered, how the local education system would develop over the next 3-5 years, and how the roles of the LA, TSAs, system leaders, the advisory service, clusters and other partnerships should fit together. There was some sense that there needed to be greater clarity about the respective roles of the LA and TSAs, and that there was some degree of “treading on toes” as each tried to establish its distinctive role. Colleagues wanted to see real strategic clarity about how the vision would be implemented, the role that would be played by the LA, TSAs, the advisory service and school partnerships, and how these groups and school leaders more generally would be supported through the transition.

**b. Schools wish to maintain a Derbyshire “family of schools”, and the DEIPB could play a strategic role in supporting this.**

A particular strength of the local education system in Derbyshire is the willingness of schools to work in partnership with one another and with the LA. For many, their immediate “family of schools” was anchored in their locality – they did not necessarily have a strong connection with schools on the other side of the county, but had a commitment to working with the Derbyshire schools in their locality. It is also a strength of the Derbyshire education system that it has sought to establish the DEIPB, as a strategic board to enable school leaders to lead school improvement locally. There is, however, a lack of clarity about – and even awareness of – the role of the Board, how it worked, and its membership. The Board has been operating for 18 months, but school leaders could not identify the impact it had had on school improvement across Derbyshire nor how it was seeking to do so. There was also some confusion about the respective roles of the Board and the School Improvement Forum, with some school leaders seeing the latter as a well-intentioned talking-shop. It is positive, however, that an independent chair for the Board has been appointed, and members have been involved in strategic discussions to agree their future role and priorities. To fulfil this role effectively, it will be vital that the Board has a clear role, can take decisions and drive action, and has the right membership, co-ordinating capacity, and links to other partners – specifically the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and regional Teaching Schools Council (TSC).

**Theme 3 – Partnerships and system leadership****a. Schools see local partnerships playing a key role in driving school improvement in the future.**

In a number of local areas similar to Derbyshire (large, predominantly rural, with large numbers of small schools), we have seen the development of deep, mature and focused partnerships as a key pillar of their future strategy for supporting school improvement. Derbyshire colleagues agreed that, in the future, local partnerships should play a central role in school improvement. Encouragingly, we heard about many examples of effective formal collaborations between schools, both well-established and more recent – the cluster in the New Mills area, Peak 11, the learning communities in Chesterfield and Staveley & Brimington, and the federation of special schools. While the development of clusters has been a strategic priority in Derbyshire, the development and current maturity of clusters varies across the county. While some, including those mentioned here, are developing a strong focus on school improvement, others are too focused on informal networking or “housekeeping”, or have fallen into disuse altogether. While strengthening primary-secondary transition is an important priority, colleagues, particularly from nursery and secondary schools, questioned whether the clusters were offering them opportunities for phase-specific support from their peers.

**b. The role of system leaders is widely recognised as another crucial part of the future Derbyshire education system.**

Likewise, most schools also saw system leadership playing an increasingly important role in school improvement in Derbyshire. They recognised, however, that system leadership is in the early stages of development within Derbyshire. As we highlighted on p.9, there are comparatively fewer system leaders (TSAs, NLEs, NLGs) in Derbyshire than similar LAs. This lack of capacity is compounded by the fact that the Derbyshire TSAs that have been designated are located in the northern and eastern parts of the county. Some alliances have a wide reach in geographical terms, but the fact remains that many schools in Derbyshire, particularly in the south and west of the county, are not able to access a local TSA. The recent announcement of changes to the criteria for applying to be a teaching school presents an important opportunity for Derbyshire to boost county-wide TSA capacity and coverage. At the same time, however, there is also the need to maximise the impact of Derbyshire’s current TSA and system leadership capacity – system leaders reported that they were not being utilised fully, nor were there clear processes for brokering and deploying system leaders. Overall, there is a lack of understanding about the role of TSAs and system leaders in the Derbyshire education system.

**Develop a new, high-quality local school improvement offer, based on what schools colleagues value.**

As noted in the previous section, schools wanted to retain a central school improvement advisory service in Derbyshire. During the review, therefore, we explored what this offer should look like and how it could be delivered in a way that reflected schools' feedback about the need for a more support-focused, consistently high-quality offer.

**The content of the “core offer” for schools** – there was consensus that, in the future, there should be a “core offer” of school improvement support available to all schools who bought into the advisory service. This core offer should include:

- **support from a school improvement advisor** – based on the Quality Development Dialogue (QDD) model, this would involve 3 termly visits plus a further 3-5 days to plan and co-ordinate school improvement support;
- **information & advice** – being able to contact the school's advisor for advice, regular information bulletins about national developments and local initiatives, and potentially an induction offer for new school leaders / governors; and
- **the opportunity to buy into a professional services package** – HR, payroll, legal services and similar.

This advisory offer would be focused primarily around (a) supporting schools' self-evaluations and identifying support needs, (b) signposting to forms of support or effective practice (within Derbyshire or beyond), and (c) helping to “hold the ring” in terms of the support the school received. Our suggestion is that any additional school improvement support would then be commissioned from the appropriate place – this may be a teaching school, system leader, or teaching & learning consultant. This would be paid for by schools – the LA and schools may wish for there to be a small “insurance” pot of funding to match-fund support for schools that fall into difficulties, and there may be opportunities to access resources from the school-to-school support fund. Schools could also purchase additional advisory days if they wished.

**An additional “bespoke offer”** – schools could purchase specific support related to teaching & learning, governance, leadership, vulnerable pupils, CPD and headteacher performance management on top of their core offer.

**An additional “cluster offer”** – in addition, colleagues wanted part of the new offer to relate specifically to strengthening clusters and local partnerships. They suggested they would like to be able to purchase an additional 5-10 days across an academic year to have an advisor, working across the schools in the cluster, to facilitate schools in the cluster / partnership to focus their partnership work on school improvement activities (e.g. peer review, research & development).

**We suggest an advisory group is formed** to enable schools to shape the development of this offer (see Part D, pp.21-22).



**Deliver this as a (partially) traded offer, which schools could buy into, for the academic year 2017/18. We suggest that the LA may wish to consider subsidising the cost to schools during an initial transitional period.**

**Why a traded offer?** – local education systems across the country are redesigning support for school improvement – through strategic partnerships with system leaders, developing school improvement capacity within clusters (e.g. via peer review), and supporting schools-led school improvement services. Derbyshire schools wish to maintain a local advisory service. We recommend that this delivered as a traded service in 2017/18 for two reasons. First, there is the need to move quickly to get this offer in place. There was interest in developing a schools-led company, but our experience is that this can require 2-3 years, as well as a cadre of system leaders with capacity to devote to this, to implement. Second, national policy changes are likely to affect the way the advisory service is funded. The service is currently funded by (a) a top-slice from DSG, (b) funding from ESG, and (c) a small subscription fee from schools plus CPD income. Proposed national funding changes, plus pressures on LA budgets, mean that the advisory service will need to move to being more schools-funded if it is to be sustained. We have assumed, however, that the top-slice from DSG may continue for 2017/18 and that the LA will be considering what funding it could provide to support school improvement given the anticipated cuts to ESG.

**Estimates of the cost per school** – based on the outline of the advisory offer we developed with schools colleagues, described on p.15, we have worked with LA colleagues to start to model the *total cost* to a school wishing to purchase this offer. This modelling work is ongoing. Please note that the *actual cost to schools* will depend on whether and to what extent the LA is able to support this transition by subsidising the cost to schools.

**The LA supporting the transition to a fully traded offer** – the aim of maintaining an advisory service would be to increase the pace of school improvement in Derbyshire, stop the system fragmenting, and facilitate of a more mature, schools-led, self-improving education system over the next 2-3 years. As we have noted, there is not an alternative school improvement offer that all schools in Derbyshire could access. Subsidising the offer in the short term would allow time to build the capacity for schools-led improvement, and enable the LA and schools to consider whether to move to a fully-traded, schools-led advisory service or an alternative approach (e.g. system leaders and clusters). If the LA decides to do this, it should be transparent to schools how the advisory service is subsidised and the long-term direction of travel.

**The long-term direction of travel** – given the interest in developing a schools-led company, and given the need to move to a more schools-funded model, we suggest that the advisory group we have recommended be formed also has the role of leading a long-term consultation exercise about the desirability of moving to a schools-led model for the advisory service.



Ensure that there is clarity about how this offer will be delivered and by whom.

**The fit between support from the advisory service and the LA's ongoing statutory responsibilities** – we know that there is currently some uncertainty about the future LA role in supporting school improvement. While the LA retains these statutory duties, in developing the future advisory service offer, it will be important that the advisory service is able to balance its *monitoring* and *support* functions. As we noted in Part B, there was strong feedback from schools that the condition of them paying into an advisory service was that the offer was more focused on support for schools, as opposed to monitoring. There is a tension between these two functions that is, to some extent, inevitable. The key will be balancing these functions effectively. This will require streamlining reporting requirements as much as possible, improving information management, and stripping out duplication of requests for information. As we describe on the following page, an important shift that needs to be made is to the DEIPB, rather than the advisory service (but with their support), leading school improvement in Derbyshire – this should help to reduce the demands on the advisory service to generate reports to elected members and other parties. It may be possible to present the funding for the advisory service in such a way as to make clear which parts of the offer (e.g. termly visits) are about helping the LA to fulfil their statutory duties, and are therefore LA-funded, and which are about supporting schools to improve, and are school-funded.

**By whom this support is delivered** – we heard differing views about the relative benefits of the advisory service being delivered by serving headteachers (as ASIAs) or permanent staff. There are pros and cons of each model. For example, some colleagues valued being supported by peer headteachers, who brought an understanding and experience of the current demands of the role. Others spoke of the value to them of playing the role of an ASIA, in terms of their personal development and professional practice. Nevertheless, we also heard instances of high turnover of ASIAs (due to staff moving on), meetings postponed due to competing commitments, and some inconsistency of practice. We also heard positive feedback about some of the permanent staff within the advisory service, who are clearly highly-regarded by schools. We know, however, that recruiting permanent advisors can be difficult. One option may be to consider seconding serving leaders to work within the advisory service full-time for a fixed period. Whoever delivers the advisory service, however, the feedback from schools suggest that (a) the calibre of the people, (b) the professionalism of the service that schools receive, and (c) the consistency of the support and challenge will be what schools look for. An added benefit would be if the advisors were trained, or had the opportunity to be trained, as Ofsted inspectors.

**Continue to work with the DEIPB to strengthen the Board's role and strategic leadership of the local education system.**

**The Board leading school improvement in Derbyshire** – we suggest that the Board should be the body that has collective responsibility for and leads school improvement, supported by the advisory service, as well as system leaders, area groups, the LA and regional partners. The role of the advisory service would shift from *leading* to *supporting* school improvement. The appointment of an independent chair should assist the transition to the Board playing this role.

**A clear & clearly-understood role for the Board** – there was broad consensus that the Board should focus on three things:

- **gathering intelligence and evidence about the local system** – to identify county-wide priorities;
- **commissioning county-wide school improvement** – to address county-wide priorities, which could include closing attainment gaps for disadvantaged pupils, building system leadership capacity, supporting small schools at risk of becoming unviable, or a good-to-great programme (helping schools to become outstanding) – there should be a specific focus on strengthening partnerships and building schools' capacity to support and challenge one another in mutually reinforcing ways (e.g. through peer review); and
- **overseeing the “health” of the local system** – being the place where questions about overall improvement and impact of school improvement activities are asked and decisions taken (not recreating traditional accountability to the LA).

**Enabling the Board to fulfil this role effectively** – to perform this role effectively, the Board will need (a) the right membership, (b) a clear strategic plan with concrete actions and leads, (c) strong management “grip” and routines for analysing intelligence and taking decisions, and (d) co-ordinating capacity to ensure these decisions are implemented.

**Strong links between the Board and schools & partnerships** – colleagues stressed to us the diverse nature of Derbyshire, and the different contexts and priorities in the districts that make up the county. This suggests that the links between the county-wide Board and the area headteacher groups will be particularly important in implementing the findings of this review. Furthermore, we know that other large, rural education systems with whom we have worked have focused on strengthening this intermediate tier between a county-level Board and schools (e.g. Cumbria, Essex and East Sussex) to broker and deploy school improvement support. We suggest considering whether the area headteacher groups could be repurposed to play a role in brokering and deploying system leaders and other school improvement support. In addition, it will be vital that the Board (as well as the LA itself) has the right links with regional partners (the RSC, regional TSC). Consideration should be given to the future role of the School Improvement Forum alongside these other groups.

**Theme 3 – Partnerships and system leadership****Put in place a long-term strategy for strengthening school partnerships focused on school improvement.**

School leaders saw the development of school-improvement-focused school partnerships playing a vital role in the future of the Derbyshire education system. What is needed, alongside the advisory service offer and the leadership provided by the Board, is a concrete strategy and set of actions for putting this into effect. Other local education systems with whom we have worked have started from setting out a concrete aim: namely, that all schools should be in some form of formal partnership. Were Derbyshire to adopt that as an aim, the development of an advisory offer for clusters / partnerships would help to put this into effect. The exact form of the partnership would not matter – it may be existing clusters for some schools or other formal partnerships for others. The offer of advisory support to facilitate and shape school improvement priorities or activities (e.g. peer review) would help to build the capacity of the clusters / partnerships to drive school improvement locally. It will be important to balance cross-phase working (around transition), with phase-specific activities. It will also be important to consider how the Board will know whether this strategy is proving effective in building school improvement capacity.

**In parallel, put in place a strategy for building system leadership capacity and coverage across the county.**

Likewise, another overall strategic aim for Derbyshire, which we have seen adopted in similar local areas, is that every school / partnership should be linked into and able to access support from a local teaching school alliance. We suggest that putting this into effect will require four things:

1. **clear messages from the Board & LA about the role of TSAs & system leaders**, and how they fit into the local system;
2. **clear (and clearly-understood) processes for commissioning and deploying system leaders**, to maximise the impact of the current cadre of teaching schools, NLEs, LLEs and NLGs;
3. **a plan for building the capacity and coverage of system leaders across the county** – this will require a pro-active approach to identifying prospective system leaders and developing hubs or satellites of existing teaching schools in current “cold spots” – the recent changes to the designation criteria present a vital opportunity to do this; and
4. **ensure that there is clarity about how the TSAs’ CPD offer fits with any ongoing CPD offered by the advisory service.**

## Next steps: Implementing the findings of this review

### Timescales

There was a strong message from schools about the need to move swiftly to communicate and implement the new offer.

**Autumn term 2016** – confirmation of the future school improvement offer for 2017/18.

**Spring term 2017** – concrete details of the new offer (specific content, details about costs to schools).

**September 2017** – the new school improvement offer is in place as a Derbyshire County Council traded offer.

**Long-term** – advisory group to consult widely about the desirability and practicalities of a schools-led delivery model.

### The need for pace, grip and precise, high-quality implementation

This review suggests that the local education system recognises the need and is geared up for swift change. We know, from our previous research (our 2014 “temperature check” research for DfE), that local systems can fragment when the desire for change is frustrated by a lack of strategic leadership or poor implementation. There was feedback during the review that, in the past, projects had been initiated in Derbyshire and left to develop organically, rather than seen through to ensure consistency, durability and impact. Implementing these changes to local school improvement arrangements will require clarity of purpose, real focus, strong grip and co-ordination, and regular and ongoing engagement with schools.

### An ongoing role for the local authority

Our previous research also suggests that local education systems have become fragmented when LAs have simply stepped back from supporting school improvement. As such, we see that the LA will continue to play a vital role in the transition to a new approach to supporting school improvement in Derbyshire. This role will include being a convenor of partnerships, a commissioner of services, and a champion of children. Specifically, it will entail fostering mature schools-led strategic leadership of the local system, building capacity for system leadership, developing a responsive and high-quality school improvement offer, and pro-actively forging links and signposting to effective practice within and beyond Derbyshire.

## D Next steps: The role of the advisory group

### The role of the advisory group

In taking forward the findings of this review, we consider that there is an important role to be played by a small advisory group of school leaders (both headteachers and governors) in supporting the development of a new offer of school improvement in Derbyshire. We have suggested that the advisory group could play two specific roles.

1. **In the immediate term, to work with LA colleagues to develop, test and shape the offer of school improvement support for the academic year 2017/18.** Schools colleagues want the offer to be in place quickly, but also want to see an adapted offer than is more responsive to their needs. The advisory group would work with LA colleagues to steer the development of the offer, consider key questions, and lead communication with school leaders across the county.
2. **Potentially, in the longer term, working with the LA and engaging a wider group of schools colleagues to consider the development of a more schools-led model for delivering the offer (e.g. a schools-led company).** There was some interest in exploring such models in the longer term, and the advisory group could lead the work to develop this model.

### Timescales and a suggested schedule of meetings

**We suggest that the group should be formed in mid-November and continue to meet for a period of three months, through to mid-February.** We suggest that the group may meet 3-4 times during this period:

- **late November** – to consider the findings of this review and an outline of the new advisory offer;
- **mid-December** – to receive further updates, and develop a communication to schools before the end of term;
- **mid-January** – to consider a near-final version of the offer, with detailed content and costings; and
- **late-January / early February** – to sign off the final offer, and agree how this will be communicated to schools.

**We suggest that there should be clear communication about the formation of the group, its purpose, its membership, and its initial period of operation.** This should help to give other schools clarity about how this work is being taken forward, who is involved, and how the outcomes of the advisory group's work will be communicated to schools.

## D Next steps: The role of the advisory group

### Membership

In terms of its membership, we suggest that:

- the advisory group has a tight membership comprising 6-8 school leaders (headteachers and governors);
- members are selected based on their capacity to operate at a strategic, system-wide level;
- members are selected to ensure a reasonable spread in terms of geography, phase and type of school;
- you may wish to nominate a chair to provide leadership within the group – it will be important that the advisory group feels ownership of their work, and that the group is schools-, rather than LA-, led;
- the LA nominates 1-2 school improvement leaders to be the main links with the advisory group – we would not suggest that there would be a large LA membership of the group; and
- the LA provides a member of staff to capture actions and co-ordinate meetings.

### Key questions on which the advisory group might focus

In addition to developing the overall shape and content of the school improvement offer, it will also be important for the advisory group to consider several key questions. We have made suggestions in relation to these questions in Part C of this report, but it will be important for schools colleagues to agree a preferred approach collectively.

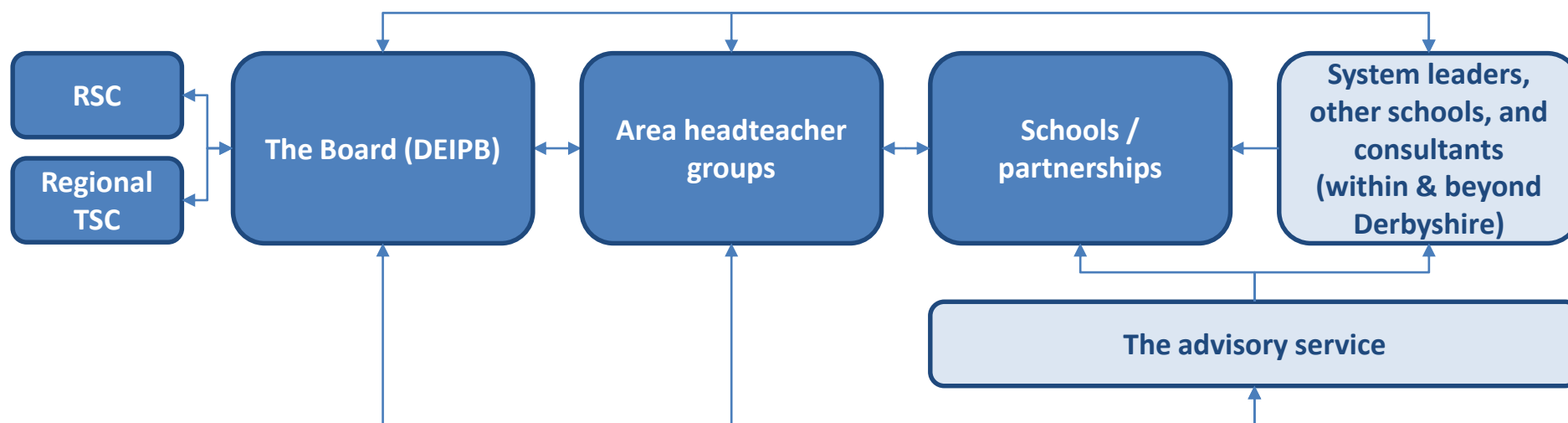
- **Tiers** – should the school improvement offer be tiered, so schools can buy more support above a core entitlement?
- **Funding model** – should the cost be a flat rate per school, a differential rate according to phase, or a per pupil rate?
- **Matching support to needs** – how might the advisory service provide schools with a degree of choice about the advisors with whom they work and match their priorities to the expertise of their advisor? (How can this be done without destabilising whole service?)
- **By whom is the advisory offer delivered** – should this be done by permanent staff, serving headteachers, secondees?

## Next steps: Communicating the long-term vision for the local education system

During the review, schools said that they wanted clarity about the long-term vision for the local education system, and how the different parts of the system fitted together. Below, we have summarised this visually. In implementing the review, it will be important to continue to communicate the long-term vision and aims to schools, to help them orientate themselves and make the most of the school improvement support available within and beyond Derbyshire.

The diagram below shows the role of:

- **the Board** (with key links to the RSC and regional Teaching School Council);
- **the area headteacher groups**, specifically in relation to brokering school improvement support;
- **the advisory service** in supporting schools' self-evaluation and signposting to / brokering support; and
- **system leaders**, who will play an increasingly prominent role in providing school improvement support.



The diagram also emphasises schools' responsibility for school improvement – both at a strategic level (through the Board and area groups) and at an individual school and partnership level. The Board will have overall responsibility for leading school improvement in Derbyshire. The role of the advisory service will be to facilitate school improvement.



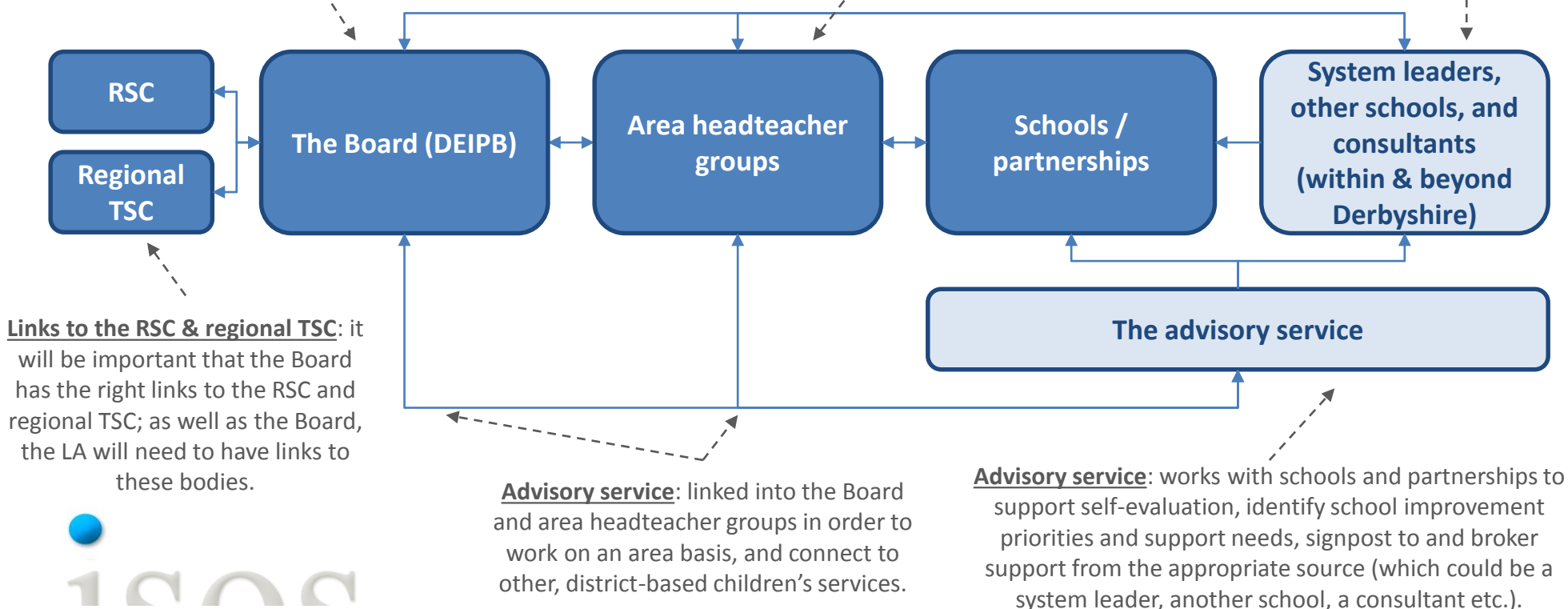
## Next steps: Communicating the long-term vision for the local education system

On this page, we explain in slightly more detail what we suggest may be the future roles of each of the key components of the local education system in Derbyshire, based on the feedback we have gathered through the review. The diagram seeks to show how these component parts could fit together to drive, facilitate and support school improvement in Derbyshire.

**Board:** leads school improvement: sets strategic direction and priorities, commissions county-wide initiatives, monitors the “health of the system”.

**Area groups:** brokers school improvement support at area level, feeds intelligence to Board and helps to implement county-wide work in localities.

**System leaders:** will play an increasingly prominent role in providing school improvement support in Derbyshire, with the advisory service helping to broker their support.





## Annex A – Feedback from school leaders

### Theme 1 – The offer of school improvement services

#### Theme 1: Offer from the advisory service

*'As a school, we have benefitted immensely from local authority advisory support. I am not sure I could say the same about middle leader and subject leader support.'*  
(Secondary Headteacher)

*'I would not want it [the advisory offer] to go at all.'*  
(Secondary Headteacher)

*'I agree entirely that we need to develop a new offer, building on what is valued about the advisory service. We have to get this in place quickly, and we need to avoid a lack of certainty – we cannot have "we'll have something in September".'* (Primary Headteacher)

*'Yes, I would buy into an advisory offer in the future, provided the price was right and the quality was consistently high.'* (Primary Headteacher)

*'It [a future advisory offer] would be something I would want to be part of.'*  
(Secondary Headteacher)

*'Yes, I would like to see it continue ... I am not sure what the alternative would be.'* (Secondary Headteacher)

*'If this was a schools-led offer in the future, it would bring the offer closer to what schools need and make it more accountable to schools.'* (Primary Chair of Governors)

#### Theme 1: Offer from professional services. CPD

*'They [HR] have been critical in assisting me to move my school forward.'*  
(Secondary Headteacher)

*'Services do not always work well together. When a school is in difficulty, you cannot separate teaching & learning issues from HR – these need to be joined up. HR policies can be risk-averse.'*  
(Primary Headteacher)

*'The CPD offer can be a bit hit-and-miss, especially in a world where people are paying for everything.'*  
(Primary Headteacher)

*'We would have been lost without this [HR advice], absolutely lost.'* (Nursery School Headteacher)

*'Legal services work well for my school. We want to continue to buy into this.'*  
(Secondary Headteacher)

*'Excellent support on finance, HR. But some policies are behind the times – they stop schools pushing through changes.'* (Secondary Headteacher)

## Annex A – Feedback from school leaders

### Themes 2 & 3 – Schools-led strategic governance, school partnerships

#### Theme 2: Schools-led strategic governance

##### governance

*'We really need some good, strong strategic leadership. People are calling out for it. We need to grip this issue, rather than ambling towards oblivion.'*

(Primary Headteacher)

*'We have a strategic group, but it has not worked yet ... it has not moved Derbyshire forward.'* (Secondary Headteacher)

*'It is hard to see how everything fits together in the local system. It is not helpful to have groups set up that have become talking-shops. We need real clarity.'*

(Secondary Headteacher)

*'We find out things by chance. Everything is a little bit by hearsay.'*

(Primary Headteacher)

*'What do we want to see from this review? A clear offer, a transition plan, and a long-term vision about the role of schools, system leaders and the local authority.'*

(Primary Chair of Governors)

#### Theme 3: School partnerships & system leadership

##### system leadership

*'There is not enough school improvement going on in clusters, there is too much "housekeeping". It could be a really good vehicle for school improvement.'*

(Primary Headteacher)

*'System leadership is in its infancy as an approach in Derbyshire.'*

(Primary Chair of Governors)

*'There is a bit of "treading on toes" between the TSAs and local authority.'* (Primary Headteacher)

*'As system leaders, we do not really know where we sit, to whom we are affiliated, who commissions us.'*

(Primary Chair of Governors)

*'It [system leadership and school-to-school support] just has to be done, we just need to get on with it ... it is the future.'* (From)

## Annex B: Glossary of abbreviations used in the report

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**ASIA** – Associate School Improvement Advisor (serving headteacher working as an advisor within the advisory service)

**CPD** – continuing professional development

**DEIPB** – Derbyshire Education Improvement Partnership Board

**DfE** – Department for Education

**DSG** – dedicated schools grant

**ESG** – education services grant

**FTE** – full-time equivalent (in relation to staffing)

**HMI** – Her Majesty's Inspector (within Ofsted)

**HR** – human resources

**KS** – Key Stage (e.g. Key Stage 4)

**LA** – local authority

**LLE** – Local Leader of Education

**NLE** – National Leader of Education

**NLG** – National Leader of Governance

**QDD** – quality development dialogue (the approach offered currently by the advisory service)

**RSC** – the Regional Schools Commissioner

**RWM** – reading, writing and mathematics (in relation to Key Stage 2)

**SEND** – special education needs or disability

**TSA** – teaching school alliance

**TSC** – the Teaching Schools Council

**VC / VA** – voluntary-controlled –aided (a type of school)

