SCHOOL PEER SUPPORT NETWORKS AND

COLLABORATIONS: A STUDY OF A SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL

PEER SUPPORT PROGRAMME USED IN A LARGE

METROPOLITAN CITY

By

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ABSTRACT

This is a case study of a school improvement peer review programme (S2SSP), operating under an Education Partnership (EP) umbrella of schools in a large metropolitan area in England. It examines, through the eyes of participants (i) the effectiveness of the model in terms of school self-evaluation and school improvement (ii) factors which contribute to, or hinder its effectiveness and (iii) the capacity of the partnership to sustain school improvement over time.

The outcomes of the study suggest that S2SSP provides a credible and semi-externally validated school improvement tool. As with most alliances, the strength of S2SSP lies in the 'social capital' derived from working within a supportive 'learning community' with the associated benefits arising from that. Enabling different categories of teams, such as *Champions for Improvement*, to lead the 'change' process was regarded as highly effective.

The findings suggest that a rigid structure isn't what is required. S2SSP appeared to work best where space was made for teams to be flexible in their approach which helped to sustain it. Where it worked well, participants shared a common desire to engage in and contribute to 'system change'. This has the potential to shape the landscape of ownership of school improvement for school leaders in the area.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my mother Winifred Farrell who instilled in me a steadfast sense of resilience and fortitude.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to my supervisor, Professor Peter Davies, for going the extra mile with his time and energy and for ensuring I kept on track with this thesis.

I would also like to thank my husband Hugh for his unfailing patience and support and my daughter Marie for her advice and support which made the completion of this study possible.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACTS (Association for Co-ordinated Teaching Schools)

CfBT (Centre for British Teachers)

CPD (Continuing Professional Development)

DfE (Department for Education)

DfES (Department for Education and Science)

EEE (Educational Excellence Everywhere)

EEF (Education Endowment Foundation)

EHCP (Educational Health Care Plans)

EiC (Education in Cities)

EP (Education Partnership)

GTC (General Teaching Council)

GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education)

HMSO (Her Majesty's Stationery Office)

IQEA (Improving the Quality of Education for ALL)

ITT (Initial Teacher Training)

JPD (Joint Practice Development)

LIG (Leadership Improvement Grants

LLE (Local Leader Education)

LMS (Local Management of Schools)

MAT (Multi Academy Trust)

MAC (Multi Academy Company)

NAHT (National Association of Headteachers)

NCSL (National College for School Leadership)

NCTL (National College of Teaching & Leadership)

NLC (Network Learning Communities)

NLE (National Leader of Education)

NFER (National Foundation for Educational Research)

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development);

OfSTED (Office for Standards in Education)

PISA (Programme International Student Assessment)

PLC (Professional Learning Community)

PSLN (Primary Strategy Learning Network)

ROL (Raise on Line RSC (Regional Schools Commissioners)

SATs (Standard Attainment Tests)

SIPP (School Improvement Partnership Programme)

STPCD (School Teachers Pay & Conditions Document)

S2SSP (School to School Support Programme)

TES (Times Educational Supplement)

TSA (Teaching School Alliance)

UTC (University Teaching Colleges)

CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   **Focus**

The aim of this study was two-fold. First, it examined if a school-to-school peer review programme provided a viable and effective self-evaluation and improvement tool which supported school improvement. Second, the study examined the factors that participants believed had contributed to the effectiveness (or hindered the progress) of this programme. The programme was introduced by an educational partnership (network of schools) in one metropolitan area in England. I refer to the programme as S2SSP (for school-to-school support programme) and I refer to the education partnership as EP (Educational Partnership).

As a practising headteacher and Local Leader of Education in the metropolitan area in this study and having been involved in implementing an alternative school improvement and evaluation model with a group of school leaders, I have a particular professional interest in attempting to establish what the main components of successful school collaboration looks like and to also consider the characteristics and nature of challenges and failures of such systems. What others have found to be effective or ineffective, have, in part, set the scene and provided an informed background to support this study which includes reflections on implicit Before outlining how I pursued this interest in this thesis I need to pause to define a number of key terms.

First, education systems across the world, and especially in England, have become strongly focused on effectiveness. This word has been used in different ways. The seminal study by Mortimore *et al*., (1988), defined effectiveness in terms of comparing the outcomes of different school through measures of cognitive and non-cognitive attainment, whilst taking account of students' background, race and gender and their attainment when starting school. However, the application of the school effectiveness literature in education policy in England (by the DfE and OfSTED) has used a much narrower measure of educational outcomes: focusing on cognitive outcomes measured by formal assessments. Kelly and Downey (2011) reported the extent to which schools in England had accepted this focus on academic attainment, albeit with mixed understanding of how to interpret the data available to them. This was not seen as the main purpose for those engaging in the S2SSP programme, although an element of data scrutiny and comparison does inevitably become part of any school effectiveness process.

Other writers (such as Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1994 and Van Velzen *et al*, 1985) have preferred to use the term school improvement. In doing this they were highlighting their commitment to helping schools to change. They were primarily interested in the 'improvement process' and how this should be identified, measured and enacted. These writers emphasised the benefits of collaboration within schools. They suggest that school improvement follows from teacher development and the creation of a culture within the school that helps teachers to learn from each other. More recently, attention has switched to collaboration between schools and the forms that such collaboration can take (Chapman & Muijs, 2014; Alexander, 2015). Whilst Hopkins and colleagues

described collaboration within schools as focused on staff development through learning together, collaboration between schools may take different forms. When collaboration between schools and collaboration between schools and other agencies has been convened by a separate body it has been commonly referred to as a 'partnership' (e.g. Connolly and James, 2006; Chapman *et al*., 2015). Schools may share a governing body or they may be more loosely coupled with each school retain a separate board of governors. They may collaborate on all their activities or just on a single strand (such as initial teacher education). Some public policy initiatives have also encouraged schools to collaborate with other agencies in the public sector (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002), but this lies beyond the scope of the present study.

Insights have been offered by others such as Earl and Katz (2005) and Hadfield and Chapman (2009) which suggest that taking account of the challenges faced by those working collaboratively has the potential to advance original contributions to knowledge. They suggest that taking a critical perspective on the expected impact and outcomes can aid our understanding of those challenges. The research questions were formulated to incorporate the views of leadership stakeholders who have engaged with the S2SSP process and to take account of their real experiences in implementing the school improvement programme including the challenges faced in their own schools and collaborative groups. The questions were refined through reading of the literature and discussion with an initial Consultation Group which helped to narrow the focus of interest and enquiry. This study provides an overview of how the S2SSP programme has evolved over the last four years. The intention was to inform and support the school improvement decision making process for school leaders and school governors and to

contribute to the wider debate in the locality on how best to respond to the challenge of the new era of autonomous school self-evaluation.

As this thesis was conducted for a professional doctorate its primary aim is to contribute to professional knowledge and practice in the context in which it was conducted. The subsidiary aim is to offer evidence that may be used by others working in or with school-to-school peer review collaborations. The study adds to knowledge through the answers to the four research questions.

(1) To what extent do school leaders believe the S2SSP model supports and influences reliable school improvement and raises standards?

Summary of answer: most senior and middle leaders believed that S2SSP was effective and judged it according to its perceived impact on academic standards. There was little evidence to support an expectation that school autonomy was encouraging schools to drive improvement through a sense of 'moral purpose'. Supporting the general tone of published research, most participants believed that S2SSP was building schools' capacity for improvement through shared expertise in a community practice. Dissenters believed that other schools in the partnership lacked the experience of challenges they believed were particular to their own school.

(2) What factors do school leaders believe have affected the success of S2SSP, including barriers and advantages?

Summary of answer: Participants welcomed the shift of government policy encouraging school-to-school support. They appeared to have interpreted this as

making the judgements of their peers more important than the judgement of parents. They believed that flexibility in S2SSP, allowing reviewed schools to set the focus for the review, fostered improvement. They believed that pre-existing professional relationships between leaders and the relatively small size of the partnership were crucial to maintaining trust. Some middle leaders felt that senior leaders had excluded them from key communications about the process and they welcomed the idea of 'champions for school improvement' from middle leadership.

(3) Is the S2SSP system sustainable in the longer term?

Summary of answer: Participants identified lack of school resources and internal school crises as threats to sustainability. They also believed there was a risk that the fund of expert knowledge in the partnership could be exhausted through knowledge sharing. They identified continued professional development for leaders and readiness of the system to keep adapting as key to sustainability.

(4) Does the EP S2SSP model provide a useful tool for self-evaluation by schools?

Summary of answer: The majority of participants clearly believed the tool had been useful *for them*. Whether an outside observer would agree that the tool would be useful to others depends on assumptions about the motivation of schools and their leaders. Elements of the practice described by participants is encouraging for advocates of school-self review. However, the schools in this partnership might be described as exercising self-discipline rather than finding their authentic voice.

1.2 **Background**

This section outlines, in three parts, the evolution of school policy in England that provides the context for the school-to-school collaboration examined in this study.

The section begins with an examination of the development of the DfE Academies' programme. The Academy Programme began with the development of single academy schools before progressing to the establishment of groups of schools in Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). This is followed by a summary of the Teaching School initiative where established groups of schools, led by one key school, focused on initial and continuing teacher development. The third section focuses on the broad articulation by the Department for Education (DfE) and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) of the merits of school-to -school collaboration and a short review of their successes.

1.2.1   The Academy Programme

Circa 2006, the then Labour government in its second term, buoyed by the apparent success of Charter Schools (free from district and Local Authority control and funded separately) which were prominent at the time in the USA, moved rapidly towards emulating that model by creating similar 'Academies' structures in England. These were particularly aimed at secondary schools which were falling behind academic targets for GCSE and A Levels. There was an added concern about the poorer performance of schools in England in international scoring tests such as Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). From 2010, the Coalition Government continued to fly the Academisation flag, which they outlined in an Education White Paper (DfE, 2010) as a

key means for driving school improvement forward. This policy oversaw the removal of powers for evaluating school improvement from Local Education Authorities: with the added bonus, some would suggest, of saving money in a climate of austerity and global recession. Coupled with this was the view that the existing Ofsted School Inspection Framework was becoming too expensive and cumbersome, prompting a Review (2019) of the Ofsted Inspection Model, by the DfE. This revised approach put more emphasis on networking and collaboration as a means of steering schools to work together more in developing their own 'group' school improvement evaluative systems. This approach also saved money for the DfE.

As a general rule, 'good' and 'outstanding' schools in England had the option to voluntarily convert to academy status or join an Academy Trust. Such schools were left nearly entirely to their own devices on self-evaluation, with the performance of outstanding schools only loosely monitored through data or safeguarding. Under the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework (Ofsted, 2015), the policy changed whereby good schools would receive a reduced one-day inspection from Ofsted every three to five years. This remains the case. At the time of completing this thesis, the DfE directs that schools with two consecutive 'Requires Improvement' Inspection outcomes automatically convert to academy status.

The National College recommendations, outlined in an NCSL Seminar Report (National College, 2012), broadly supported central government policy of increasing the capacity for what was termed a 'mediating layer' in education (Hargreaves, 2011). This effectively opened the way to increasing sponsored Academy Chains or Trusts, which

were fundamentally considered to be autonomous enterprises, free to run schools without reference to or 'interference' from central or local government. Academy Trusts would also enjoy what was termed 'light touch' Ofsted inspections. A policy which it is now believed should be re-examined as more statistics become available on the lacklustre performances and academic achievements (and Ofsted outcomes) and reported 'dodgy' dealings and lack of accountability of a number of Academy Trusts and Free Schools (McInerney, 2018).

From a slow start since 2010, schools converting to academy status have become an established feature of the educational landscape in England, particularly for secondary schools. By 2018, 68% of secondary schools were independent of local education authorities and nearly a third of all schools (21,538 of all state-funded schools 2018) were either run by Academy Trusts or stand-alone Academies (West and Wolfe, 2018). From an initial 'rush' to take up the academy offer, the number of schools from the primary sector doing so slowed, with a total of 27% converting at the time of writing (NAO, 2018).

Many Multi-Academy organisations (MATs or MACs) tended to be structured around one larger secondary school, acting as a hub to support satellites of smaller local feeder primary schools. The DfE Education White Paper EEE (DfE, 2016), alongside budget reforms, made the final push in insisting that every school in England needed to come under some type of MAT by 2022 regardless of their achievement or high Ofsted rating. The tone of the DfE (2016) White Paper again suggested that the move was primarily about giving schools autonomy and to finally 'free' them from Local Authority

constraining structures. However, questions have arisen as to the level of autonomy actually afforded to schools under such proposals, with some anecdotal reports of mergers being motivated by finance and based on business models, with little interest from secondary schools in what their primary partners provide in educational terms. Questions on the need for non-academy and maintained good and outstanding schools to join MATs continue to be debated.

1.2.2   Teaching Schools

Teaching Schools were established in 2014 to provide a focus for school-led initial and continuing teacher education. By 2018 Teaching Schools were headed by a growing band of School Leaders and 'executive' headteachers, with an outreach remit to work beyond their own schools. These were known generically as 'System Leaders' (Hopkins and Higham (2007), often with a designated title of National Leader of Education (NLE) supported by Local Leaders of Education (LLE). These 'System Leaders', usually from good and outstanding schools (Ofsted grades), were usually headteachers (or principals) who committed to sharing their expertise and their own school's good practice with struggling schools. Teaching School Alliances in this metropolitan area are now well established in co-ordinating their outreach work and have created their own association linked to the National College (now subsumed into DfE Teaching Regulation Agency).

Whilst the Teaching Schools' model of collaboration appears to be effective, partnerships are heavily dependent on one 'lead' school supporting 'weaker' schools which need to pay for the privilege and who may have little control over the co-

ordination or the type of support offered. However, there is some evidence that this system helps to raise standards in the schools being supported (Chapman and Muijs, 2014).

1.2.3   DfE and NCSL advocacy of school-to-school collaboration

Within the vast array of educational policies and 'improvement' changes introduced by the DfE before and since 2010 (See Appendix 3), many school leaders found themselves being left to their own 'autonomous' devices on school-evaluation, particularly those in good and outstanding categories. Schools, which were not 'free schools', sponsored Academies or were not converted to independent academy status, were under increased pressure to join networks, collaborations and federations. These were seen as obvious routes to providing school improvement support mechanisms, as well as helping to avoid schools working in isolation.

In this context, in November 2011, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) hosted a 24-hour seminar on the *Educational Landscape in England* and the challenges and opportunities being put forward for school leaders, particularly in terms of how system-wide academic success could be achieved in education. One question raised was how to build capacity for more effective 'system' leadership through school-to-school collaborative processes in education.

A follow-up report (Earley *et al.,* 2012) produced by the NCSL in line with the outcomes of the seminar, defined system leaders as leaders who work within and beyond their individual organisations. The report suggests that these leaders share and

harness the best resources that the system can offer to bring about improvement in their own and other organisations and influencing thinking, policy and practice.

The National College (2012 p.4) recognised a need for what was termed a 'cultural' change in schools in England and recommended that the College worked with school leaders and other stakeholders to build and communicate a case for:

> *"How and why all school leaders should engage in the development of a self-improving system".*

Data from the National College (Earley *et al.,* 2012) indicated that 87% of headteachers; 80% of senior leaders and middle leaders and 83% of chairs of governors believed that working in partnership with other schools was critical to improving outcomes for students. The National College (2012 p.3) also suggested that the challenge for policymakers and school leaders was:

> *"to be clear about the case for collaboration, including how it could be achieved and how barriers could be overcome".*

Coupled with severe restrictions on funding to support local and regional school improvement initiatives, there was a growing sense that the case being made by central government for schools to collaborate more was to support an ideological roll-back of state. An Education White Paper *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010 p.13) indicated a clear shift in thinking, stating that the improvement of schools rests primarily with schools – not with government either local or central:

> *"Our aim should be to support the school system to become more effectively self-improving".*

Conversely, Ofsted Inspections were at the same time guided to become more 'rigorous' when evaluating school performance.

Whilst many in education would accept that collaboration between schools is a good thing (with all its inherent challenges) and much has been written on the subject (Stoll *et al*., 2006; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009; West, 2010; Matthews and Berwick, 2013; Chapman *et al*., 2016; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016) to name but a few, there is less agreement on what 'type' or 'model' of collaboration works best between schools in their local contexts and which programme models have the most impact on school improvement. Fullan (2003) found at the time that few schools were willing to state categorically that one system or another was best, suggesting that local circumstances are often too varied to pin down to specifics. Mortimore *et al*., (1998) discussed the complexity and multi-functionality of schools. More recently, the concept of 'self-determination' in the new 'autonomous' era often lacked detail on how schools could work more effectively together, being primarily aimed at the notion of outstanding school leaders supporting less-able local school leaders under the newly created Teaching School umbrella. The Teaching School model, with links to local Universities, and initially funded from central government as an incentive, has evolved over the last few years as funding has been gradually scaled back. Most now operate independently under a charge-for-service consultancy-type system.

National initiatives such as The London Challenge, The Greater Manchester and The Black Country Challenges (Challenge Partners supporting schools in 'challenging' circumstances and with low academic outcomes) were introduced in 2003 and were

credited with raising standards through collaborative 'system leadership'. The aim of these national challenges was to improve educational outcomes across their designated areas, and specifically to reduce the numbers of underperforming schools; raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils; and increase the number of schools judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.

Ofsted (2010) regarded the London Challenge as being highly effective in bringing about improvement in outcomes for pupils. They judged that 30% of London's Local Authority secondary schools were outstanding, compared to 17.5% for the rest of England. The system used in London to achieve these results however was more difficult to emulate nationally to the same degree, due to the specific set up of small London boroughs which leant itself to easier collaboration. Greaves *et al*., (2014) concluded that prior achievement at KS2 was a key element in supporting achievement later down the line with success related to the role of secondary schools in maintaining those good levels of performance. Further research pointed to the particular nature of the demographic ethnic mix in those London schools, which was believed to be a significant factor in its success, with a high level of cultural and work ethic factors at play (Wyness, 2011; Burgess, 2014).

City Challenges such as the Greater Manchester and the Black Country Challenges were credited with improving academic standards and achieving higher Ofsted ratings through their collaborative work. In each Challenge area, improvement between 2005 and 2011 was greater than the national average, with the Black Country showing the largest increase in attainment. By April 2011 when City Challenge ended, all four Black

Country boroughs and six of the ten Greater Manchester boroughs had outstanding Ofsted ratings.

An evaluation of the City Challenges was commissioned which reviewed the dimensions of the challenges which supported their success and to offer insights into challenges faced (National Audit Office, 2009; DfE, 2010 and West, 2010). Their conclusions recommended the following general attributes which they found contributed to the success of the challenges and those which they suggested could hinder progress if not fully considered:

- A willingness amongst local authority staff to engage with the process and to get directly involved where there is a clear role to play
- External help from credible advisers who will confidently work alongside schools and produce independent evaluations
- Development of a sense of collective responsibility between partners and recognition that all have something to contribution
- Identification of common, inclusive and relevant improvement priorities led by those who are willing and able to drive collaboration forward
- Incentives to encourage stakeholders to participate and be interested which involved trust, goodwill and commitment among members
- Aligned within local context
- Simple governance with periodic review to assess full potential
- Clear and consensual objectives

From 2010 (under a Coalition Government directive), the DfE oversaw a programme of reducing the autonomy of Local Education Authorities, which included a steady decline in responsibility for overseeing local/regional school improvement. This had the effect of reducing their involvement in supporting national school improvement initiatives. Since 2015, and under a conservative government, Local Authorities responsibility for general local school improvement has for the most part ceased to exist and has fallen to Regional Commissioners with a wider geographical remit. Local Authorities still however had responsibility to oversee academic outcomes and standards and were still required to control and fund local Special Educational Needs provision.

In this new autonomous climate, the Education Partnership was established in the city metropolitan area of this study with the support of high profile political figures. It was intended to fill a gap that had previously been filled by the Local Authority. It was initially given a £11.7 million budget from central government to invest in supporting struggling schools and to help all schools in the metropolitan area to develop their own school improvement systems. Sir Mike Tomlinson, City Education Commissioner, supported the initiative:

> *"The creation of EP is an important milestone on the journey towards a model where schools are responsible for their own improvement and also the improvement of others. All of the research tells us this works best… Schools must not be isolated from each other and need to be part of a wider education community". (Elkes, 2015, Business News Statement, Appendix 1)*

One of the principal aims stated by EP was to champion a culture of school evaluation which enabled school leaders to build strong peer-supported and mutually beneficial relationships that deliver sustainable school improvement. This concept, termed

'Shaping the Future', was introduced to local school leaders at a Systems Leadership Conference held by EP in 2015 (Appendix 2) in a co-ordinated approach which included Teaching Schools. As an element of this concept and in response to the impending demise of Local Authority control at the time, the Education Partnership introduced a school evaluation model, developed to support school peer reviews (S2SSP), with a stated remit of creating a strong supportive system of networking for school leaders. The EP's website carried a statement which suggested that S2SSP helped school leaders to rigorously challenge each other and identify priority areas for improvement (BEP, 2018a).

Sir Mike Tomlinson, Education Commissioner for the metropolitan area, supported the EP Peer Review initiative stating that:

> *"This model of school to school working has proved to be effective in other parts of England". (Elkes, 2015, Business News Statement, Appendix 1)*

A range of local school improvement partners including Teaching Schools also supported and recommended the EP S2SSP programme.

1.3 **Scope of this research**

This study examined the operation of one school-to-school programme that was established by an Education Partnership in a large metropolitan area. One reason for focusing in detail on one school-to-school partnership model is that the research was undertaken at an early stage in the development of the S2SSP school networks in England. At that point, there was not much evidence to tell us whether these school

networks did actually operate in the way that advocates had been suggesting. This section provides background information about that partnership model. A second reason for focusing on one partnership is that the literature on school collaborations has argued that they needed to adapt to their circumstances. This suggests that school-to-school collaborations due to local complexity do not all share the same character. Finally, since this study is being undertaken for a professional doctorate a prime concern was to generate evidence that would be useful to that local partnership. As the EP programme was being rolled out across the region, there was little evidence, other than that advocated by the programme training providers and some local commentary, that it was effectively delivering change for those taking up the programme. This research aims to provide a first-hand account of the reality of instigating the programme through the experiences of those using it. It will identify if and how participants thought the programme contributed to school improvement and provide new research evidence on system change in the region.

Since 2014, and in collaboration with the Education Development Trust (EDT - formerly CfBT), EP has delivered the S2SSP school improvement programme in conjunction with EDT's national Schools Partnership Programme. More recently EP has introduced its own S2SSP training programme (discussed further on) with bespoke elements more applicable to local schools and led by local headteachers. However, the research for this study was undertaken using the initial CfBTsupported S2SSP model.

Whilst only a handful of schools in the metropolitan area were interested when the notion of S2SSP was first muted by EP in 2014, with the apparent success of a few,

more and more schools warmed to an idea which relied on schools operating through one agreed 'challenge' vision. In February 2018, EP stated that it had over 120 schools (42% of its membership within 22 'Families' of schools in 10 metropolitan area designated districts) participating in S2SSP training (BEP, 2018b). Data on the breakdown of the 'status' of the participating schools, for example, membership of an Academy Trust, was not specifically available. However, EP membership is not confined to particular school types or sizes and includes Multi-Academy Trusts (MAT), members of Multi-Academy Companies (Diocese MAC), stand-alone Academies and grant-maintained (Local Authority) schools. Data on the percentage of schools who have continued to use S2SSP after initial training and execution of peer reviews has not been collected. As the schools in this study are a mixture of types of schools, the question of what constitutes suitable and appropriate sizes and kinds of schools using the S2SSP model have been explored in this research.

The challenge for schools in this metropolitan area was how to engage in a co-ordinated mutually beneficial school improvement support mechanism fit for purpose: one which was accessible and manageable as well as sustainable - self-determination by choice. The S2SSP model of school-review appeared to provide an ideal environment for schools to collaborate within a defined and supported framework. Although school leaders could choose to partner with any number of schools, the EP programme of S2SSP is generally made up of small groups of schools, broadly within the same geographical location. Membership is voluntary where the schools work closely within a system of continuous self-review and school improvement. Early discussions with a Consultation group indicated that three or four was the optimum number of schools in

each peer group for the system to operate successfully. It was believed that this allowed the necessary time for each school to be more rigorous and challenging, as well as providing the opportunity to add `depth' to the process. This premise formed part of this study.

Exponents of S2SSP say that the aim is simply to develop a system in which members share performance data, challenge each other, identify priorities for improvement and share expertise where needed. This involves forming a type of 'professional merger' where participants are said to have a genuine desire to bring about sustained improvement for those involved in each S2SSP. Those taking up the training on S2SSP, generally provided through EP, are tasked with ensuring that each of the schools in a peer group will challenge and support each other in equal measure, with a remit to increase leadership capacity, raise standards and ultimately improve outcomes for pupils. Perhaps, most importantly, the model presupposes that those in a peer group should be made up of leaders of perceived equal status, relying on capability and trust to challenge each other effectively.

This is the theory, but could S2SSP become part of what Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) and Hopkins and Higham (2007) describe as achieving `high social capital' and empowering school leaders within groups? As Gunter (2004) suggests in her work on changing educational landscapes, working for change is about working to create a better, more suitable and sustainable system. The S2SSP system is expected to provide a home-grown learning platform from which schools take on board the concept of what

the providers believe is a genuine professional 'learning community' in practice, built from the ground up by staff in their own real-life teaching and learning scenarios.

Through studying the S2SSP processes undertaken by a selection of schools, I have attempted to put forward some evidence of the success or otherwise of the model, mainly from the perspective of school leaders carrying out the peer reviews, including those of middle leaders.

Participation in S2SSP is generally initiated by school leaders themselves, although some were strongly advised to take it up, usually because of falling academic standards or changes in a school leadership team. This added weight to the notion that 'effective' school leaders could be trusted to get on with their own self-evaluation without the perceived heavy-handed approach used by the DfE and Ofsted. Those participating in S2SSP were given the autonomy to operate the school improvement system themselves. The intention was that these small groups of local schools then effectively self-evaluated through supporting each other. An attempt was made in this study to evidence how participants felt about the feasibility of S2SSP being used at some point to offset Ofsted Inspections.

1.4   **Value of researching S2SSP**

In contrast with other professions such as medicine, which rely heavily on peer-reviewed empirical research, schools in England have often been criticised by government ministers and others (Hargreaves, 2011) for not getting involved in

educational research on effective systems and practices. It was anticipated that this study on S2SSP would add to the debate on system leadership in a selection of schools in one city which will provide first-hand accounts on the success or otherwise of the collaborative school improvement programme. The study also provides the Education Partnership with a researched study on what users of S2SSP have found to be worthwhile and what they suggest could be improved, all of which can be used by EP to reflect on and develop the training programme further.

1.5   **Method**

The research reported in this thesis has been conducted as 'practitioner research'. Prior to conducting this research I had been a local headteacher and a key stakeholder in the school peer review process. I had a vested interest in the components of a successful S2SSP and how the operation of S2SSP could be more effectively implemented. I recognised that I needed to be wary about ways in which my own interest might introduce bias into the conduct of this research. I tried to combat this risk by reflecting on how I was collecting and analysing evidence. I used the supervision process to get a critical commentary on the way in which I was conducting the research.

The research was conducted as a case study of one school-to-school programme which operated through a system of school review. Six sources of data were used: a documentation review; consultation group made up of local school leaders; survey questionnaires to school leaders (electronic); survey questionnaires to strategic network leaders (electronic); and face-to-face in-depth interviews with school senior leaders;

face to face in-depth interviews with middle leaders who had participated in the programme.

Since the data collection gathered participants' perceptions of, and beliefs about, the programme, the research adopted an interpretivist approach. It sought to gather evidence of the way that participants experienced and interpreted the programme. Although a network may be viewed as a community that develops a shared culture, I did not assume that participants would have developed a single perspective on the success of the programme or the factors that helped or hindered it. The programme was still fairly new when I started the research and I approached the research without presuming that I would find a single, uniform perspective. The nature and rationale for the research design is explained more fully in Chapter 3.

1.5.1   Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 2 presents a review of relevant literature. It starts by describing the strategy used to identify relevant literature. The next main section reviews literature on two main themes relevant to this research: *networks as a form of organisation for schools* and *school networks, learning and a 'self-improving' school system*. The chapter continues with a review of recent policies in England that have encouraged schools to work together in networks. The review examines policies before and after 2010 when a new Coalition government brought in some changes.

Chapter 3 describes and justifies the research design. This justification refers to literature on case study design and the interpretivist approach to research. The chapter

also includes my reflections on my role as a researcher and how I tried to minimise bias that was introduced through my interest and prior experience. The chapter summarises the methods of data collection and explains how these were related to the research questions.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of evidence collected by the short questionnaires completed by senior (school) and strategic (network) leaders. These questionnaires collected data from a larger sample than was possible in the interviews and they offered a reference point in considering whether the interview data could be treated as reflecting the range of perspectives of participants in S2SSP. Analysis of the questionnaire data also informed the conduct of the interviews.

Chapter 5 has two parts. The first part presents the views and opinions of School Senior and Middle Leaders during the in-depth interviews. These recorded interviews formed the basis of a thematic framework which underpinned the research questions. The second part of Chapter 5 discusses the outcomes of the interviews in light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and considers the implications of parallel themes.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by first summarising the answers suggested to the four research questions and provides a broader discussion on challenges faced by school leaders in managing change (Mortimer, 1998; West, 2010). This chapter also comments on limitations of the study and considers the dissemination of the findings and suggests a range of implications.

CHAPTER 2   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

In order to place the study in a wider context, this chapter examined a wide range of available literature on the subject of effective collaborations and networks. The framework for the literature reviewed takes account of government policies, national studies and research dating from the late 1980's up to the present time on collaborations and networking between schools. It also takes account of international perspectives and influential practice globally. This includes articles and studies on educational policy and practice in the UK. These were used to clarify arguments and review evidence relevant to the following four research questions:

(1) To what extent do school leaders believe the S2SSP model supports and influences reliable school improvement and raises standards?

(2) What factors do school leaders believe have affected the success of S2SSP including barriers and advantages?

(3) Do school leaders believe S2SSRP is sustainable in the long term?

(4) Does the EP S2SSP model provide a useful tool for self-evaluation by schools?

The first research question raised the issue of what school leaders regard as `school improvement'. Even government policy offers a range of contrasting perspectives on the meaning of school improvement and the factors that promote it: absolute and relative performance in league tables; adherence to desirable processes as judged by Ofsted

inspections; the quality of school leadership, school autonomy and school collaboration. Beyond these agendas lie other perspectives: a focus on succession planning, sustainability and innovation and school leaders' beliefs about what improves the lives of children in schools and the communities to which they belong. As we shall see, advocates of school networks have been drawn to phrases like 'moral purpose' and `moral leadership'. But what exactly do they mean by this? The first research question also drew attention to how school networks are expected to improve schools. What are the presumed improvement processes and what is the evidence to support belief in the existence of these mechanisms? What defines 'improvement' for school leaders in the present 'test' focus climate and how is school effectiveness in the context of collaboration actually measured? Has the focus on measuring outcomes from standardised tests held back best practice or has the S2SSP developed its own unique criteria for effectiveness through overcoming potential barriers?

The acronym S2SSP (School to School Support Programme) is used to refer to the peer review programme set up by EP (Education Partnership). This acronym was widely used in the EP partnership when referring to Peer Reviews and has been used for brevity in this study.

Many terms have been used to refer to school partnerships. However, for the purposes of this study, the terms Learning Networks; Collaborations; Federations; Partnerships; Clusters; Alliances etc., are used interchangeably to mean broadly the same thing. 'Collaborations, Federations, Networks and Partnerships' have tended to imply a wider more formal working relationship, whilst 'Clusters' imply smaller groups which

perhaps collaborate more on local issues. They can all however be defined as collaborations at varying levels and may be viewed as peer sharing experiences whatever the aims or outcome. The acronyms DfE (Department for Education) and DfES (Department for Education and Skills) have also been used to refer to the central government ministry for education, depending on the timeframe being discussed.

The second research question asked what is believed about what makes school networks work: what are the opportunities and also what are the opportunities? This question suggests there was likely to be variation between school networks in the way that they operated the S2SSP. The third question extended this focus to ask whether school leaders believed that S2SSP offered a viable long-term model for school improvement. The final research question focused specifically on the evaluation tool used by S2SSP. Put simply, was it a useful school evaluation tool and for whom or what was it likely to be useful?

This study focused on one regional, school network. The beliefs of participants in this network may not be shared by school leaders in other networks. Moreover, the ingredients for 'success' and the 'challenges' faced are likely to differ between network groups. This study does not claim to offer generalizable knowledge. Principally, since the thesis is set in the context of a professional doctorate, it considered what can be said about the EP S2SSP programme that will be useful for its future. The outcomes of the study are likely to be of interest to readers beyond the EP network, contributing to a growing body of research evidence about how one type of network within a particular context navigated the challenges faced.

The next section 2.2 gives a description of the search strategy used to identify relevant literature including government reports. This is followed by Section 2.3 which examines theoretical issues that have been highlighted in the advocacy of school networks and subsequent academic debate about the likelihood that school networks will achieve the outcomes that have been suggested. Section 2.4 offers an account of the development of policy in England which has framed the opportunities for S2SSP. This section is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on policy developments up till 2010. Much of the evidence on the implementation of school-to-school networks in England comes from this period. The second part of the review focuses on policy developments since 2010 as the new government in that year introduced some substantive changes in policy that framed the context for the development of S2SSP. One new type of school network (Teaching School Alliances) was introduced and another (Multi-Academy Trusts) was strongly encouraged. These changes greatly increased the proportion of schools in England that belonged to local school-to-school networks. Section 2.5 sets the EP S2SSP initiative in this context. Section 2.5.3 reviews the limited evidence about the development of school networks in this new (post-2010) policy context and the extent to which the expectations for a 'self-improving school system' have been realised. The final section (2.7) of the chapter considers the implications of this review for the research conducted in this study.

2.2   **Search Strategy**

This section outlines methods used to identify relevant literature including government reports. An electronic search of published research, policy and literature using key words such as School Peer Reviews, Network Communities, Federations and Collaborations in England and elsewhere as well as general terms relating to school-to-school peer reviews over the last 20 years was carried out using the University Library website   (www.elibrary.bham.ac.uk)   and   FindIt@bham,   as   well   as www.google.scholar.com. A search of the National College of Teaching & Leadership (NCTL) website (www.nationalcollege.org.uk) of literature on effective school-to-school networks, collaborations and peer reviews over the last 10-15 years was undertaken with those cited being the most recent and relevant to this study.

The literature review was also supported through the reading of HMSO (Her Majesty's Stationery Office) and Ofsted material on policy and collaborative school peer review practice openly available on the DfE (Department for Education) and Ofsted linked websites. Use was made of reviews of literature and reading of recommended course material on the topic of Networking and School Peer Collaborations and the reading of general educational journals and publications on the build-up and progress of government policy on the subject of Academies and Teaching School Alliances. Comments from related articles and information gained through the reading of Online Educational Debates and Educational Media Supplements in England such as the TES (Times Educational Supplement) and Guardian Education were also included, in order to provide a broad range of perspectives on the effectiveness or otherwise of on-going educational policy and practice. It is, however, accepted that much of the discourse from

these sources may draw conclusions based on opinions of interested parties (with some of it anecdotal through general reading and professional conversations) rather than the research evidence this thesis will provide through outcomes of surveys and interviews, and that only tentative conclusions may be drawn from some.

The bulk of the literature review was undertaken before the data collection to inform the design of the study. A further search was undertaken during the final preparation of the thesis to capture recent publications. These feature largely in section 2.5.3 examining consequences of the policy changes since 2010.

2.3   Theoretical issues and options

This section examines theoretical issues raised by those advocating school networks. It also picks up on debate about the likelihood that school networks will achieve the outcomes that have been suggested and considers the challenges faced and the extent to which they play an active role in developing and furthering professional learning.

2.3.1   Networks as a form of organisation for schools

S2SSP is a form of school network. Networks are one of three organising systems that can be used to provide education. The other two are hierarchies and markets (Davies, 2018; Greany and Higham, 2018). For most of the previous century the dominant system for organising state education in England was a hierarchy in which Local Authorities played a key role in managing local schools. From the 1980s onwards, schools were increasingly subject to market forces operating through parental choice

and more open enrolment (Adnett and Davies, 2002). The idea of school provision through networks has emerged in this context, though the literature on school networks has sometimes abstracted from the continuing effects of hierarchies and markets. This section examines some key issues in network organisation, some 'recipes' for good practice in school networks and some challenges created by the influence of hierarchies and markets.

In their work on how humans have evolved to co-operate, Bowles and Gintis (2013) put forward their belief that we are instinctively concerned with the well-being of others, both for personal and social reasons. We are morally bound, they suggest, and predisposed to work together for the greater good and for outcomes which benefit the whole. This view implies that those working in networks such as S2SSP are likely to succeed because they are innately driven to do their collective best for each other. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) embrace this idea of 'moral purpose' which they regard as one of the key drivers in the success of any collaboration. This means that school networks then develop a reservoir of moral capital (Berwick 2010).

The importance of social capital has been widely discussed in the literature on social networks. Matthews and Berwick (2013) suggest that meeting the needs of pupils in the wider community is a 'moral imperative' which necessitates the development of shared 'social capital' within a network. Bauman (2001) distinguished between tight-knit and loose-knit communities, whilst Putnam (2001) distinguished between bonding and bridging social capital. Both ideas suggest that networks may either require a very high degree of trust and reciprocity if participants have a very strong focus on activity within

the network or a lower level of trust and reciprocity if participants engage quite widely with others outside the network. The idea of 'moral purpose' suggests a reciprocity that extends to any school simply on the basis of being 'ready to give something back' to the whole education system (Hill, 2011). If this kind of motivation can be relied on, then the *quid pro quo* reciprocity of tight-knit networks is unnecessary. In either case, the idea of a shared network culture becomes critical to the effective operation of the network. Unlike hierarchical or market systems where the emphasis is on extrinsic motivation, the motivation in a network is supposed to come from the internalisation of shared goals which become apparent in a shared culture.

The concept of human and collective agency was explored by Bandura (2001 p.4) who put forward the concept that 'people are producers as well as products of social systems: we rely on others through collective agency exercised through socially coordinated and interdependent effort'. Wenger's (1998) idea of 'communities of practice' has been frequently used to examine relationships within organisations and more recently has been extended to look at networks between organisations (e.g. Buysse, Sparkman and Wesley, 2003; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003).

As suggested by Wenger (1998), communities of practice can be a force to be reckoned with: what he calls a '*locus of engagement*' in action, interpersonal relations, shared knowledge and negotiations of enterprises. Such communities, Wenger (1998 p.99) believes, hold the key to real transformation, the kind that has a real effect on people's lives:

> *"Engagement in social practice is the fundamental process by which we learn and so become who we are".*

Although agreed language, procedures and structures may help to define a group, Wenger (1998) emphasised shared implicit relations which are often not articulated (referring to perceptions, tacit conventions, sensitivities, embodied understanding and shared world views). Consideration of these aspects he suggests is crucial to the success of any enterprise.

2.3.2   *School networks, learning and a 'self-improving' school system*

Enthusiasm for networks in school policy has been largely driven by a belief in their capacity for improving (not just maintaining) schools. This belief contrasts with an older literature on the role of social class in maintaining a *status quo* in education: an informal social class network of middle class teachers effectively privileging middle class children at the expense of working class children (Power, Edwards and Wigfall, 2003). This comparison raises the question of why we should expect networking between schools to necessarily lead to school improvement. Advocates of school networking have sometimes appeared to imply that improvement is inevitable when teachers collaborate with each other. For example, according to Hargreaves (2011 p.11), networking is:

> *"not a matter of unilateral practice transfer. It is a process to which the recipient can also contribute as an act of reciprocity. In short, what begin as sharing practice ends up as a co-construction of practice that entails as incremental innovation".*

It is not easy to detect a compelling theoretical rationale for expecting improvement to be an inevitable outcome of collaboration between schools. Research on the experience of school collaborations might help to develop understanding in this regard. However,

there are some recurring themes which highlight mechanisms through which networks are expected to yield improvements.

First, academic commentary that has directly informed school policy in Britain has used the term 'Joint Practice Development' (JPD) (see for example Hargreaves, 2011; Sebba *et al*., 2012) to convey the expectation that collaboration will yield improvement. JPD in its simplest form is a peer-to-peer professional development process that encourages teachers to work collaboratively and to come up with `shared' solutions to issues identified in their practice. This brings with it an expectation that 'professional capital' will ensue where teachers will inevitably improve practice when they work (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). This notion is, for example, embodied in the practice of 'Lesson Study' (Lewis *et al*., 2006). In a similar way, Chapman, *et al*., (2015) found that networks were more sustainable where there were groups of committed practitioners on a journey of 'collaborative inquiry'.

Second, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argued that schools needed to develop a culture in which members share performance data, challenge each other equally, identify the priorities for improvement and direct help and expertise where it is most needed in the partnership. This emphasis on comparison between schools contrasts with the comparison between school performance encouraged by market forces (Adnett and Davies, 2000). The market forces argument assumes that teachers already know what leads to improvements in students' learning and need external incentives to act in students' interests. The network argument assumes that teachers will be able to identify

cause and effect in teaching and learning through comparing practice and that they will naturally be motivated to work in students' interests.

Third, it has been argued (e.g. Meiers and Buckley, 2010; Kennedy, 2015) that school-to-school networks will motivate teachers and leaders by giving them control over their work. They suggest that collaboration will provide a non-threatening context in which leaders at any level can take 'ownership' of initiatives, which in turn adds to a high level of engagement. This belief was echoed by Rea *et al.,* (2013), who claimed that a non-hierarchical network approach to school improvement usefully builds links and learning between schools. The Rea Report (2013 pp. 43-44) also stressed the importance of personal involvement and commitment by school leaders which they believed helped to consolidate support for improvement projects among staff.

Fourth, it has been argued that collaboration and networking between schools creates the best environment for the development of new school leaders. Investing in 'professional capital', which focuses on the development of 'human capital', leads to better economic outcomes and increased social cohesion (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

There was a belief that Teaching Schools could be highly successful when partnerships engaged in what was termed 'disciplined innovation' where entrepreneurs would subsequently acquire the skills to become confident future leaders, either within their own schools or between peer schools and beyond (Hargreaves, 2011; Matthews and Berwick, 2015). Moreover, the literature on school improvement through networks anticipates that collaboration between schools is associated with flat hierarchies of

responsibility within schools (Marzano, 2005; Meiers and Buckley, 2010; Balyera *et al.,* 2015). Development of leadership capacity then becomes an aspect of professional development for all teachers (e.g. Buysse *et al*., 2003; Stoll *et al*., 2006; Vescio *et al*., 2008). This view is shared by Hill (2011) who highlighted the increased opportunities for leadership training and development that inter-school collaboration can provide, particularly in supporting and developing aspiring and middle leaders.

Finally, the literature advocating school collaboration (Earl, Watson and Katz, 2003; Hargreaves (2011); Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves, 2012; NCTL, 2012) also suggests that collaboration needs to be established as a 'formal and purposeful' process that focuses on agreed school improvement priorities. It is suggested that formal processes (partnerships) are necessary to secure sustainability in the long run. There may be a tension between commitment and engagement engendered by voluntary participation and requirements for conformity suggested by formal, long-run, agreements and processes.

In studying the effects of the School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP) in Scotland, Chapman, *et al*., (2015) shared a range of insights which they believed helped the programme to be effective in particular contexts:

- Focus on closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged learners

- Purposeful leadership

- Understanding the change process

- Structured opportunities for collaboration

- Commitment to collaborative action research

- Use of data and understanding of impact

- A focus on literacy, numeracy and parental engagement

- Investing in building positive relationships

- Promoting a risk-taking culture

- Drawing on external expertise.

There have been several attempts to distil these arguments into a menu of desirable characteristics of school collaborations. These lists stop well short of offering any underlying theory that identifies and addresses tensions between 'desirable characteristics'. For example, Matthews and Berwick (2013 p.5), on the basis of experience in the London Challenge, suggested what they referred to as the 'four capitals' with the development of 'social skills' of particular relevance:

- Creating the moral climate (Moral Capital).

- Identifying effective school practice and capturing it (Knowledge Capital).

- Equipping schools with the social skills to share their knowledge effectively (Social Capital).

- Setting up the organisational systems for them to share this knowledge with those who need to learn (Organisational Capital).

Although they refer to these four capitals as a 'theory of action', they stop short of identifying relationships between the capitals or, crucially, the barriers that stand in the way of the accumulation of these capitals.

Others such as Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan (2016) suggested the following eight key features of effective school networks:

1. Focus on ambitious student learning outcomes linked to effective pedagogy.

2. Develop strong relationships of trust and internal accountability.

3. Continuously improve practice and systems through cycles of collaborative inquiry.

4. Use deliberate leadership and skilled facilitation within flat power structures.

5. Frequently interact and learn inwards.

6. Connect outwards to learn from others.

7. Form new partnership among students, teachers, families, and communities.

8. Secure adequate resources to sustain the work.

These lists which are intended to identify characteristics of practice that are likely to make networks more effective have many similarities. Carvalho and Goodyear (2014) believe that identifying the key ingredients of effective learning communities is less straightforward. They illustrate this perspective through a discussion of studies by Harasim *et al.,* (1997) and Mayadas (1997). They discuss why boundaries within a framework would be tricky to pin down and point to problems with trying to identify them clearly for research purposes, as well as the difficulty in differentiating between what constitutes a network, when there may be so many variables. They assert that job satisfaction, as well as challenge, in networked learning often comes from the autonomy exercised by the participants, particularly when it comes to making choices about the people with whom they work which can be a varied and complex process.

These lists of desirable characteristics of school networks may also be read as characteristics of a 'self-improving school system'. This term repositions school improvement from a feature of individual schools to features of school systems. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012 p.4) discuss such partnerships in terms of the benefits of such systems:

> *"Inter-school partnerships (clusters, alliances, families) are the new organisational form on which a self-improving system has to be based".*

This position is echoed by Wheatley (1999 p.158) who sees more opportunities in connected systems than isolated bodies:

> *"We participate in a world of exquisite interconnectedness. We are learning to see systems rather than isolated parts and players".*

However, theorising a self-improving school system solely in terms of one form of (network) governance is problematic when schools in England (and elsewhere) also operate in environments in which governance is shared between networks, markets and hierarchies (Davies, 2018). Present government policy in England also expects schools to improve through hierarchical governance structures (eg. DfE, Academy Governance, 2017) exercised through evaluation by central government appointed school inspectors. Policy also expects schools to improve through the incentives created by competition in schooling markets (Adnett and Davies, 2002). Moreover, school networks have been encouraged by incentives from central governments which local governments have been required to facilitate (Feys and Devos, 2015). The Education Partnership facilitating S2SSP has been a beneficiary of this policy.

The notion that networks needed an external facilitator to enable their formation was put forward by Chapman and Allen (2006). This is a role that a hierarchical government agency could play. Some networks (e.g. some Multi-Academy Trusts that have been described as 'chains') have come to operate as hierarchies. School networks have also been asked to operate in competitive markets. Schools in England compete for student enrolments even with schools with which they are collaborating (Adnett and Davies, 2003; Davies, Adnett and Turnbull, 2003). This can create tensions in moral purpose, trust and reciprocity and contrasts with the belief that school networks need a stable and non-competitive environment to be effective (eg. Feys and Devos, 2015), and runs counter to suppositions that schools need to operate under competitive pressures.

2.4   School Networks; policy and practice

This section presents a brief chronological account of related developments in education policy in England which shaped the context for the S2SSP initiative examined in this thesis. The first part of this section focuses on school improvement policy developments up to 2010. The second part focuses on policy developments since 2010 as the new government in that year introduced some substantive changes in policy that framed the context for the development of S2SSP.

2.4.1   Policy developments up to 2010

School improvement policy in England under the Blair Labour Government (1997 to 2010) encouraged collaboration between schools through a series of initiatives. Common themes in these initiatives were: providing additional central government

funding to facilitate improvement through collaboration, establishing organisational bodies (at a locality, metropolitan or regional level) to oversee collaboration; involving local authorities, facilitating involvement by individuals and organisations from beyond the school sector; and facilitating participation from university researchers in the field. Similar initiatives took place in Scotland (e.g. Chapman *et al*., 2015).

The high focus on bringing stakeholders together also brought significant funding to support improvement projects. Earlier government funded school improvement initiatives included the creation of programmes such as Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA circa 1990's) which had involved teams of researchers working in partnership with colleagues from schools to identify ways in which the learning of all members of a school community could be enhanced. Leadership Improvement Grants (LIGs) supported collaboration between schools and encouraged school leaders to share school improvement developments. Education Action Zones (EAZ, 1998 DfEE, 1998) and Excellence in Cities (EiC, 2001) initiatives were led by LEA's within a concept of civic capacity. They were established to involve local business and community leaders in working with schools with some success (See Appendix 3). These initiatives and Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA) which began in the late 1980s, laid the foundations for future initiatives. Whilst some initiatives appeared to have limited evidential effects (Franklin, 2005), others were praised for their impact (e.g. Machin *et al*, 2004).

Other centrally funded projects were launched with varying degrees of success. These included Network Learning Communities (NLC) in England where groups of schools

worked in partnership on school improvement and professional development circa 2002-2006 (See Appendix 3 for full list).

As described in Chapter 1, City Challenge collaborations (London Challenge, 2003-10; Manchester Challenge, 2006-10; Black Country Challenge, 2006-10) were recognised as key drivers in improving standards in schools. The metropolitan area in which S2SSP was based had participated in this programme of initiatives. In fact, the Lead Education Officer at the time rose to national prominence and the innovations and improvements in this metropolitan area were regarded as models for others. Whilst the Lead Education Officer was viewed by some as a controversial, he was widely regarded as inspirational and was credited with changing attitudes and raising standards in schools in this metropolitan area. He was later appointed to act as Commissioner for London Schools in the London Challenge.

The London Challenge (2003-10), in particular began what was considered a radical change in direction on school improvement networking. At a time when London Boroughs worked in isolation, the process, which took place over a number of years, involved system leaders of 70 disadvantaged schools and five low-performing boroughs working with education advisers across different boroughs to identify priorities and challenges and devise joint school improvement plans. This extensive and systematic process was credited with raising academic attainment and standards above national levels (Brighouse and Woods, 2017).

The collaborative 'Challenge' approach was subsequently rolled out to include the Manchester Challenge and the Black Country Challenge, focussing in particular on secondary schools performing below floor targets[1], with varying degrees of success. However, the approach was felt to be successful enough to include primary schools in the wider scheme from 2008.

Under the 'Challenge' umbrella, schools across the country were encouraged to engage with these 'tried and tested' evidently successful collaborative processes and systems to support school self-evaluation. Funding for these national challenges at the time ran into tens of millions of pounds. Other initiatives such as the Primary Strategy Learning Network (PSLN) were introduced as part of the Excellence and Enjoyment Strategy (DfES 2004): an example of large scale national educational reform. The PSLN 'top down' strategy was heavily directed centrally within a very specific national agenda focused on raising standards in literacy and numeracy. A review carried out by the NCSL (National College, 2005) on PSLN concluded that it was effective in the short term in raising the profile of collaborations between schools, but that evidence of impact was very patchy and available research was not sufficient enough to be more conclusive.

Around the same time, the DfES (2006) introduced a policy of conferring 'Academy' status on schools deemed to be failing to meet academic standards, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas. This idea was taken from the 'Charter' school initiative rolled out in America in the early 1990, where schools could operate outside local

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[1] Minimum levels of attainment and progress expected in national academic tests in England

district control. This was widely taken up in England by secondary schools at the time, particularly those vulnerable to closure or reclassification because of poor educational standards when compared to peers nationally (based on SATs, GCSE and A Level Floor Target outcomes). For some, particularly in areas of high deprivation, Academies were seen as `game changers' in their attempt to instil a sense of 'pride, aspiration and success in adversity'. However, many school leaders criticised a system that drew funding away from maintained non-academy schools through 'top slicing' of funds and redirecting it towards ensuring that a government led flagship was successful. Questions were raised on the capacity of schools with depleting budgets to drive improvement initiatives such as S2SSP without funding to back them up.

2.4.2   *Evidence of school to school networks gathered before 2010*

The most persuasive evidence of the value of school networks in the pre-2010 period (eg. study on federated and non-federated schools in Scotland from 2006) was provided by Chapman and Muijs (2014). When they compared federated and non-federated schools they found stronger improvement in student outcomes over time in the federated schools. It is possible, as Chapman and Muijs (2014) acknowledge, that this difference reflected greater capacity for, and commitment to, improvement in outcomes in the schools that opted to join networks. They also found substantial variation between schools within each group. They acknowledge that variations may have resulted from differences between the ways that school networks were organised or indeed the composition of the schools involved. It is also possible that the external contexts for the networks may have been different: either in terms of the market forces to which they were subject or the ways in which schools in the network were affected by hierarchical

governance exercised by government bodies. This work laid the foundations for the introduction of Scotland's School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP) which focussed on tackling educational inequalities using Local Improvement Groups (LIGs) as key drivers of improvement in schools facing challenges.

In an NCSL review of the evidence of the impact of partnerships such as inter-school networks and collaborations, Armstrong (2015 p.32) suggested there was a 'paucity of independent empirical evidence relating to interschool collaboration'. Armstrong's review suggested that most research evidence on effective inter-school partnerships had up to 2010 focused on evaluations of central government initiatives. The review also identified:

> *"a number of common challenges associated with inter-school collaboration including those relating to school autonomy, trust, increased workload, capacity and funding".*

Claims were also made, mainly by government sources, that school networks were able to pool resources to achieve cost savings, particularly in administration (Hill, 2011, Hill *et al*., 2012). Moreover, case study research by Woods *et al*., (2013) reported that school leaders believed that collaboration between schools had helped reduce administrative load on individual schools. However, at least up to 2014/15, the evidence suggested otherwise. Davies (2018) found more recently that the proportion of school spending on 'back office costs' was significantly higher in schools in multi-academy trusts than in single academy and maintained schools.

A more recent think piece on reform of education in Scotland (Chapman, ADES, 2018) drew together some key themes, issues, tensions and dilemmas arising from the ADES

Directors' Forum discussions in 2018. This opened up the debate on the challenges faced by local authorities in Scotland when attempting to evidence the impact of collaborative work between schools. The ADES Forum drew attention to some major factors which needed to be taken into consideration when implementing collaborative improvement initiatives. Chapman (2018 p.7) discussed the effects of what he called the 'dark side of collaboration' which he believes is sometimes overlooked in measuring success. This included the need to consider the following which can sometimes have a major influence on what is deemed to be successful:

- Illusion of association – where passive buy-in creates the illusion of collaboration as a 'sleeping partner'

- Fabricated cooperation – where one's own agenda is pursued to enhance power, status or resources, often at the expense of others

- Initial engagement – used to control and influence the agenda to mitigate perceived negative consequences of the collaborative activity can turn into collusion

- Contrived collegiality - False public expression of values and belief systems that do not match the behaviours enacted by leaders or those involved in the collaboration.

As well as recognising how networks can help off-set some of the problems faced by schools with tried and tested approaches, there is a need to recognise and consider likely obstructions in order to secure their sustainability. Chapman (2018) suggests that system leaders should take account of the possible unhelpful attributes of collaborative endeavours. Without longer term vision built into the process, it is unlikely to achieve

the desired outcomes (Hadfield and Chapman 2009). This means that collaborate school improvement processes need to take account of and include locally led efforts to make school systems more equitable, whilst also linking with wider policies aimed at creating a fairer society (Ainscow *et al.,* 2012).

As with the research on school networks in England and Scotland, international evidence has emphasised variation between networks and has tended to focus on organisational issues which are believed to have influenced how effectively these networks have operated. For example, Wohlstetter *et al.*, (2003) evaluated a large-scale US initiative which created families of schools including high schools and their feeder primary schools. Their case studies suggested substantial variation between the effectiveness of the operation of different networks. An international comparison of the performance of school systems (Mourshed *et al.,* 2010) claimed that the best systems in the world relied heavily on peer-to-peer support as a source of innovation and improvement. This kind of inference is made problematic by the extent of difference between school systems and the risk of misattributing cause and effect. Mourshed *et al.*, (2010 p.11) also observed that leaders of school improvement systems were rarely sure of why they had been successful:

> *"They often did not have a 'theory of the case' about why what they did worked. Even fewer had a mental map of how all the changes they made fit together as a coherent whole. Some even thought they had just been lucky".*

Although a large scale quantitative study was carried out in Scotland by Chapman and Muijs in 2006, research which focused on impact on students has tended to be small-scale, illustrative and qualitative (e.g. Owen, 2015).

Some general conclusions were offered by Owen (2015 p.59), that the ultimate learning impact is the potential to support staff well-being, which she believes reinvigorates passion:

> *"...supporting teachers within school based professional communities contributed significantly to changing teacher practices".*

The question of whether it is important to establish 'joint values' at the beginning of a prospective joint venture, or to allow values to emerge naturally and develop as JPD begins to sustain itself (the binding effect of sharing) emerges for discussion with regard to S2SSP. In summary the pre-2010 evidence suggested a positive impact of school networks, but it was not conclusive.

2.5   School networks: policy and practice after 2010

2.5.1   A review of policy developments since 2010

This section concentrates on policy in more recent years when central government in England went on to encourage collaboration between schools in various forms and with a grow emphasis on school autonomous self-reliance. In 2010 a new coalition government introduced new emphases in policy towards schools, offering what was termed 'autonomous self-managing schools' operating in competitive environments. However, before reviewing policies which encouraged the development of school networks, this section begins by noting some features of the policy context which framed the developing policy on school networks.

The new Government was perhaps even more focused than its predecessors on England's relative performance in international educational comparisons. In the 2015

PISA (OECD) international test comparisons England was ranked 20th in the world using the 'basic skills' measure but 6th when other factors were considered, such as having a sense of well-being and the percentage that went on to further education (Appendix 4). Finland was ranked first out of higher achieving Western European countries. However, Asian countries such as Singapore and South Korea were still considered to be world leaders, offering models that were copied elsewhere. By 2016 England was lagging behind in international comparison league tables such as PISA where the performance of England's 15 year olds was dropping (Ward, 2016: OECD-Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). These comparisons created a climate in which government was looking for policies to borrow from 'high achieving countries' whilst also being anxious that the schooling system was under pressure to perform.

In this context, the new government was keen to maintain (and perhaps strengthen) the role of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) in imposing hierarchical governance. It was also keen to maintain the role of school league tables to foster market forces which encouraged schools to compete with each other. In fact, curriculum changes were introduced (through an English Baccalaureate) that were driven by a desire to strengthen the role of school comparison through league tables. This meant that whilst schools might appear to have been given more control over their own affairs, they were also constrained by market and hierarchical forces.

Over the last decade there has been a gradual erosion of the responsibilities of local government for schools in England. The new coalition government in 2010 announced

its priorities through a White Paper '*The Importance of Teaching*' (DfE, 2010). One key aim was a rapid expansion in the number of 'academy' schools, independent of Local Authority control. In fact, the government initially planned for all schools to become Academies by 2022, although this requirement was revoked in 2016 through a revised Parliamentary Statement (Burns, 2016). This was followed by a more recent statement by the Education Secretary 2018 (Damian Hinds) who revised and loosely revoked the expectation that any school which fell below floor targets or had a 'coasting' label would automatically transfer to academy status (DfE, 2018a). The academy system replaced the previous hierarchical governance of schooling (whereby Local Authorities exercised local control on behalf of central government) within a contracting system. Central government paid organisations to provide schooling subject to conditions specified in a contract. This opened school governance to a range of organisations and was championed by government advisors who admired the Charter School movement in the US (e.g. Coulson, 2011).

Referring to effective school partnerships, Gilbert (2012), who had been Chief Inspector of Ofsted from 2006 to 2011, believed that the best schools evaluate their own performance and are honest about their school's strengths and weaknesses: they use both stakeholder and peer review to open up their practice to help them develop teachers' capacity and children's learning. She suggested that support across schools offers greater scope and potential for increasing confidence in and taking ownership of school-led accountability. Gilbert (2012) concluded that establishing a culture of 'professional reflection and enquiry' across schools was a rigorous and effective tool for

improving practice: reflection and enquiry becoming key elements of any subsequent and evolving joint school improvement plan.

The DfE White Paper (2010) on the importance of teaching created some new structures to fulfil its ambitions. A critical innovation was the idea of a 'Teaching School Alliance' (TSA). Schools that had been judged outstanding by Ofsted were encouraged to form networks with other schools to work together to train new teachers. The Finnish system of University Training Schools was sometimes invoked as an inspiration for this policy which related three main influences on the development of Teaching Schools (e.g. Gu *et al.,* NCSL 2015):

1. The concept of teaching hospitals, medical training and clinical excellence.
2. The development of highly effective schools that play a major part in teacher education and professional development.
3. Successful school improvement initiatives to be drawn upon.

This report considered four main principles to guide further policy and practice (p.22/23) which included a keen focus on (1) *Relationships* based - on trust (2) *Institutional and teacher identity* - within less hierarchical structures (3) *Learner engagement and involvement* - from the beginning and (4) *Understanding time -* to learn and adapt to new practice.

Teaching Schools tend to operate within network-based structures which are generally believed to have a positive effect on raising standards for schools brought under their

umbrella of support. With a central government grant of £150,000 spread over 3 years, there was an expectation that Teaching Schools, as they matured, would become self-sufficient. The DfE also announced plans to invite some Higher Education providers of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) to establish University Training Schools (UTSs) as demonstration centres for new techniques. The School of Education at the University of Birmingham was among the first to respond to this, as a way forward for developing trainee teachers. Influences from and parallels with the concept of 'laboratory' schools in the USA could also be seen, where schools would link up with a college or university to provide teacher training. By May 2016, there were 736 Teaching Schools, 577 of them operating within Teaching School Alliances (Gu *et al.,* NCTL 2016). By 2018, there were 835 Teaching Schools and 668 Teaching School Alliances with numbers appearing to stall (DfE, 2018b). Teaching Schools are now mostly funded through chargeable services and funding bids. Their influence and impact on school improvement has not to date been tested.

The academy programme had created a governance structure in which schools operated outside Local Authority control and were directly accountable to the DfE. Although there were a small number of Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) before 2010, their number grew sharply in the new policy environment after 2010. By 2016 two-thirds of all Academies were in MATs (Andrews, 2016). The vast majority of schools responding to a survey (conducted by Greany and Higham, 2018) reported that they were collaborating with other schools in some form. MATs and TSAs (Teaching School Alliance) featured strongly in these collaborations. The creation of MATs was accelerated by the DfE White Paper, Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2016),

which included a strong directive (but subsequently changed to a recommendation) that by 2022 all schools in England would be expected to have either joined formal federated networks or to have converted to academy status. By January 2018, out of 21,538 state funded schools in England, 35% had converted to academy status. The growth in academies up to this point has to some extent been restricted largely by a lack of sponsors (National Audit Office, 2018).

Not everyone was convinced that introducing more Multi Academy Trusts was the right thing to do. The Ofsted Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw at the time (2016) speaking to the Education Select Committee in England, criticised the Government's flagship school improvement agenda. He led a scathing attack on the performance of MATs in his letter to the then Education Secretary (Nicky Morgan), accusing them of being more interested in rapid market expansion than quality, suggesting:

> *"Many of the trusts manifested the same weaknesses as the worst-performing local authorities and offered the same excuses… Only a handful of multi-academy trusts are up to the job of improving England's schools".* (Adams, 2016 online extract from Michael Wilshaw letter)

Even before the policy shifts from 2010, there were increasing concerns about the supply of effective school leaders and the consequences of the responsibilities they had to bear for headteacher burn-out. Between-school collaborations required leadership at an even more demanding level. A study carried out by Tunnadine (2011) on extended headship roles (such as Executive Headships of more than one school) suggested that 'system leadership' was a crucial way forward which could extend the role of outstanding school leaders in providing strategic support to emerging leaders. These

'System Leaders' were subsequently tailored to include what became known as National Leader of Education (NLE) supported by Local Leaders of Education (LLE) (Hopkins and Higham (2007). These 'System Leaders', usually from good and outstanding schools (Ofsted grades), were usually headteachers (or principals) who committed to sharing their expertise and their own school's good practice with struggling schools.

This optimistic forecast has not proved to be the case to any great extent. As policy on school networks unfolded, the headship crisis appears to have deepened.

2.5.2 The *Education Partnership (EP) and S2SSP*

The context for the development of the Education Partnership (EP) was primarily created to fill the gap left by the erosion of local government oversight of local educational policy and practice, which accelerated after 2010. The EP is a registered not-for-profit charity created in 2013/14 which is owned by its member schools paying an annual charge per pupil on school roll. With over 300 schools in the partnership out of over 445 of all school types in the metropolitan area, their membership includes a mix of school categories including MATs and TSAs as well as stand-alone Academies and grant-maintained schools. Membership of EP has more recently declined due to some MATs working solely within their own network of schools.

The aims of EP align with the City Councils stated Education and School Strategy and Improvement Plan (City Council, 2017-18 p.10) which outlines their expectations for the education of children in the city. This includes a commitment to promoting new

models of collaboration and system leadership with all partners. The stated aim of EP was to '*Build a culture of sustainable improvement*' through local ownership, with school peer-to-peer support positioned at the core of their approach to school self-evaluation. This, they state, helps to build on schools capability and capacity to self-improve.

Although testimonials on the success of S2SSP provided through EP are highly positive, anecdotal evidence suggests that whilst a number have been successful, others have been less so, creating an element of scepticism for some about the reality of stated expected outcomes, or evidence to back them up. This opens up a discussion on the challenges as well as the benefits of a 'one type fits all' peer review framework and how adaptable or flexible such programmes need to be. The Education Partnership has now taken what they believe are the best aspects from the original peer review trainers (CfBT) and created their own bespoke programme, taking account of feedback from past and continuing participants. The generic term S2SSP encompasses any variation of the EP model used by schools, as the overarching aims are the same with their stated desire for school leaders to become '*architects of their own futures*' (Carvalho and Goodyear, 2014). Within MAT structures, whilst some school leaders may have welcomed the opportunity to narrow their leadership focus on teaching and learning only, the existence of 'real' autonomy to control what underpins change may emerge as a broad discussion point within S2SSP. A hierarchal tier of management of funding for staffing and resources plays a critical role in the school's ability to maintain standards. This is likely to impact on a headteacher's (generally referred to as Principals within

Academy Trusts) ability to have any real influence on decisions which impact on the immediate or long-term needs of students e.g. staffing levels.

Advocates of support systems such as S2SSP, which include a number of headteachers who have undertaken peer reviews and school improvement advisors in TSAs and EP, support the rationale behind the EP peer school evaluation programme. However, a critic (Hatcher, 2014) studying the effects of the way City Councils are outsourcing to bodies such as EP suggests it is an indication of what he believes is an agenda of focusing on student achievement through managerial control, which had been imposed through stealth on the local school community. However, the main benefit derived from such collaborations may lie in their ability to provide a more efficient and effective way of sharing expertise and resources. At a time when schools are experiencing major funding cuts, government funding when available was increasingly directed towards collaborations and partnerships which were seen as a more efficient way of working (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002).

In her forward in the EP Annual Report 2017, the chair of EP Estelle Morris pointed to the increase in the number of academies and the shift away from local government support which she believed has led to a more fragmented school system (BEP, 2018b).

2.5.3 School networks: evidence since 2010

This section reviews the evidence on the development of school networks in a new (post-2010) policy context and the extent to which the expectations for a `self-improving school system' have been realised. It offers a brief summary of evidence

relevant to school-to-school networks and the impact of support from establishments such as Teaching School Alliances.

Some publications (e.g. Matthews and Berwick, 2013) on networking have taken the form of showcasing 'success stories' and providing guides for 'good practice' which were generally managed and distributed through the National College. Helpful as these documents were, they do not tell the reader how the judgements being made were reached or why they should be trusted. Commenting on some of the key lessons learnt from research on 'system leadership', Hill (2011) reviewed evidence from a study investigating the attitudes and beliefs of school leaders. He concluded that the effectiveness of school-to-school partnerships depended on them being led by what he calls good 'nodal' leaders – an idea borrowed from the world of business to describe organisations that use a balance of skills well to marry ambition, drive and know-how to effect change within their sector. Hill (2011 p.9) suggested that school leaders were:

> *"likely to become engaged in system leadership because they think it will help them to improve their own school, aid their personal skill development and open up opportunities for colleagues".*

The first of two reports commissioned by the DfE (Gu *et al*., 2015) focused on Teaching School Alliances (TSAs) using the results of a survey of school leaders working within TSAs. The report found that although school leaders believed that teaching and professional development had improved, only about a quarter of respondents believed that this had resulted in an improvement in students' achievement.

The second more wide-ranging report on collaborative partnerships was more cautious. Armstrong (2015) concluded that evidence of impact on student outcomes was limited.

Moreover, the report referred largely to studies conducted before 2010 (even though some were published after 2010). Armstrong (2015 p.5) also states that there is very little research evidence about the extent and impact of collaborative activity. He concluded that:

> *"there is very little knowledge surrounding the change process and the development and maintenance of relationships when schools enter into collaboration"*.

More recently, the government has directed most of its funding for evaluating school initiatives through the Education Endowment Fund which has concentrated on 'within school' processes. An evaluation of a project on school partnerships is due in 2021.

A study carried out by Muijs (2015) concluded that student achievement improved more strongly in schools being supported in networks than in stand-alone schools. Reasons given include factors such as ensuring a limited number of goals; trust and personal relationships and mutually beneficial outcomes. This could be read as confirming the arguments that such collaborations have a positive effect on academic achievement or it could be due to the acceptance by school leaders of general rhetoric surrounding the advocacy of school collaboration.

There are claims that tensions between network governance, hierarchies and markets were creating difficulties for schools. Waters (2013) suggested that a positive view of system leadership has been undermined by a 'standards' agenda which forces schools to compete in a quasi-market place. This, he believes, makes it more difficult for collaborations and partnerships to work effectively together and for school leaders to claim ownership and autonomy in any real capacity. Ehren and Godfrey (2017)

provided a detailed case study of the interaction between external and internal accountability mechanisms in one Multi-Academy Trust. They showed impact of external (Ofsted) inspection on internal control mechanisms encouraged fairly rigid hierarchical control within the trust. External accountability created pressures for the trust management to exert centralising control over the schools. This contrasts quite sharply with some of the key claims for effective communities of practice. A recent report by Greany and Higham (2018) adds weight to these fears, claiming that the self-improving school system has in fact delivered a system which is more closely controlled by central government than it was before and that schools are subject to new pressures and challenges as a result.

2.6   Summary and implications for this research

This final section considers the implications of the review for the research conducted in this study. The literature has shown that there is a fairly strong consistency between the claims made on what makes collaboration between schools work well. There is also a growing evidence of studies which support networking and collaboration through the prism of recognising and taking account of challenges and sometimes inherent failures. The following summarises the key themes arising:

1. A shared sense of moral purpose (e.g. Lewis and Marks, 1998; Wenger, 1998;Stoll *et al*., 2006; West, 2010; Hargreaves, 2012; Matthews and Berwick, NCSL, 2013; Owen, 2015)

2. Focus on outcomes for students (e.g. Stoll *et al.,* 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Chapman and Muijs, 2014; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016).

3. Commitment to sharing evidence for exploration and improvement (e.g. Stoll *et al*., 2006; West, 2010; Matthews and Berwick, 2013; Chapman *et al*., 2016; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016).

4. Securing adequate resources and allocate them fairly and well (Woods *et al*., 2013; Carvalho and Goodyear, 2014; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016).

5. Ensuring a culture of continuous professional development (Stoll *et al*., 2006; Buysee *et al*., 2003; Vescio *et al*., 2008; Hargreaves, 2011; Hill, 2011; National College, 2012, 2013).

6. Trust and mutual respect between and within schools (e.g. Stoll *et al*. 2006; West, 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan, NCSL, 2012; Matthews and Berwick, NCSL,2013; Carvalho & Goodyear, 2014; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016);

7. Shared ownership/ flat organisational structure (e.g. Wenger, 1998; Lewis and Marks, 1998: Stoll *et al*., 2006; Miers and Buckley, 2010; West, 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Carvalho and Goodyear, 2014; Chapman and Muijs, 2014; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016);

8. Take account of challenges and failures (Earl and Katz, 2006; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009; Chapman (Ades), 2018).

Although there are some differences between authors' lists of key ingredients for successful school networks, common themes appear strongly throughout. This has built up a weight of expectation that has been reflected in government policy. These expectations are loosely grounded on theory (e.g. communities of practice), but also

seem to reflect deeply held beliefs that collaboration between schools, like collaboration between teachers, must be a good thing. The literature sometimes seems to drift towards an idealisation of collaboration between schools with scant references to the realities and challenges of putting all this into practice.

There are disagreements on whether collaboration and networking between schools derive real and measurable improvements. Much could be said to rely on reports from those who advocate their use. Others have taken a critical approach to the challenges associated with collaboration and partnership working and what they see as the limited evidence relating to impact on outcomes (Earl and Katz, 2006; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009). There is an argument that the make-up and balance of those involved in school-based networks have a bearing on how relationships between them develop. Themes 1-4 in the list above are pertinent to Research Question 1. Themes 4-8 are particularly relevant to Research Question 2 and themes 2-3 and 6-7 are relevant to Research Question 3.

In practice, collaboration between schools in England has been taking many different forms. By 2018, most schools reported that they were involved in some form of collaboration (Greany and Higham, 2018). They might be in a Teaching School Alliance or a Multi-Academy Trust or branded chain (Chapman, 2015). The ties between schools might be tight or loose (Bauman, 2001). There might be a small or large number of schools in the collaboration. The collaboration might be supported by a Local Authority or totally unconnected with it. The collaboration may be new, finding its feet, or it might be long-standing. It is, therefore, unsurprising to find that the

operation of school collaborations and the outcomes for students have been observed to vary substantially between networks (Wohlstetter *et al*., 2003; Chapman and Muijs, 2014). Moreover, school networks operate within contexts that constrain what is possible and which influence the consequences when networks conduct themselves in particular ways.

All UK state maintained schools operate under the same regime of hierarchical control from central government, but some schools are still governed by Local Authorities as well. Moreover, the Ofsted inspection regime bears differently on schools deemed to be underachieving than it does on schools deemed to be successful. Underachieving schools are more likely to be found in localities with higher levels of deprivation. This applies to a number of areas within the city in this study. Market forces also operate differently in some localities than in others (Adnett and Davies, 2003; Davies *et al*., 2003). Schools are under more pressure to compete when they are struggling to recruit enough students to reach full capacity and enough good teachers to accept the challenging circumstances. Competition is more intense when schools are all trying to offer pretty much the same thing to parents.

This variation has made it difficult to judge the generalised claims for school collaboration found in the literature. The judgements of Hadfield and Chapman (2009); Armstrong (2015) and the ADES (2018) still seem to hold. That is, that there is as yet, insufficient evidence to be confident about expectations that collaboration between schools will generally foster more rapid and transformative professional development of teachers, or that they will increase the operational effectiveness of schools or result in

better outcomes for students. Adding to knowledge regarding the generalizable operation and outcomes of school networks is beyond the scope of this study.

However, this study can add to knowledge by providing evidence on the operation of one type of school collaboration in one particular city. S2SSP concentrates on two of the themes identified in the literature: commitment to sharing evidence for exploration and improvement and a culture of continuous professional development. For this research the questions are: who is involved in sharing evidence and what evidence is shared? To what extent is this sharing regarded as challenging, evidence-based and to what extent is it regarded as an exchange of views and perspectives? What kind of culture is aimed for? What indicators are used to point to progress towards that culture? How is the sharing of evidence and professional development framed by the other characteristics of the network that are expected to affect its operation (trust and mutual respect; shared moral purpose; organisational structure; focus on student learning; resources)? How do hierarchies and markets shape the operation of this network? The study aims to explore these issues through its pursuit of the four research questions which were generated through a review of the claims made by the training providers and users of the S2SSP programme.

The review of the literature frames the design of the study which is described in detail in the next chapter. The summary in this conclusion provides the justification for the focus on the operation of this particular school network model and the specific focus on the school-to-school peer resources that became a central part of the network. This suggests

that a case study design, examining a model as a case of a school-to-school network in line with the 'self-improving school system' agenda, is appropriate.

CHAPTER 3   RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1   Introduction to Research Focus

This study examines the perceived effectiveness of S2SSP as a reliable and sustainable school improvement tool using, for the most part, the experiences of those who have participated in undertaking the school evaluation system in their own schools. The focus of the study is to examine what factors were believed to affect the successful application of the S2SSP process and those which have hindered its effectiveness; and to identify what participants believed were the important elements of a S2SSP process to ensure a viable and applicable school self-evaluation tool.

The research takes the form of an *Evaluative* and *Comparative* Case Study carried out through a mix of surveys and semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants in an S2SSP system. The S2SSP framework examined in this study provides a systematic support system to small groups of school leaders who wished to work together to evaluate teaching and learning. The S2SSP process involves three (although sometimes two and less commonly four or five) schools coming together to review the performance of each other's schools. The programme outlines the following systematic approach to carrying out the peer reviews:

a) Documentation review; setting dates to carry out the review; agreement on timetabling for each school;

b) An initial team meeting (usually headteachers and deputy/assistant headteachers) to discuss and decide on the focus of the review and agenda;

c) The election of a lead facilitator of the process in each school and agreement on protocols, leads and timetables etc.;

d) The team (usually working in pairs) carry out their observations/learning walks etc. and complete their reviews in the school;

e) A feedback meeting immediately following the review where the findings and outcomes are discussed and agreed;

f) An outline report of key issues to the school senior leaders facilitated by the lead facilitator, with shared editing input from the whole team;

g) Subsequently, the reviewed school creates a revised school improvement plan reflecting the outcomes of the S2SSP and reports to governors.

When a review has been completed, an Evaluative Feedback Report is compiled by the review group outlining its findings (See Appendix 5). This process is repeated until all the schools involved have completed an evaluation review. The Reports may then be used as a basis for a revised School Improvement Plan (SIP) for each school. Reports also highlight aspects of school improvement which align with key priorities of the other schools in the review group. This alignment can act as a spring-board for JPD (Joint Practice Development) between the schools involved. Some schools carry out only one round of reviews. Others take a cyclical approach where schools continue to work together and carry out new reviews.

The key and subsidiary research questions, which are explored mainly through the empirical research, are set out in *Table 3.1*.

Table 3.1 Research Questions linked to subsidiary questions developed in interviews

Main Research Questions	Subsidiary Related Questions
1) To what extent do school leaders believe the S2SSP system supports and influences reliable school improvement which raises standards?	a) What are the basic aims of using S2SSP?
	b) Do all those involved in using S2SSP believe it provides relatable and reliable school improvement?
	c) Was S2SSP successful in advancing joint professional development?
2) What factors do school leaders believe have affected the success of S2SSP?	a) What aspects of the system are viewed as key to successful outcomes?
	b) Were there any problems with using S2SSP?
3) Do school leaders believe S2SSP is sustainable in the long term?	a) Is the S2SSP approach sustainable or likely to fizzle out over time?
	b) Does the system transfer easily across different types of schools?
4) Does the EP S2SSP model provide a useful tool for self-evaluation by schools?	a) What elements are likely to affect successful outcomes of S2SSP?
	b) Does the S2SSP system lend itself to external validation?

3.2 Organisation of this chapter

This chapter sets out the systematic processes used to gather the evidence data for this study, beginning with a description and justification for the research design (Section 3.3). This is followed by reflections on the epistemology limitations of the approach and how my experience and role might have affected the conduct of the research and the measures I took to mitigate these effects (Section 3.4). Ethical issues and the process of getting ethical approval are discussed in Section 3.5. The design and implementation of the data collection is described and explained in Section 3.6 and the sampling is set out in Section 3.7. Section 3.8 explains the methods used to analyse the data and the chapter concludes with some reflections on the research design.

3.3   Design and Methodology

3.3.1   The rationale for the methodology used in this study

This study examines the beliefs of participants in a school-to-school self-review system. It is a case study that examines beliefs and actions in a particular setting (see section 3.3.2). In examining beliefs it is an *interpretivist* study (see section 3.3.3). It looks at what people think. It does not adopt the perspective of an outside observer able to view things as they really are. The rationale for adopting an interpretivist perspective is that we can understand what people do and the way that social settings develop by understanding the beliefs that are informing their actions. This perspective does not require the researcher to deny that 'real things' exist or that people's actions – and their beliefs – are constrained by these real things. Adopting an interpretivist perspective does not require relativism. People can be misguided, but their beliefs still matter because their actions will help to create the future whether their actions are based on misguided beliefs or not.

A case study approach is justified first of all by a belief that the particular circumstances in which people interact have consequences for the pattern of behaviour and beliefs that emerge. The participants in a school-to-school review system affect each other through the histories they do and do not share, through the way the system comes about and through the way participants interact. This perspective does not require a belief that each context is unique, only that it might have distinctive characteristics which it is helpful to notice. By taking a case study approach the researcher tries to resist forcing the case into a pre-set pattern. This case may turn out to be very similar to others, but the researcher is trying not to pre-determine that issue.

Research which focuses on beliefs within a particular context stands in contrast to research which aims to identify generalised patterns in real things. Research on beliefs in a particular context uses qualitative methods to capture depth and detail using relatively small numbers of participants. Research on generalised patterns uses quantitative methods to capture broad similarities and differences across a large number of participants. These two perspectives have been seen as deeply opposed, to the extent of generating 'paradigm wars' (Bryman, 2008). However, Bryman regards this opposition as unnecessary and unhelpful and this is the stance taken in this research. On this view, both perspectives can aid our understanding through the light they shed on circumstances and events. They can be combined in mixed methods research. Indeed, Morse (2001) and Cameron and Miller (2014) claim that mixed methods research resulted from attempts to resolve these tensions and was related to the philosophy of pragmatism and the notion of triangulation. This research accepts the rationale for a mixed methods approach. It uses a survey to gather views across S2SSP and interviews to explore those views in depth.

3.3.2   Case study approach

Thomas (2013) advises that we should focus on what a case study actually is: a small-sample in-depth study. Thomas (2013) suggests that it allows more focus on how the data were created, collected and analysed and on the specific techniques involved, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Thomas (2013) also makes the point that because of the nature of case study, which is rooted in time, care needs to be taken not to over-generalise the outcomes or findings. On the other hand, he suggests that case study can provide a deeper understanding in context, allowing more reflection on the potential of

outcomes to 'shape the future'. This seems an appropriate aim for a professional doctorate. Thomas (2013) goes on to argue that if the evidence provides 'more' information than is already generally known by a lay person simply asking similar questions and coming to the same 'obvious' conclusions, case study has its own worth. Furthermore, a case study approach can capture the 'essence' of how S2SSP operated as seen through the eyes of participants. It accommodates what Stake (1995) suggests are the three main criteria for case study: specificity, uniqueness and the ability to limit the area being studied. In addition, as pointed out by Yin (1989) a case study approach allows the researcher to bring to light the multiplicity of factors at work in the case and to draw out the inimitable characteristics of those in the study.

An issue to consider with a case study of a network is that participants are likely to have only a partial view of the whole. Carvalho & Goodyear (2014) suggest that there are two perspectives from which learning networks can be analysed. One, they called '*ego-centred*' which captures how networks look from the perspective of its members, which is good for reflecting on the experiences of individuals (such as those interviewed in this study). The other they suggest is more '*holistic*' and looks at the entire network as if from above, which they believed works well in capturing aspects of networks of a more structural or collective kind and which may not be known to most of its participants. They argue that neither would be sufficient on its own. This study used the voices of strategic leaders (with network responsibilities) and S2SSP documentation to get perspectives on the network as a whole. It then used the voices of senior leaders and middle leaders to gather a range of viewpoints from within the school peer networks.

Another issue to take into account is whether the case study in question is only relevant to those who are involved in that case or whether others may find the case study findings informative (Simons, 2009). The following two 'types' of case study identified by Stake (1995) fit the purpose of this particular study:

1. *Intrinsic*, 'if the study is undertaken because one wants a better understanding of a particular case'

2. *Instrumental*, 'when a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization'.

This study was considered to be both *intrinsic* and *instrumental*. It aimed to support the future development of S2SSP by providing evidence of participants' beliefs, which were used to reflect upon the operation and effectiveness of S2SSP. It also aimed to support broader understanding of how forms of school-to-school collaboration may operate in practice and, through this, to contribute to judgements of how best to use this form of organising schooling. Although a case study cannot claim to offer generalizable truths (Hammersley, 2008; Denscombe, 2010), it can offer useful insights from which others may learn.

3.3.3   Interpretivist approach

As suggested by Thomas (2013), case study lends itself well to an *interpretivist* approach which captures how participants' understand their experiences and situations. This study presents interpretations of what has happened rather than claiming to offer an objective account of reality. A key argument for this research design within a case study is the way in which individuals within a particular context function, following on from the way they see things. Simons (2009) calls this 'authenticated anecdote' where subjective data are an

integral part of the case. She goes on to suggest that it is through analysis and interpretation of how people 'think, feel and act' that many of the insights and understanding of the case are gained. The research questions in this study were designed to elicit the thoughts, feelings and actions of a range of senior and middle leaders undertaking S2SSP. An attempt is made to relate these to the thoughts and beliefs of a range of strategic leaders with an interest in promoting S2SSP in the city in a climate of government fiscal restraint and political uncertainty.

An interpretative approach also typically treats data as embedded in particular cultures (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). It encourages the researcher to recognise ways in which data (e.g. about opinions, attitudes and behaviours) are culturally constructed (Atkinson *et al.*, 2001). How those undertaking the S2SSP programme dealt with change and conflict within their peer review groups was also examined as an important aspect to providing a 'balanced' view (Denscombe, 2010).

However, even within a case study of this relatively small size, the cultural context may vary between participants. Some schools may have cultures that are different from other schools. Teachers may bring very different experiences to their roles even within the same school. In this study, it means that the 'reality' is likely to vary for individuals even between those in the same institution, as the perspective of individuals is by its nature unique. This qualitative study was not intended to offer 'generalisations'. It is for the reader to draw their own conclusions on the reliability of what participants say or think, as the study was intended to 'tell the story' of S2SSP as part of the EP Challenge and not to put it forward as a definitive peer school improvement system for others to follow.

Therefore, although the participants in this study shared the same or similar contexts (the introduction and development of S2SSP), they may speak with different voices reflecting differences between ways of interpreting what was happening and why.

3.3.4   Summary and justification of data collection methods

This section outlines the methods used to collect data, shown in *Table 3.2*. This is followed by a justification of this choice in terms of triangulation, authenticity and trustworthiness.

Table 3.2   Description and justification for data collection methods

	Thematic links to relevant questions	Justification	No. approached	No. participated
Documentation	Aims and operation of S2SSP	Gather background information on S2SSP to inform design of Surveys and Interview Schedules; to provide reference check		n/a
Consultation group: 45m open discussion with group of 6 school staff from 3 schools who had used S2SSP	Sample general interview questions linked to developing themes	To inform the design of Interview Schedules gather evidence of typical viewpoints and language in which these are expressed. To refine the research questions	3 schools	6 individuals
Short questionnaire sent electronically to strategic leaders	General perspectives Relevance and Impact Sustainability	Gather evidence from a strategic group to gain a picture of the spread of views on the system; inform Interview Schedules; view the system in a broader context	10	5
Questionnaire to senior leaders sent electronically	School self-evaluation Advantages / Disadvantages Impact on school improvement	Gather evidence from a wider leadership group to gain a picture of the spread of views across the system; inform Interview Schedules; set the interviews in a broader context	70	26
Semi-structured in-depth interviews: senior leaders	Vision and Values Facilitators & Barriers Ingredients for success	Gather in-depth evidence of participants' views, giving space to allow participants to fully express their thoughts and following up issues raised	26	11
Semi-structured in-depth interviews: middle leaders	Facilitators & Barriers Impact & Relevance Ingredients for success	Gather in-depth evidence of participants' views, giving space to allow participants to fully express their thoughts and following up issues raised	26	10

The sequence of methods used in conducting the research is set out in *Figure 3.1* below.

Figure 3.1 Sequence of methods used in the conduct of this research

Literature review

Data collection method

To compare transcripts to literature

To check out issues raised by documents and literature

Documentation

Consultation group

Short survey to strategic leaders

To inform design of instruments

Full survey to senior leaders

To compare transcripts with documents

Interviews with senior leaders

Interviews with middle leaders

The terms 'validity' and 'reliability' are sometimes used in judging the quality of qualitative research (e.g. Salomon, 1991), but these terms have specific meanings in quantitative research which do not translate well into qualitative research. Therefore, qualitative researchers have often preferred terms such as 'authenticity', 'trustworthiness' and 'triangulation' (Robson, 2011). Parlett and Hamilton (1972) proposed 'trustworthiness' as a key criterion for qualitative research, indicating that the researcher has presented findings that offer a recognisable and credible reality for the reader. However, since there has been plenty of disagreement between researchers about the appropriate terminology to use (Golafshani, 2003; Freeman *et al*., 2007) the emphasis here was on the issues that have to be addressed rather than the term that is used to refer to a particular issue.

Since the aim of qualitative research in this study is principally to capture the voices of participants and to explore their views and experiences of how S2SSP operates, the key issue was how to justify that claim. There is a problem to be faced of collecting evidence. How can we be sure that an interviewee is telling us what they really think rather than what they think we want to hear? How has what they say been affected by the circumstances in which they were talking, who they were talking to and the prompts used to encourage them to talk? There is a second problem at the point of data analysis. How can we be sure that what the researcher sees in the data is not simply a reflection of what they expected to see?

Five criteria identified by Denzin and Lincoln (2002) can be used to judge whether a researcher has sufficiently dealt with this problem to give the reader confidence in the

results: (i) researchers should have been closely connected to the scene; (ii) the researcher should have created enough distance from the data to be confident that it is free from the researcher's own stake or bias; (iii) claims should be based on a justifiable selection of data from all that the researcher has collected; (iv) data should come partly from publicly accessible records; and (v) data and analysis should include consideration of inferences and interpretations. Denscombe (2010) expands the third point to emphasise a need to use appropriate and consistently applied research tools, which ensure reliability and reduce variations in outcomes.

The first two points in this list refer to the role of the researcher which is discussed later in Section 3.4 of this chapter. The final three refer to the process of data collection, selection and analysis. Point (iii) was addressed through the range of data collected and the selection of interviewees. The survey was used to gather a spread of views and experiences from across the schools in the EP partnership. Interviewees at different levels of seniority (senior and middle leaders) within S2SSP schools were selected to gather views from different levels within the partnership. The sampling and selection of interviewees is described in section 3.7. Point four is addressed in *Figure 3.1* by the inclusion of reference to documents produced through S2SSP. These documents informed the development of the Surveys and the Interview Schedules. The fifth point focuses on the analysis of the evidence which aims to recognise diversity in perspectives.

Attention is drawn to the way in which the design of data collection methods was informed by the collection of data (*Figure 3.1*). The open-ended discussion with the consultation group (Wilson, 1997) and documentary evidence suggested a variety of

perspectives and viewpoints which helped set the scene and gather information on suitable questions for use in the senior leadership surveys and the interviews. The main source of data comes from the semi-structured in-depth interviews with two specific groups (senior and middle leaders) who had participated in the S2SSP process in their own schools. Brundrett and Rhodes (2014) advise that triangulation can be achieved by employing more than one method to explore research questions in different contexts. This was achieved in this study by including surveys with similar questions to two different groups, followed by in-depth interviews using similar questions put to two different groups.

3.4 My role as a researcher

As noted earlier, Denzin and Lincoln (2002) suggest that insider knowledge is an asset in conducting case study research. It enables the researcher to know where to look for information and can inform interpretation of documents. It can also help to gain access to the participants. There are also several challenges. As the research findings need to be trustworthy, an effort is made in this study to maintain a professional distance between the research and the situations and views being put forward in order to limit personal bias. However, as pointed out by Thomas (2013) issues such as the researcher's pre-conceived ideas, values and even social class may all play a part, however small, in influencing research outcomes and need to be acknowledged where applicable.

It was essential in this study to consider 'researcher' bias. Therefore, it was imperative to comment again on my own position and to explore some of my own values which

naturally featured to an extent in this study. However, as suggested by Grugulis (2003) the job of the qualitative researcher is not to eliminate bias but to concede that its existence is inevitable, but also has the potential to provide a deeper picture of the case being studied. I began this research with a firm conviction in the value of schools working in partnerships such as the S2SSP, which I believed drives school improvement forward at a faster and more sustainable pace and also provides a valuable professional support. I considered that driving change for the sake of it (in the belief that all change is necessarily needed or will improve things), or for political ideology, can be a huge drain on professional time and energy and only adds to an already crowded and confused environment in education in England. Discussions with a wide range of professionals in a variety of schools afforded the opportunity to 'open up' the debate on where School Improvement was heading in the City and provided a platform for the 'voice' of those being 'done to' in shaping their own futures. The EP S2SSP challenge, if successful in moving school improvement forward, has the potential to act as a counter-balance to prevailing central government dictats and special interest groups.

Consideration was given to critics who argued that it can be difficult to remain objective if the researcher is too immersed in the study and that the reliability of information gathered through an element of 'participant observation' may be compromised for this reason. It is acknowledged that being so close to the subject may have coloured my perspective and may also reflect how 'free' others felt about saying exactly what they think, particularly with semi-structured interviews with middle leaders. Reference is made to my position and stance and is incorporated into the final narrative on outcomes of the study where appropriate. Every effort was made to ensure the rigour of the

analysis methods, although it is generally accepted that complete impartiality is beyond the scope of social research (Denscombe, 2010).

On the other hand, being a participant observer added strength to the research proceedings as it provided an element of open access to the participants. Particular and in-depth insights can also be garnered from the perspective of someone who is part of the prevailing culture. However, care also needed to be taken to avoid coercive behaviour or employ any elements of 'leading' aspects to the process.

Another potential drawback was the pre-existing professional relationships I had with some of the participants, particularly at a senior leadership level which could be said to impact on some of the perceived outcomes. As pointed out by Simons (2009), it should not be seen as a problem but rather as 'essential' in understanding and interpreting the case, provided it is appropriately monitored and disciplined. However, the information gathered in interviews with some senior leaders may not be said to be comparable across all the senior leaders in the city. For example, those known to me on a professional level may have provided more in-depth answers than others who were not known or indeed: the opposite may be true where known participants may be more reticent in 'telling the truth' of the matter. This may have been particularly applicable for known middle leaders in some cases. Although I had taken part in the S2SSP process, I did not include myself as a participant although my personal opinion may naturally have entered the narrative at particular points.

3.5 Ethics

This research fulfils the requirements as stated in the Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (British Educational Research Association, 2004) on *voluntary informed consent*; *right to withdraw*; *anonymity and privacy*; *storage and use of personal data (GDPR 2018)*. Ethical Approval was received on 18th August 2015 Ref: ERN_15-0668. The research also fulfils the requirements with regard to a *no harm* clause. The key principles of ethical research were considered along with issues relating to access, personal interest, generalisability and interviewer effect.

Participants were informed in their email request letters of their right to withdraw from the study or have their responses removed (Appendices 6 and 7). Consent was assumed to have been given in the surveys by those who followed the electronic link to complete the questionnaire. Those who did not wish to take part did not engage with the process and did not follow the link. Anonymity was offered but most respondents to the electronic survey put their names at the end of the questionnaire voluntarily. Anonymity has been wholly applied to interviewees in any published materials used in this study.

Some of the senior leaders of schools were known to each other in a professional capacity through wider consortium networks in the city. As a school leader involved in carrying out a S2SSP, I was particularly well placed in gaining 'open door' and personal access to a number of the subjects. However, although I am an advocate of systems such as the S2SSP programme, I do not have a vested interest in promoting a particular system in schools.

Interviewees were informed that the data collected would be kept electronically on a password protected device and disposed of once the study had been completed. They were also asked to sign the interview request letter to indicate their agreement to being interviewed. Interviewee responses were coded for ease of comparative analysis.

An opportunity to comment on the shape and outcomes of the research as it progressed was given through discussion with members of the initial consultation group who were also asked to add comments of their own on the relevance and appropriateness of the questions to be put forward. Their observations and verbal suggestions added insight and served to support the suitability of material being used. Permission to use the interview material under anonymity was sought verbally again at the beginning of each interview. Reassurance was given that personal opinions or disclosure of personal information would remain anonymous or would not be used if requested by the interviewee.

Most of the interviewees were aware of my role as a serving headteacher. However, every effort was made to avoid the possibility of unintended leading or interviewer-pleasing, particularly for the middle leadership group who were more likely to be wary of how their answers could be perceived. It was explained before each interview that the study was conducted through a professional undertaking aimed at researching the impact of the S2SSP process as it evolved. The key aim was an opportunity to provide reliable research evidence through the experience of those at the proverbial 'chalk face'.

3.6   Design and implementation of the data collection instruments

3.6.1   Documentation

Documents from the EP S2SSP process were used to provide an overview of the intentions and expectations of the partnership and these documents also informed the design of data collection from participants. The key documents used were the S2SSP Framework and the S2SSP Feedback Report Anonymised 2015-16 St Elsewhere Primary School, (See Appendix 5). The S2SSP Framework provided by EP showed how the process was expected to operate. A different S2SSP Operational Framework was developed by one secondary school which they had tailored to their own peer group's particular circumstances. Other groups used and interpreted the generic framework in different ways. The documentary summary is used to give a sense of how the general process was adjusted across the network. Some of the documentation provided a point of comparison on how different groups used the same basic format but adapted it to suit individual contexts.

3.6.2   Consultation group

A group of school leaders who had been involved in peer reviews in their own schools were engaged initially in open discussion on their experiences. This helped to give shape to the questions in the Survey and Interview Schedules. A range of draft open-ended questions was circulated to the group in advance so that these could be considered before the consultation meeting e.g. *Are peer reviews such as S2SSP useful school improvement tools?* Members were invited to discuss the S2SSP process in general. This starting point was chosen to open up the dialogue and provide a space in which participants could raise issues that had not been identified previously through prior reading and to test the

viability and focus of the area being researched. This also allowed space for participants to frame and express issues in language with which they were familiar, rather than being required to respond to that developed through analysis of the literature. Informal observational field notes for later reference were made on the group's general awareness of the S2SSP model provided through EP. This offered an opportunity to provide lead-in conversations and to take account of suggestions and make adjustments to the style, type and length of the questions to be used in the surveys and possible interview questions. It also helped to pull a range of views together within the shortest space of time possible (Kreuger, 1994).

3.6.3   Surveys

Surveys were designed and used to gather broad-brush evidence of participants' views. The survey questions were related to those areas which EP stated are the expected outcomes of S2SSP e.g. strong professional development; sharing of good practice and effective moderation of self-evaluation of school improvement. The surveys were short and were designed to be easy to complete in order to increase the likelihood that participants would engage in and complete them. Two versions of the surveys were prepared: one for strategic leaders (partnership level) and one for senior leaders (school level). The questions in the main body of the surveys are presented in *Table 3.3*. As those completing the questionnaires were Senior Leaders, it was anticipated that a 5-point Likert scale would suffice as participants were considered likely to have strong opinions at either end of the scale. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements using the 5-point scale: 'strongly disagree', 'somewhat disagree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'somewhat agree' and 'strongly agree'

Three questions (i – k) were included only for strategic leaders and three questions (l – n) were included for senior leaders only. Questions i - k were intended to focus on a broader awareness of S2SSP which might be expected of strategic leaders with an overview of the network. Senior leaders were asked (questions l – n) about the process in their own particular schools.

Table 3.3 Statements used in quantitative questions in the surveys completed by Strategic Leaders (system-wide) and Senior Leaders (within individual schools)

a) The S2SSP process works well in supporting school improvement
b) The SPSSP helps schools meet their specific school improvement objectives
c) S2SSP provides good professional development for leaders at all levels in schools
d) The S2SSP process helps staff in schools build strong professional relationships
e) The S2SSP is suitable for all types of schools
f) S2SSP supports high quality school self-evaluation
g) Having S2SSP validated as an effective improvement tool by Ofsted would encourage take-up
h) There should be a limit on the number of schools in a Peer Review group to be effective

Statements in questions asked only of strategic leaders
i) S2SSP could waste valuable time by focusing too much on other schools
j) S2SSP could be difficult to implement in some types of schools
k) S2SSP could be a burden to high performing schools

Statements in questions asked only of senior leaders
l) We have continued to use the S2SSP process to support school improvement
m) Having undertaken a Peer Review I did not feel it benefitted my school
n) I would prefer to manage my own school improvement

The survey of senior leaders was designed to take account of the fact that they would have demonstrated an interest in S2SSP in order to have signed up to it in the first place. They would have considered, following the training provided and/or undertaken reviews themselves, the extent to which S2SSP was a suitable tool for their own schools. Some of the items were designed so that agreement indicated criticism of S2SSP, in order to combat social desirability bias in the response process (Denscombe, 2010).

The Likert scale questions were followed in each survey by a series of 'open' qualitative questions offering participants the opportunity to provide more 'reflective' responses. The Survey to senior leaders included four open-ended questions (*Table 3.5*) with the last question (Q5) included to capture as many views as possible within the limits of the survey. The survey to strategic leaders included five open-ended questions (*Table 3.4*).

Table 3.4 Open-ended qualitative questions used in the Survey for Senior Leaders

Question	
1	What would you say are the basic aims and values which underpin the S2SSP process?
2	What was the greatest impact of the S2SSP on improvements in your school?
3	Having completed a S2SSP is there anything you would change about the process?
4	How do you see the S2SSP process going forward on a local or national level, particularly in light of the DfE Academisation programme?

Table 3.5 Open ended qualitative questions used in the Survey for Strategic Leaders

Question	
1	Please give a brief outline of your involvement in or knowledge of S2SSP
2	Briefly, what would you say are the basic values which underpin the S2SSP process?
3	What do you think are the most important basic ingredients for success when embarking on a S2SSP?
4	Please briefly explain you answer to question a. (The S2SSP process works well in supporting school improvement)
5	Please add any other comments of your own if you wish.

Open-questions on 'aims and values' were designed to elicit participants' views about the purpose of S2SSP. The questions on impact were designed to help answer Research Question 2 and also to check alignment between strategic leaders' expectations and senior leaders' experiences. As academisation of schools was highly topical amongst school leaders in the city at the time of writing, questions to establish if the S2SSP process was likely to be sustainable and relevant on a local, regional or national level,

and on the viability and the perceived effects of academisation, were also included to give a wider perspective on their likely impact.

It was anticipated that participants in the Strategic Educational Leader Group would be inclined to give positive responses due their role in trying to make S2SSP a success. For this reason, the survey to this group included a limited number of questions which were exploratory and broad in nature to elicit their understanding of how the S2SSP was intended to operate and how it was operating in practice.

3.6.4 In-depth interviews

The Interview Schedules (Appendices 9 & 10) were informed by themes emerging from the literature review, the Consultation Group and the data from the surveys. The interviews were designed to gather evidence of the experiences and perceptions of those taking part in the S2SSP process - a style suggested by Gunter and Ribbins (2003) in the *humanistic* tradition. The semi-structured Interview Schedules were designed to elicit the following data:

- The views of *senior leaders* with experience of S2SSP

- The views of *middle leaders* with experience of S2SSP

- Evidence of whether participants found it a positive or negative experience

- Exploration of what participants believed may have contributed to those outcomes.

The interview questions to senior and middle leaders were similar but were also adapted to suit the different foci of the two distinct groups. As suggested by Hancock, Ockleford

and Windridge (2009) 'opener' questions in semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity for discourse analysis when interviewees stray off-script whilst being interviewed, and may also provide information not previously considered but which may also be relevant. This allowed for adaptions to be made to suit the context of the different groups being interviewed e.g. a more relaxed questioning style for middle leaders.

Middle Leaders: The Interview Schedule for middle leaders (Appendix 9) was designed to allow for a degree of flexibility with 'opener' general questions, open-ended but specific questions and prompts and cues, all used to allow issues arising incidentally to support the narrative in a more relaxed manner.

Senior Leaders: The Interview Schedule for senior leaders (Appendix 10) was constructed from the information given by the initial Consultation Group; from the data gleaned through the surveys and through the use of pertinent linked themes from the literature. This helped to narrow down the focus for use in creating relevant and appropriately linked questions.

The recorded interviews were conducted at the interviewees' work place and arranged at times convenient to them. This allowed for potentially delicate issues such as possible negative personal views arising to be handled sensitively. Interviewees were re-assured that they would not be identified in the research and that they could be as open and honest about their own experiences as the process was non-judgemental. Although the interviews were generally short (30 to 40 minutes), participants were also advised that they could stop and/or could take a break or cancel it altogether at any time. This was

particularly the case for middle leaders who were possibly more reticent about making any negative comments.

The questions and follow-up prompts were designed to avoid leading respondents towards any particular judgement (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2014). However, social acceptance bias, such that respondents tend to give answers they think will be approved by the interviewer, was a difficult problem to combat (Glynn and Park 1997). The anonymity of the interviews was stressed and the introduction of the interviews sought to make clear that there was no hidden agenda. Nonetheless, given my pre-existing positive disposition towards S2SSP I attempted to avoid portraying unwitting messages that would lead to biased participants' responses. That said, the interviewees, particularly the senior leadership group, were generally confident individuals in positions of power and leadership who were open about their views.

It must be recognised that since the interviews were 'semi-structured', prompts and cues varied between participants, so conversations did develop along different lines in different interviews. These lines followed differences in experience and differences between viewpoints, all of which were considered for relevance in the transcript analysis.

3.7 Sampling

3.7.1 Sample selection

The research focused on the experiences of those involved in S2SSP as part of the *EP Challenge*. This allowed relatively easy access to the participant population and leant

itself to the likelihood of a good response to survey questionnaires. It also provided a helpful base to gather a range of emerging themes and provide enough material to put together relevant and pertinent questions for follow up in-depth interviews.

The *Surveys* were distributed to two groups through email access:

Survey Group 1: Electronic requests (Appendix 6) sent to 10 Strategic Educational Leaders (three Executive Headteachers, two EP Governing Board members, five Regional and National School Improvement Advisors) who were involved in broader school improvement (five replied including at least one from each strategic area; 50% response rate).

Survey Group 2: Electronic requests (Appendix 7) sent to 70 senior leaders which was the number known at the time to have undertaken S2SSP through EP training (26 replied; 37% response rate). Most of those who responded were from the school senior leadership group from the primary school sector (age 4 – 11) which appeared to have been a more 'embracing' user group. This was to be expected as most of those taking up the EP S2SSP training initially were from primary schools and there are a lot more primary than secondary schools per se. As the percentage of senior leaders who did not respond to the Survey was higher than those who did respond, it should be recognised that an element of 'non-response bias' could be at play (Denscombe, 2010). Also, those who did respond may have done so because they had an interest in the S2SSP process to begin with and so could be said to be more likely to (a) respond in the first place and (b) respond positively. A reminder email was sent to all senior leaders on the list who had not responded by a given date to achieve maximum take-up.

In-depth Interviews: Invitations to be interviewed (Appendix 12) were sent to those school leaders who had completed the survey (n=26). As a limited number who had completed the survey responded to the request to be interviewed (again mostly from the primary sector), a further request was then made to secondary school leaders who had not completed the survey, taken from the original mailing list provided by EP. This enabled two more secondary schools to be added to the interviewee list which increased the range of school types. Those senior leaders who had agreed to be interviewed were then asked if the middle leaders in their schools could be approached to request an interview. Those middle leaders who had agreed to be interviewed were sent an email to formally request an interview and explain how the study was to be conducted (Appendix 11). A total of 21 senior and middle leaders from 11 schools agreed to be interviewed One senior leader agreed to a phone interview only. (See Appendix 13 Sample Profile).

A point also to consider was that if some S2SSP participants who did not wish to be interviewed held perspectives that were not found in the group of interviewees, then the data collection would, necessarily, have produced an incomplete picture.

3.7.2 Descriptive information on the sample

Those being interviewed worked in different types of school by sector, size and governance (Primary, Secondary, Academy etc.). The schools were at various stages in enacting the S2SSP process with some completing peer reviews at the time of the interviews, whilst others were experienced in using S2SSP. The schools were categorised into three specific groups for ease of identification of school type.

School Group1: Four average-sized primary schools (one-form entry) from a range of demographic types and social/deprivation categories situated in four different geographical wards in the city (two were members of an Academy Trust).

School Group 2: Three large primary schools (two-form entry) also made up of a range of demographic types and social/deprivation categories from different wards (one a member of an Academy Trust).

School Group 3: Four Secondary schools situated in the south side of the city within a wider demographic and geographical mix typical of the school type.

The Sample Profile giving a breakdown of the school types, sizes, capacity and Ofsted grades used in this study is set out in a table (See Appendix 13). Senior leaders of the schools involved were approached initially by telephone and then through face-to-face contact, to explain the objectives of the study. After initial open and general discussion with participants, a variety of reasons and motivations for being involved in the S2SSP school improvement process emerged. *Table 3.6* is intended to give the reader some insight into the motivations of each of the school leaders in the sample for engaging in the process.

Table 3.6 S2SSP School Participating Groups

School Groups	Reasons for undertaking S2SSP
Group 1: consisted of 4 x 1 form entry primary schools:	Schools in earlier groups which undertook the initial School Peer Review in 2014-15 when the proposition was put to them by a Local Authority Adviser as an innovative way to extend partnership working.
*(2 x Good 1 x Requires Improvement 1 x Outstanding)	Some of the Senior Leaders from this group knew each other and said they were keen to set themselves challenges by moving their own school self-evaluation forward, within what they said was a 'trusted' environment'.
	S2SSP was recommended by an experienced adviser from a Teaching School employed to lead the initial review.
Group 2: consisted of 3 x 2 form entry primary schools:	The leaders of these schools completed a recently revised S2SSP model provided through EP.
*(2 x Good 1 x Outstanding)	It was recommended to provide a more recent perspective on the school evaluation and review process as EP continued to roll-out training and support to schools interested in being part of the *S2SSP Challenge*.
Group 3: consisted of 4 Secondary Schools:	One was part of a local school improvement partnership project, initially supported by a lead HM Inspector (Her Majesty's Inspector) and a Local Authority Adviser
*(1 x Outstanding 2 x Good 1 x Requires Improvement)	Two engaged in the S2SSP training as they felt it was an innovative way to work more closely with other leaders and to fill the gap left after the move away from Local School Improvement Monitoring.
	_____ One began the programme but did not continue with it.

*Ofsted Grades

3.8   Analysis

This section describes the analysis approach for each type of data and the way in which different types of data were triangulated. The aim was to generate what Wallace and Poulson (2003) called knowledge-for-action. That is, as a professional doctorate, this work is intended to inform practice, primarily within the context of the data collected on S2SSP.

3.8.1 How the quantitative data from the survey are analysed

The data from the quantitative section of the surveys were collated into a spreadsheet from which numerical tables were created and presented in the form of percentages of respondents who agreed or disagreed with the statements.

This use of a descriptive approach over a statistical hypothesis-testing approach was because the sample sizes of the two groups surveyed was relatively small. This was particularly true of the strategic group. For this reason the statistical analysis (eg. Fisher's Exact Test or Chi-squared) would have lacked the power to detect significant findings, with the potential consequence being a type II error in the findings (based on too small a sample size to identify statistical significance).

To get a broad picture of the opinions, the responses of each individual interviewed (*Table 3.3*) were categorised as 'mostly positive' if they agreed or strongly agreed with positive statements about S2SSP in at least four of these questions. Respondents were categorised as 'mostly negative' if they disagreed or strongly disagreed with at least four of the six statements. Respondents who fell into neither of these categories were labelled 'mixed'. The data were then examined to see if there was any pattern by 'type' of school (i.e. school size) in overall responses to S2SSP.

A further analysis examined the extent to which respondents made different judgements about different statements. Given the small sample, a simple correlation table (Chapter 4 *Table 4.*2) to check the consistency in respondents' answers was used to check if there were any statistically significant differences between the proportion of respondents

strongly agreeing with each pair of statements. The aim was to test the extent to which respondents showed general agreement across all statements.

3.8.2   *General qualitative approach*

Qualitative analysis was used to analyse the qualitative responses in both the surveys and interviews. Hancock *et al.,* (2009) define qualitative analysis as a research method for the subjective interpretation of data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. They suggest that qualitative analysis is used to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study. From the perspective of the authors, qualitative content can be analysed on two levels. The first level (*basic* level/ *manifest* level) of analysis is a descriptive account of the data. This level was the starting point for the thematic analysis described below for the qualitative responses of both the survey and the qualitative interviews. This form of analysis is a matching process without re-interpreting what was actually said by participants.

The next level they referred to as *interpretative*, which is concerned with what was deemed to have been 'meant' by the responses of participants and what may have been inferred or implied. It is sometimes called the '*latent level*' of analysis. This level applied more to the interview data, where prompts were used. This was particularly the case for middle leader interviewees as this group had less choice in the implementation of S2SSP and needed a more 'conversational' and relaxed approach using prompts where needed. The two-level approach allowed space for the wider narrative and opened up the field of enquiry where any unique features of the S2SSP experience could be identified and explored further. It also allowed for a deeper drilled-down understanding of the process

to capture what Simons (2009) suggested as the 'the uniqueness and distinctiveness of the case'.

3.8.3   *Main thematic structure*

The Thematic Structure (Appendix 8) outlines the emerging themes in the literature as well as those which arose through discussion with the initial consultation group, which was added to inductively as the research continued. The Thematic Structure underpins all of the study components and provides a strategic overview of all the sub-themes in the study. The Structure shows how the four initial thematic areas were cross-referenced to the main research questions which in turn helped to formulate appropriate questions for the surveys and the interviews. This Thematic Matrix provided a disciplinary paradigm within which the mixed methods constructs of the study were framed. The Matrix helped to steer the direction of appropriately linked questions which were formulated and refined for use in the interviews (Orman, 2016).

The research design was used to elicit as broad a range of opinions and perspectives as possible under the four main thematic areas which stemmed from the main research questions:

  (1) Vision, Culture & Motivation

  (2) School Improvement, Standards & Valued Added

  (3) Facilitators & Barriers

  (4) Impact, Relevance and Challenge

The first theme of Vision, Culture and Motivation is an over-arching focus as it was considered to have a significant likely effect on how S2SSP was viewed by participants. The pursuit of this over-arching theme helped to set the scene and open up the dialogue to draw out fundamental areas of interest to the participants, which were likely to impact on the outcomes of the other three focus areas. These were also widely viewed in the literature as relevant indicators affecting the success or otherwise of collaborative working.

3.8.4   *How the qualitative data from the surveys were analysed*

The survey questionnaire to senior leaders included open-questions (Survey Schedule Appendix 14 - Q2, 3, 4, 5 & 6). The questionnaire to strategic leaders included similar questions to those set for the senior leaders, although these were numbered slightly differently (Survey Schedule Appendix 15 - Q. 3. 4, 5 & 6) due to the slightly different design of the Survey Schedule for that group. Members of the strategic group were invited to add further comments at the end of the survey. Their responses to the open questions were coded in a similar way to that used for the senior leadership surveyed group. However, it should be noted that as the size of the strategic group is small, their responses, although taken account of, provided limited information. The surveys overall provided the opportunity for participants to respond briefly or at length, depending on where their interest in S2SSP took them, either as observers or as participants in the system.

The Survey data were summarised and categorised within an Analysis Matrix, with responses matched and placed under the emerging thematic areas: a manifest approach

used to bring complex sets of data together (Hancock *et al.,* 2009). The Analysis Matrix (Appendix 16) was structured as follows:

- Column 1: Emerging themes, guided by the survey questions

- Column 2: A summary of quantitative data – senior leaders

- Column 3: A summary of qualitative responses – senior leaders

- Column 4: A summary of quantitative data – strategic leaders

- Column 5: A summary of qualitative responses – strategic leaders

The starting point for the emerging themes was the linked Research Questions e.g. School Improvement, Standards and Value Added (which were guided by the Thematic Structure Appendix 8). However, there was also scope for additional emerging themes to be generated as they became apparent in the data.

The creation and use of the Analysis Matrix allowed for comparative analysis of the surveys across quantitative and qualitative responses, and across senior and strategic leaders. In this way, it could be shown how the categories of data were used to help construct a case, as the matrix gave a broad overview which began to form its own narrative (Atkins and Wallace 2012).

3.8.5   *How the qualitative interview data were analysed*

The interviews' analysis process was conducted through the use of thematic analysis, as outlined in *Table 3.7* above for ease of identifying and recording emerging themes (Miles and Huberman 1994; Braun and Clarke 2006). The approach was selected as it allowed for a more in-depth exploratory reading of the responses as the themes began to emerge

and the responses began to tell their own story. It included emerging themes not previously considered and was in contrast to the system used to code the qualitative responses linked to the surveys which generally recorded broader opinions from those working with and using S2SSP. The Framework described in *Table 3.7* allowed a cyclical approach, which was both inductive and deductive, providing the opportunity to:

1)   Review support for the existing Thematic Structure (deductive/systematic)

2)   Identify additional constructs and add detail to the existing themes (inductive/exploratory) and,

3)   Revisit transcripts to explore the raw data for possible inferences not immediately identified at the outset (cyclical/cross-referencing).

Table 3.7 Coding Framework for Interviews

Stage	Approach	Structural elements of analysis
1	Familiarisation: Read and checked transcripts for accuracy and familarisation. Divided interview transcripts into the two main groups (senior leaders; middle leaders)	
2	Emerging themes: Read, scrutinised and made notes for each transcript for patterns and themes emerging	
3	Matching: Matched emerging themes against themes and constructs in the Thematic Structure (Appendix 8) in an Interview Response Matrix (one for senior leaders; one for middle leaders) Made additions to the Thematic Structure as new themes became apparent. Coded transcript data into themes. Identified statements in the transcripts that confirmed or disagreed with the emerging themes. Returned to transcripts to ensure nothing was missed with new codes in mind	• Column 1: Themes and constructs • Column 2: Linked interview questions • Column 3: Data from transcripts, assigned to participant ID
4	Interpretative themes: Interpreted the body of data within each emerging theme/construct to produce broad interpretative themes. Within each interpretative theme, linked and contrasted the views of Senior Leaders and Middle Leaders in relation to their responses to questions.	• Vision; Motivation; Aims • Culture; Openness; Trust; Integrity; Moral Purpose • Quality self-evaluation; Enquiry & knowledge generation; Value Added • Intellectual rigour • Professional Relationships; Joint Enterprise; Social capital; Solidarity; Ownership; Tension • Ownership; Sustainability; Validity; Accountability; Capacity; Transferability
5	Reviewed my interpretations in light of the four key themes from the Thematic Structure with Vision, Culture and Motivation leading the overall structure as these concepts began to emerge as key elements underpinning how successful S2SSP was likely to be.	(1) Vision, Culture & Motivation (2) School Improvement, Standards & Valued Added (3) Professional Development; Impact of Leadership (4) Impact & Relevance
6	Identified participants' suggestions for improvements	Relevant to participants and EP S2SSP training

Responses were coded and categorised through electronically cutting and pasting texts within broad thematic headings in line with the Thematic Structure (Appendix 8) creating two Interviewee Response Matrices (one for senior leaders and one for middle

leaders). Denscombe (2010) defined this method as tagging where chunks of data were coded or tagged as `belonging to a broader category'. When respondents used questions as a springboard to express their views on a topic these were noted and added to the matrix to identify any new and emerging themes.

The matrix mapping process allowed for the text to be continually checked against the source material before being designated under appropriate themes. The Thematic Structure provided a strategic overview of all the main components and sub-themes in the study.

Careful consideration was given to the dangers of allowing preconceived interpretations to impose when analysing the interview transcripts and to be open to contrary findings. Transcribing of the transcripts was out-sourced which helped to maintain the verbatim integrity of the data. These were checked for accuracy by listening to the recordings again where there were areas in the transcripts which did not make sense or where mispronunciations and acronyms needed to be corrected.

3.8.6   Comment on data collection methods used

This section describes how the different sources of data related to each other. The overall approach was to use *comparative* data analysis.

Opinions naturally vary when taken from different perspectives so care was taken not to over-emphasise views from 'high vocal' individuals or participant groups but to look for patterns from a number of sources. It was also considered that the views of those within

the same schools or groups of schools would not concur in some cases. Variations in opinions of leaders at different levels in the same schools were factored into the emerging narrative and formed part of the analysis.

As suggested by Denscombe, 2010, triangulation benefits from a comparison of data collected using different methods. The study collected data from a review of documents, a survey using short answer questionnaires and through in-depth interviews. Each step in the data collection informed what followed and the analysis compared evidence from different data sources. As the sample size of the surveyed groups was greater than the sample size of the interview groups, a comparison of the two sources of data provided some evidence of the extent to which the selection of interviewees was a sample that was representative of the wider group.

3.9   Limitations, implications and reflections on the research design

This section comments on the main limitations of the study and outlines the ways in which the methods helped to minimise the impact of problems affecting the research design. This is followed by some brief reflections and observations on future research possibilities.

Simons (2009) draws attention to what she called 'the integral role of the researcher' whose own values and actions influence and shape data gathering and interpretation, and where you learn about yourself as well as the case being studied. It is appreciated that it

is never possible to be completely free of one's own preconceptions, which needed to be combatted.

First, since I was researching an initiative in which I have played a role there were several problems I needed to address such as ensuring the authenticity of the material and that confidentiality was maintained. I aimed to address these in the design and conduct of the research. As recommended by Denzin and Lincoln (2002) and Denscombe (2010), I included an analysis of some documentation e.g. Appendix 5 which gives an example of a real anonymised completed S2SSP Report. I have also made available further 'extended' documentation e.g. Response Matrices and notes which can be viewed in conjunction with this study. This provided a check in relation to the other data collection methods which I have designed.

A range of data collection methods were used to select the participants in the study eg. face-to-face contact, phone and email contact, recommendations and support from the Education Partnership and word of mouth voluntary participation. However, a degree of sample selection bias has to be recognised as the study is confined within a limited and specific group of S2SSP users relative to a particular context and time. Systematic methods were used to analyse the data in order to combat any tendency to impose my own views.

Second, the survey stage of the study could be at risk from sample selection bias. Although the survey was sent to all schools that participated in S2SSP, the response rate was 37% despite reminders. A response rate of 37% would normally be considered good

for an electronic survey (Kaplowitz *et al.,* 2004 suggest 33% as average). However, the sample size was relatively small and restricted to specified group of S2SSP users. It is also quite possible that school leaders were more likely to respond, and perhaps respond positively, if they were open-minded about engaging with school improvement systems such as S2SSP. This means there could be a risk that the survey results over-estimated how positive leaders were about S2SSP. It is also possible that those who were willing to give the time to respond in the surveys or to be interviewed were more positive about S2SSP to begin with. This may be an influencing factor in the responses from this group.

Third, there is always a risk of social acceptability bias and non-disclosure when collecting qualitative data. This was likely to relate more to the middle leader interviewees as, despite reassurances, they may have felt they needed to reflect their own school processes in a positive light. However, most of the senior leaders were in a position of control over their own school improvement and since this was a loose-knit network they were not deferential to the S2SSP process. Moreover, since survey respondents were given the opportunity to answer anonymously, covering similar ground to the interviews, it provided a way of checking the reliability of the interview data. This comparison suggests that similar issues were identified with similar frequency in the surveys and the interviews.

The study provides scope for identifying new sets of principles and values which may be unique to the EP Challenge and which may add to the on-going school peer review narrative. The question of what drives the progress of S2SSP and why those committed to continuing to support it was also keenly examined. As the use of S2SSP is part of an

on-going programme continuing to be rolled out by EP, it was anticipated that this study would carry the School Improvement 'Challenge' debate forward which may have relevance and implications for S2SSP users beyond local boundaries: likely to be more feasible if the sample used is relatively small (Hancock *et al.*, 2009). For this reason, the methods of data collection were designed to elicit a straight-forward and unambiguous outcome, shaped by those closest to the process.

Since this is a case study of a particular collaborative school improvement programme in one city between specific periods within specific contexts, it cannot offer generalizable 'truths' about the operation or the effects of school-to-school collaborations or networks (Stake, 1995; Simons, 2009; Thomas, 2013).

The survey questionnaire to school leaders provided access to all those recorded as having used the S2SSP process at the time. However, the question as to why only 26 out of a possible 70 participants responded still arises. In light of this and the intervening time-lapse, a follow-up survey to include the higher numbers of schools subsequently recorded as having used S2SSP (120 at the time of writing), would update the data and help to refine the findings of the study.

I finish this chapter with some thoughts on how I believe I have developed through selecting appropriate methods for this research. I have been enquiring about a practice in which I have been a participant. The access, time and patience afforded to me by colleagues have opened my eyes to the general high level of desire of school leaders to engage in educational research which they find relevant and which is directly linked to

informing their own everyday practice. I have come to realise the value and usefulness of including empirical methods of collecting and recording outcomes data, which are simple and easy to execute, but which give a wealth of information to benefit and inform wider debate and good practice. It is intended that this research emphasises the need for teachers to take account of and value their own everyday practice as untapped and unrecorded sources of data which others may find useful: an example of the authenticated research often cited by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to add to the national knowledge base in education.

CHAPTER 4   SURVEYS: OUTCOMES AND ANALYSIS

4.1   Introduction

This chapter analyses the data collected through online surveys from two key groups of educational leaders who have been involved either in the use of, or promotion of, S2SSP in a large metropolitan area:

> Survey Group 1 consisted of a small group of strategic leaders working generally in advisory capacities regionally;
>
> Survey Group 2 consisted of senior leaders working in schools in the city who have carried out peer reviews using the S2SSP model.

The online surveys were carried out at a time when it was considered that peer review systems such as S2SSP were an innovative way to get schools in the city on board in managing and determining their own self-evaluation in the absence of Local Authority oversight.

Outcomes where participants indicated their measure of agreement with the statements at the beginning of the survey questionnaires (See Appendices 14 and 15) are presented in tables below and analysed for thematic links. Respondents' answers to open questions in the second part of the survey provide some clarification of the themes to be explored. The analysis suggests how respondents believed the S2SSP process had impacted on school improvement and how the process had evolved for school leaders. Whilst the data indicate broad areas of agreement on where S2SSP works well, they

also highlight areas of disagreement which have been used in this study to provide a frame in which contradictions and suggestions for improvement could be explored further in interviews.

The thematic focus areas are linked to the research questions shown in Table 3.1 and Appendix 8. The themes arose from two main sources: firstly, those prerequisites for successful collaborations established by others and discussed in the literature review, and secondly: areas which have evolved and are seen as important elements which affect a successful S2SSP identified by those who promote and train S2SSP reviewers under the EP Challenge. The linked questions in Appendix 8 provided a broad-stroke avenue for exploring relevant areas on which to 'thread' the story and expand on the real experiences of participants in S2SSP. These were used to give balance to some of the theoretical suppositions. The thematic approach provided a sense of what the participants felt about S2SSP and their general beliefs about its usefulness as a school improvement tool which is ultimately designed to help raise standards. It also gave an opportunity for individual testimonies to drive the narrative and to lead the main areas of enquiry through qualitative analysis in the in-depth interviews to follow.

Section 4.2 of this chapter presents the results from the questions in the survey asking for responses on a Likert scale. Outcomes where participants indicated their measure of agreement with the quantitative statements at the beginning of each of the Survey Schedules (See Appendices 14 and 15) are presented in tables 4.1 to 4.5. Respondents' answers to the open questions in the second part of the Survey Schedules are reported in Section 4.3. These provided further information in determining which themes resonated

most with participants and which required further investigation. Section 4.4 outlines suggestions put forward by respondents to improve to the S2SSP system based on their own experiences. Section 4.5 provides a summary of the findings.

4.2 Analysis of the quantitative data from the surveys

4.2.1 Summary of survey responses to agree or disagree with the statements

Responses from both surveyed groups to the statements in the first section of the questionnaires are outlined in *Table 4.1*. These questions appeared in both the survey for strategic leaders and the survey for senior leaders.

Table 4.1 Combined Strategic & Senior Leader Responses†

	Statement	Strongly agree %	Some-what agree %	Neutral %	Some-what disagree %	Strongly disagree %
a	S2SSP works well in supporting school improvement	71	26	0	3	0
b	The S2SSP process is effective in meeting specific school improvement objectives	65	29	0	6	0
c	Engaging with other schools through S2SSP provides good professional development	65	29	0	3	3
d	S2SSP helps to build strong professional relationships between schools	71	23	0	6	0
e	S2SSP supports high quality school self-evaluation	58	39	0	3	0
f	S2SSP is suitable for all types of schools (n=30)	57	33	0	3	7
g	S2SSP should be recognised and validated by Ofsted	74	23	0	3	0
h	There should be a limit on the number of schools in a S2SSP to be effective	71	19	0	10	0

† Percentages calculated after omitting any missing data. n=31 unless otherwise stated.

Table 4.1 shows that there was general agreement on most of the statements, differing for the most part only to the extent to which they agreed '*strongly*' or '*somewhat*'. However, the table does not show the extent of consistency in the answers of each respondent to different questions. For example, did respondents who strongly agreed with statement 'a' also strongly agree with each of the other statements?

Table 4.2 presents results from a simple correlation matrix to check the consistency in respondents' answers. When a respondent rated their level of agreement or disagreement between two statements exactly the same, this increased the strength of correlation between responses to that pair of statements. This table shows that there was generally a high correlation between the patterns of answers to each pair of questions.

However, responses to some pairs of statements were less strongly correlated, e.g. Statement (b) 'The S2SSP process is effective in meeting specific school improvement objectives' and, Statement (h) 'There should be a limit on the number of schools in a S2SSP to be effective'; Statement (a) 'S2SSP works well in supporting school improvement' and, Statements (h), (b) and (f) that 'S2SSP is suitable for all types of schools'.

Perhaps it is more important to note that disagreement with the statements was concentrated in just 4 of the respondents. One senior leader (a headteacher) disagreed with all 8 statements and another senior leader (also a headteacher) disagreed with 3 of the statements. Two of the strategic leaders each disagreed with one statement, though not the same one.

Table 4.2 Correlation between respondents' answers to each pair of survey questions (Strategic Leaders and Senior Leaders combined)†

	Qa	Qb	Qc	Qd	Qe	Qf	Qg	Qh
Qa	1	**.726**	**.508**	.462	**.721**	**.420**	**.563**	.255
		(<.001)	(.006)	(.009)	(<.001)	(.021)	(<.001)	(.167)
Qb		1	.366	.392	.470	.244	.451	.255
			(.043)	(.029)	(.008)	(.193)	(.011)	(.167)
Qc			1	**.815**	**.652**	**.707**	**.598**	**.554**
				(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)
Qd				1	**.531**	**.667**	.367	.388
					(.002)	(<.001)	(.042)	(.031)
Qe					1	**.597**	**.691**	.305
						(<.001)	(<.001)	(.095)
Qf						1	**.560**	.345
							(.001)	(.062)
Qg							1	.340
								(.061)
Qh								1
N	31	31	31	31	31	30	31	31

† Since this correlation considers 8 variables a Bonferroni correction (0.05/8) suggests that the probability estimate should be below 0.00625 to give a less than 5% chance that the correlation is random. The correlations that fulfil this criterion are shown in bold.

The results of the quantitative questions pertinent to senior leaders only are shown in *Table 4.3* below.

Table 4.3 Responses to questions asked only of school Senior Leaders

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree %	Somewhat Agree %	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
i.	We have continued to use the Peer Review process to support school improvement	56	24	8	8	4
j.	Having undertaken a school peer review I did not feel it benefitted my school	4	0	0	12	85
k.	I would prefer to manage my own school improvement	8	8	16	24	44

(Appendix 14 Senior Leader Survey Schedule); (n=26) (*Some percentages do not tally due to rounding*)

One of the two senior leaders who '*somewhat agreed*' that they would '*prefer to manage their own school improvement*' also answered negatively to the other two statements (i) and (j). This was the same secondary school senior leader who disagreed with each of the eight statements reported in *Table 4.1*.

The possibility of a link between those who '*have not*' continued with S2SSP and those who stated they would '*prefer to manage their own school improvement*' was tested but was rejected as only one person was found to have answered the same way to both statements. There could be any number of reasons why a school may not have continued with S2SSP but the numbers involved were too low to have statistical confidence in the outcome. Of those who '*agreed*' or were neutral in that they would '*prefer to manage their own school improvement*', four were anonymous so links to other questions or conclusions could not be made.

Table 4.4 outlines the responses of strategic leaders to the quantitative questions relevant only to them. The Strategic leaders surveyed agreed for the most part that S2SSP was good for schools.

Table 4.4 Responses to questions asked of Strategic Leaders only

_Q	Statement	Strongly Agree %	Somewhat Agree %	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %
L	S2SSP could waste valuable time by focusing too much on other schools	0	0	0	60	40
M	S2SSPcould be difficult to implement in some types of schools	20	40	20	20	0
N	S2SSP could be a burden to high performing schools	0	0	0	20	80

(Appendix 15) Strategic Leader Survey Schedule (n = 5)

There was a slight hesitancy on Q (*l*) '*S2SSP could waste valuable time*' with more '*somewhat*' disagreeing than '*strongly disagreeing*' which could indicate that respondents believed the system could impact negatively on some schools due to the amount of time it took to undertake reviews in all the schools in a group: an issue picked up in the interviews. The reasons why four out of five strategic leaders '*agreed*' or were '*neutral*' about Q (*m*) '*S2SSP could be difficult to implement in some types of schools*' opened up further areas of enquiry which were picked up in the survey qualitative data.

Four out of five strategic leaders agreed that there should be a limit on the number of schools in a peer review group. This outcome raised questions to explore in the interviews on what school leaders felt the 'optimum' number in a peer group should be and if or why it could have an effect on the success of reviews.

4.2.2   *Variation in response by respondent and schools*

Given the small number of strategic leaders who completed the survey (n=5), only tentative conclusions could be drawn from a comparison between responses from strategic and senior leaders. Both types of leader answered the items a-h in *Table 4.1*. These responses were compared using t-tests (independent samples). There was only a significant difference (p=.007) for responses to one of the statements. The small sample size lacked the power to show any relevant significance. Each of the strategic leaders strongly agreed that 'S2SSP helps to build professional relationships between schools'. However, two of the senior leaders disagreed and there was a mix of 'somewhat agree'

and 'strongly agreed' amongst the rest. The development of professional relationships between schools was, perhaps, less powerful than the strategic leaders imagined.

The distribution of responses from senior leader participants by school-sector type is shown in *Table 4.5*. The table does not include the Strategic Group as members of this group were not school based.

Table 4.5 Summary of senior leaders' views about S2SSP by sector type

| Schools/Leader Type | Senior Leaders of Schools | | | |
	Primary	Secondary	Nursery	Sector not disclosed
Mostly Negative		1		
Mixed	2	1		1
Mostly Positive	16	1	1	3
Total	18	3	1	4

The small sample size (See *Table 3.2* for response rates) precludes using these data to infer general patterns or identifying percentage correlations by sector, particularly as four respondents (15%) did not give their sector, although none of those four were '*mostly negative*'. However, given perspectives in the literature, it was relevant to know if the less positive responses came from particular types of school or school leaders.

Through a search of publicly available information it was ascertained that three out of the sixteen primaries who responded positively had been graded by Ofsted as 'RI' (Requires Improvement). It appeared that the experience of a disappointing Ofsted grade had not adversely affected the judgements of S2SSP made by the leaders of these three schools. The three secondary school leaders who responded were from schools in areas of high deprivation and were recorded as having good Ofsted grades. However,

one of those secondary leaders answered '*disagree*' or '*strongly disagree*' to most of the statements: this senior leader respondent had a totally negative view of the S2SSP process. Another gave mixed responses, recording agreement that there should be *a 'limit on the number of schools in a S2SSP'* and that '*not all schools benefit*' from the process. This is possibly because the logistics of managing S2SSP presented more of a challenge to the secondary school respondents. One secondary school leader was wholly positive. However, as only three secondary schools completed the survey, their views could not be said to be representative of secondary schools using the S2SSP collaborative model generally.

A summary of the relevant issues emerging from the *quantitative data* includes the following points for further exploration:

- Not all schools benefit from S2SSP

- There should be a limit on the number of schools in a review group

- S2SSP could be difficult to implement in some types of schools

- The process could involve spending too much time on other schools to the detriment of your own school

- Some school leaders would prefer to manage their own school improvement

The issue of '*validation*' of the S2SSR by Ofsted raised a question which is pursued in the semi-structured interviews, particularly as 'consistency of application' of the process was also raised as a concern for some in the surveys' *qualitative* data below. The quality of training on S2SSP was also considered to be a contentious factor worth pursuing in the interview stage.

4.3 Analysis of survey qualitative data

To give a preliminary 'voice' to the groups for further scrutiny and analysis (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2014), the data from the survey responses were scrutinised for similar themes and concerns arising and to identify newly introduced themes not picked up in the quantitative data.

When asked about the impact of S2SSP, most respondents felt that the peer review model supported school improvement in at least some aspects. Using a response matrix, responses were grouped under the main thematic headings set out under the themes to follow. Direct quotes from the 'open' section of the surveys are identified by the question number and type of senior leader eg. Survey Q2b: Assistant Headteacher (See Appendix 16).

4.3.1   Benchmarking standards, school improvement and accountability

Whilst there was evidence from the literature reviewed that schools working collaboratively helped to drive school improvement forward (eg. Chapman and Muijs 2014), there has been little focus on the specific benefits of using systems such as S2SSP to benchmark standards. The peer review process, if the S2SSP remit was followed, involved scrutinising the existing evaluations and data of each school; collectively agreeing on the focus of each review; allocating team member positions including a team leader; carrying out the review; feeding back verbally and then issuing a final written report on the findings: all time consuming elements. It could be construed from this that those who were prepared to carry out the necessary elements diligently were those who were already committed and on board with the process.

When asked what aspect of S2SSP had the most impact on school improvement, some senior leaders did make reference to its usefulness as a benchmarking tool, whilst also allowing schools within similar contexts to compare and contrast the effectiveness of their own school improvement processes. Strong academic outcomes continue to be viewed by most stakeholders (and the media) as an indication of a school's high performance. However, the expected revised 2019 Ofsted Inspection Framework (https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chief-inspector-sets-out-vision-for-new-education-inspection-framework) emphasises moving away from focusing too much on academic standards: a notion not entirely aligned with statements on school standards from the DfE.

Some respondents felt there was too much emphasis on scrutinising each school's data which they felt wasted time when schools would have already reviewed data themselves - reviews which would show strengths and weaknesses through their own self-evaluation. The amount of time it took to carry out S2SSP was seen as a stumbling block for some school leaders, a particular issue if a school is already under external scrutiny due to low academic standards.

The 'culture' of school improvement was considered in the literature to have some bearing on the success of collaborations (Fullan, 2003; Hargreaves, 2011; Matthew and Berwick, 2013). This literature provides a context in which to view the references made by survey respondents to the necessary climate for S2SSP to be operated successfully. Some respondents raised concerns about the '*integrity*' of individuals carrying out the reviews which they felt needed to be addressed. This also linked in some cases to the

issue of 'trust' in the capability of colleagues to act without prejudice or without preconceived ideas of how to 'fix' others, an issue which arose as a recurring theme. One senior leader stated that the review process had helped to build an open culture between the schools in their peer review group, commenting that:

> *"A strong culture of trust and transparency has been built between the participating* schools*".* (Survey Q2b: Assistant Headteacher)

Other senior leaders felt there was a need to consider the `*culture, ethos and context of schools*' being reviewed to support effective self-evaluation, which could also have some bearing on the type of support needed.

Whilst some respondents regarded the peer review process as unsustainable for a variety of reasons, others felt that it actually supported their ability to build on school improvement:

> *"S2SSP helps to build the capability and capacity of schools to be self-improving, leading to better outcomes*". (Survey Q2a: Headteacher)

Accountability for improving standards as a 'collective' by trusted peers was felt by some to have had more impact that reviews carried out by the Local Authority or through Ofsted scrutiny:

> *"External views of peers carried some weight for a mandate ... We felt embarrassed or even ashamed of what our peers thought and respected them enough to do something about it".* (Survey Q2f: Headteacher)

This view was considered by some to be what they referred to as 'genuine' school improvement by consent, an issue which was picked up in the interviews.

4.3.2   Quality control, fairness and equal effort

Several survey respondents emphasised a need for a balance between 'challenge' and 'fairness' when carrying out S2SSP. They suggested that the review process could be more effective if it was perceived on all sides as robustly identifying scope for improvement, whilst also recognising legitimate constraints on what was possible. This was reiterated by a strategic leader who felt that S2SSP did provide a level of `*challenge'* but who also suggested that there needed to be a `*fair and consistent'* approach within a `*well-organised and agreed contract',* a recurring issue to pursue in the interviews. A Secondary school senior leader echoed this sentiment and felt that although it was understood that the process was expected to provide challenge, it also needed to be properly managed:

> *"I felt let down by colleagues who did not reciprocate or put in the same amount of effort".* (Survey Q5: Deputy Headteacher)

Reference was made to a need to '*understand the purpose, scope and boundaries'* of S2SSP which some suggested was vital for an 'effective' peer review process. Agreement on how the process was conducted between all stakeholders and the requirement of having one 'lead' take responsibility for each review is explored in the interviews in Chapter 5.

References were made by some respondents to the possibility of the process becoming too 'cosy' an affair if carried out solely between colleagues who may also be friends: an issue picked up again in the in-depth interviews. This also raised a concern about the 'credibility' of reviewers which linked back to the level of trust needed for successful reviews referred to above. Some senior leaders were of the opinion that working with

colleagues over time could make it more difficult to provide `critical analysis' as friendships inevitably develop if people choose to continue to work together, with one suggesting:

> *"there may need to be external validation as there is a danger of over-familiarity".* (Survey Q5: Deputy Headteacher)

However, another senior leader commented that the S2SSP approach should be accepted as a replacement to an Ofsted inspection:

> *"I would like to see S2SSP ratified as an alternative approach to the punitive Ofsted process". (Survey Q2g: Headteacher)*

What constituted `challenge' arose with some who felt there were issues around 'boundaries' and lack of 'consistency' of application which they believed could undermine the process. These responses suggested a need for consideration to be given to finding a balance between offering 'challenge' and offering advice.

The S2SSP training package provided by EP provided all the relevant documentation to support the peer review process. However, how participants interpreted or carried out reviews was beyond the scope of the training. One senior leader who struggled at the first stage of a review stated that when a 2nd peer review was done with a different group, it was more successful as it was '*run in a different way*'. This raised a question of how, for some, the lack of consistency in application of the process had a bearing on the outcomes of some reviews and also how positive or negative those leaders felt about the programme.

4.3.3   Cost effectiveness and time

Offering 'value for money' when compared to other forms of school monitoring such as those carried out by Educational Advisors or Consultants was put forward as a key factor to consider in the use of S2SSP. Some respondents stated that the process could save money (and reduce stress) by cutting down the time needed to prepare for Ofsted inspections and by pooling staffing resources. It was felt by others that the 'time' and a positive attitude given to the S2SSP process allowed for a more considered approach to school self-evaluation, in contrast to an Ofsted inspection which was generally felt by school leaders to be an intrusive process. This was pertinent to the fact that some respondents felt the time needed to reciprocate the reviews in other schools could not be fully justified. Some school leaders believed that spending time pursuing systems such as S2SSP and working with other schools was a luxury they could not afford.

4.3.4   Arbitration and capacity

The suggestion that there needed to be an 'independent arbitrator' to keep the process on track within an 'agreed protocol' to help validate the final peer review report was made by some senior leaders. This again linked in with the issue around fairness with one senior leader commenting that the feedback report was '*poor quality*' and another stating that there were '*no helpful comments on how to improve*'. The S2SSP model was designed to have a 'cards on the table' approach which appeared to grate with some respondents with the possibility of the 'aims' of the process being perceived differently by some reviewers.

Capacity and the ability to find suitable partner-schools was an issue raised. This was particularly true of the secondary schools surveyed, perhaps because of the much smaller access and availability of schools with which to partner. One secondary school leader commented on their struggle to find suitable partners:

> *"We have really struggled to find two secondary partners to do another full peer review; our last review was two years ago". (Survey Q5: Secondary Headteacher).*

A primary school senior leader expressed similar concerns about the sustainability of the process once initial reviews were completed:

> *"The initial start has been excellent but will we be able to maintain capacity for this across all schools in the cluster and keep the momentum going". (Survey Q5: Primary Headteacher).*

The ability of school leaders to continue with S2SSP in the longer term, given the fluidity of government policies and likely changing circumstances of member schools (eg. change of leadership) prompted a reality check for some. It also raised a question on the longer-term goals of S2SSP which could have a bearing on the likely 'shelf-life' of the process.

4.3.5   Adaptability, flexibility and bespoke elements

Whilst some respondents spoke of the need for 'protocols' to be established, others seem to have been encouraged to adapt the process to suit their own situations: the desire for a more bespoke element coming through. The issues of the '*transferability*' of the skills developed and the need to allow '*flexibility*' in the approach of peer review groups as the process evolved were viewed as important by some. One group had

established their own bespoke version of S2SSP as they felt the original did not serve their needs or purpose:

> *"We've resisted the EP model for now because we felt it lacked bite… modifications were made as the group progressed through the cycle of reviews". (Survey Q5: Headteacher)*

This suggested that being able to 'adapt' the process to suit individual group needs was important in establishing a worthwhile peer review process: an issue picked up in the interviews.

Whilst being open to the sharing of good practice, the need for a 'formal' approach by reviewers was raised by some. On respondent suggested that each school within a peer group should agree on a 'contract' before embarking on a peer review. This could, it was put forward, include adapting the process when particular circumstances required it:

> *"Whilst each school will have its own unique characteristics and needs, the pooling of and development of initiatives and sharing of good and outstanding practice leads to improvement for all when internalised in each schools' own way". (Survey Q2e: Headteacher).*

The difficulties which could arise around the capacity to collaborate within MAT structures and without training providers such as EP or without Local Authority support was raised. One respondent stated:

> *"Due to the almost total reduction in the Local Authority's capacity to support school improvement, S2SSP will be vital to ensure schools continue to improve". (Survey Q2c: Headteacher).*

Both surveyed groups appeared to agree on the benefits of using support systems such as S2SSP in combating any shortcomings in general support for schools.

4.4 Survey respondents' suggestions for improvements to S2SSP

Both surveyed groups made suggestions on improving the S2SSP process. Senior leaders were best placed to offer advice through first-hand experience, although Strategic leaders did offer a wider overview. A summary of suggestions for improving the process, put forward by those surveyed, is outlined in *Table 4.6.*

Table 4.6 Survey Respondent suggestions for improving S2SSP

Improvements suggested by respondents	Reasons Given
Meet initially to **set the agenda**	The opportunity to discuss different aspects at the beginning was particularly useful and meant the day of the review was the most effective.
Fair and consistent approach	Each party should adopt agreed protocols
Clearly understood focus	Be specific to the school's own self-evaluation areas
Limit the focus	Avoids scrutiny of too much data and taking up too much time
Evidence based	Avoid subjective commenting Be evaluative rather than subjective Be rigorous and thorough
Take on board feedback from **external validator**	Judgements should be moderated Provide deadlines to demonstrate impact Limit over-familiarity
Limit the number of schools	Larger numbers of schools involved dilute trust

As the surveys were analysed before the interviews were conducted, the areas highlighted by participants helped to steer the direction of potential areas to focus on in the in-depth interviews and to consider areas which warranted further enquiry.

4.5 Summary of findings from surveys

To check relationships between the quantitative and qualitative data from the surveys, themes and issues were collated in the Response Matrix (Appendix 16). This table provides the basis for the shorter summary presented in *Table 4.7.*

Table 4.7: Summary of main issues arising from surveys for further exploration

Survey issues	Link to 4.3	Linked Focus Areas	Areas to explore further
Benchmarking Standards	4.3.1	Ingredients for success Accountability	What form would bench-marking take? Does it provide sufficient challenge?? Should there be accountability inherent in the process?
Quality Control Fairness Equal effort	4.3.2	Critical analysis Challenge Credibility	Are 'friends' working together <u>more</u> or <u>less</u> likely to be honest in providing critical feedback? Is there a culture of trust and transparency?
Validity Reviewer Training	4.3.2	Professional Development	Is there a need for better training for reviewers? Are reports focused on evidence?
Cost effect Time	4.3.3	Value for Money	Is the model sustainable longer term? Is the time involved in carrying out reviews justified?
Arbitration Consistency	4.3.4	Independence Arbitrator	Should S2SSP be monitored for consistency of application? Are all partners treated equally?
Adaptability Flexibility	4.3.5	Transferability Bespoke	What different approaches and adaptations have schools used? Does it matter if the model is adapted? Is the present model sustainable?

Some opinions around sustainability could be due to negative outcomes based on past poor S2SSP experiences. They could simply be that schools may not have had the opportunity to continue working with the same peer group once the initial round of peer reviews had been completed. It could also be that they had not intended to carry on with further or cyclical reviews once the initial rounds were completed. This raised questions which were pursued in the interviews around whether or not S2SSP is understood or intended to be a one-off process or a cyclical support mechanism which adapts and changes to the needs of the groups over time.

A number of the areas which featured in the literature as rudimentary to good collaborative working were evident in the survey responses. When asked about aims and values, phrases related to the need for *mutual trust, respect, honesty and empathy*

came up frequently with both groups, as did the value of *reciprocal learning and sharing good practice*.

The issue of a culture of openness is often related strongly to the context of schools but the reality is that most schools are presently heavily scrutinised by a wide range of stakeholders with an even wider range of expectations which 'shape' the prevailing culture.

Surveys, by their nature, give limited information and do not lend themselves to exploring broader philosophical themes. They did however provide starter areas which steered the direction of the study and provided insights into areas which were explored further in the in-depth interviews in Chapter 5.

The survey outcomes provided preliminary evidence that most strategic leaders and school senior leaders surveyed believed that S2SSP generally worked well in supporting school improvement. However, some disagreed with various aspects of the process, with a few in 'total disagreement' on it being a positive experience. A range of debatable issues were raised which had some bearing on what those carrying out S2SSP believed affected successful review outcomes. These helped to steer the direction of this study.

CHAPTER 5   IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS: OUTCOMES AND
ANALYSIS

5.1   Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the interviews which took place with school leaders and middle leaders. It also includes discussion of the results in the light of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Section 5.2 summarises the way in which the interview questions were targeted on the themes from the literature review and how they related to the research questions. Section 5.3 analyses responses relevant to research question 1 (School improvement and raising standards). Responses related to research question 2 (Factors affecting success including facilitators and barriers) are analysed in section 5.4. Section 5.5 examines the interviewees' beliefs about the sustainability of S2SSP. Section 5.6 focuses on research question 4 (the usefulness of S2SSP as an evaluation process). Section 5.7 concludes the chapter with a discussion of the evidence in the light of the literature.

5.2   How the interview questions relate to the literature review and the research questions

The main body of the text in the interview analysis is organised under the main research questions detailed in *Table 5.1*. This shows how the research questions link to the themes arising in the literature and which corresponded to the themes which arose in the interview questions.

The themes from the literature review provided the initial impetus for the questions, along with issues raised in the survey. However, since the interviews were semi-structured, themes also emerged and developed through the personal accounts of the interviewees. As a result, the interviews gave opportunities for individual testimonies to 'drive the narrative' and to lead the main areas of enquiry through qualitative interpretative analysis of in-depth testimonies: what Brundrett and Rhodes (2014) refer to as '*Narrative Analysis'*. The second column of *Table 5.1* presents themes in the interview transcripts that were linked to the literature themes in the third column. Section 5.7 of this chapter presents discussions of the interview evidence in the light of the literature.

Table 5.1: Interview Questions linked to Literature themes

Section of this chapter	Research Questions	Themes explored through Interview Questions	Key themes from the Literature
5.3	Question 1: To what extent do school leaders believe the S2SSP system supports and influences reliable school improvement and raises standards?	Benefits and risks of comparison; workload and capacity; certainty/uncertainty about improvement;	Although school collaboration has been strongly advocated as helpful for school improvement, existing evidence remains unclear.
5.4	Question 2: What factors do school leaders believe have affected the success of S2SSP?	Motivation; trust; communication; and professional development	Moral purpose; focus on student outcomes; trust; shared ownership; sharing evidence; sharing resources; culture of continuous professional development
5.5	Question 3: Is the S2SSP system sustainable in the longer term?	Non-judgemental Equally beneficial to all Trust and respect Shared ownership	Shared ownership; Allocating resources; professional development; Relying on key individuals; Drivers moving on a problem
5.6	Question 4: Does the EP S2SSP system provide a useful tool for self-evaluation by schools?	Reliable self-evaluation with teeth to affect change; Quality assurance; Reality & Ofsted; Validity; Accountability; Adaptability; Transferability; Effects of competition Academies	Focus on student outcomes; sharing evidence; shared ownership

Table 5.2 provides a breakdown of the 'types' of schools where the S2SSP reviews took place. It shows the balance in numbers between senior and middle leaders and a breakdown of the types of schools involved. The letters used in the table e.g. A1, are codes used to identify individuals within the group categories when recording and tracking their responses in the interviews. The use of codes helped to maintain anonymity. The letters A-K indicate one of each of the 11 schools with each school allocated a number code. The number one indicates a senior leader whilst two indicates a middle leader eg. Primary SL-A1-S1 = Primary Senior Leader A1 from School 1; Primary ML-A2-S1 = Primary Middle Leader A2 from School 1.

Table 5.2: Category of schools from which interviewees were drawn

School Groups	Primary and infant school		Secondary school	
	Senior leader	Middle leader	Senior leader	Middle leader
Maintained Local Authority Schools	A1 (S1) D1 (S4) E1 (S5) J1 (S10)	A2 (S1) D2 (S4) E2 (S5) J2 (S10)	H1 (S8) I1 (S9)	H2 (S8) I2 (S9)
Schools in Academy Trust	B1 (S2) C1 (S3) F1 (S6)	B2 (S2) C2 (S3) F2 (S6)	G1 (S7)	
School in Co-operative Learning Trust			K1 (S11)	K2 (S11)

The school leaders came from a mix of primary and secondary school sizes and from a range of socio-economic areas. There were 15 leaders from the primary and infant school sector and 6 came from the secondary school sector making a total of 21. Most of the interview questions directed to both senior leaders and middle leaders were similar in scope, covering similar thematic areas to enable comparisons to be made. However, some questions were directed and relevant to only one group, depending on the extent of

their involvement in particular areas of S2SSP and also taking into account the fact that senior leaders were the main drivers of the peer reviews in their own schools (See Chapter 3.6.4 Appendices 9 & 10 Interview Schedules).

The interviews are reported in the sequence set out in Table 5.1. Responses relevant to Research Question 1 are analysed in 5.3 (School improvement and standards). Responses related to Research Question 2 are analysed in 5.4 (Factors affecting success including facilitators and barriers). Research Question 3 responses, which focus on outcomes related to the integrity and sustainability of the process, are analysed in sub-section 5.5. Section 5.6 relates to the final Research Question 4 which discusses the views of respondents on the viability and validity of S2SSP.

5.3 Research Question 1: To what extent do school leaders believe the S2SSP system supports and influences reliable school improvement and raises standards?

This section explores and contrasts the views of senior and middle leaders in relation to questions on the impact of S2SSP on school improvement. Their views on the capacity of the process to raise standards and develop joint professional practices within S2SSP groups were also considered.

5.3.1 Senior Leaders: positive school improvement aspects

Senior leaders were asked if they could identify areas where S2SSP raised standards in their own schools or had an impact on school improvement, particularly on teaching and

learning. Responses to these questions focused on the role of comparison between schools to raise expectations and to identify effective practices.

A primary senior leader, who focussed on supporting an RI (Requires Improvement) school within their S2SSP group, spoke of how the process helped to strengthen and improve standards in all the schools in the group. This suggests that the sharing of good practice also consolidated and embedded the sustainability of the school improvement process for all the schools involved:

> *"We've helped get an RI school into a good position drawing on the strengths of each of the peer-schools. This has had a huge impact on raising standards and consolidating what works well for all of us". (Primary SL–A1-School 1).*

The same senior leader went on to suggest that the S2SSP schools work best when they come together as a team, where it was felt it enabled participants to sustain and spread the school improvement workload:

> *"You can't do it all on your own, sharing systems and good practice is great e.g. assessment without levels; reducing workload; systems for recording. Safeguarding was another area which we worked on – that can close a school down by Ofsted" (Primary SL–F1-School 6).*

The experience of working together in the manner suggested by the S2SSP programme was a new experience for some who felt that the impact on school improvement was positive. This view was echoed by others:

> *"Spending 2 days with 4 other heads, dissecting, analysing and caring about my school was a huge privilege. Never before have I experienced having 4 highly skilled professionals come to do nothing other than help me make my school better". (Secondary SL –G1-School 7).*

> *"They were head teachers that I knew already. It was an opportunity to get to work with them more closely which I felt was really valuable".*
> *(Primary SL –J1–School 10).*

The capacity of S2SSP to share and reduce workload was particularly relevant for senior leaders, which linked to a central aspect of the growing problem of teacher retention presently in England. The prospect of primary schools collaborating and sharing expertise with secondary school colleagues was of particular interest because of the opportunities it provided for drawing on the wider pool of expertise not typically found in smaller primary schools.

However, respondents referred not only to capacity, but also to raising expectations through sharing data standards. Many believed that working with colleagues in other schools improved their sense of what standard they should be aiming for: what counted as 'good' or 'outstanding' and what teams should be focussing on. A senior leader of a secondary school reported that the impact of the peer review introduced 'quality assurance' in the absence of scrutiny that had previously been provided by the Local Education Authority. The response also suggested that the scrutiny of 'trusted' peers was more acceptable than that offered by more formal monitoring bodies such as Ofsted:

> *"We had marking as one of the actions picked up on with the peer review… As it is with anything, you've got to keep revisiting it which is better than Ofsted because they rely on data and come and go quickly, while colleagues are still around".* *(Secondary SL -I1–School 9).*

This response suggests that a process of more localised professional school improvement monitoring was emerging for some, which they implied had more validity than the arms-length data-led monitoring exercises carried out by central government bodies such as Ofsted.

Both primary and secondary senior leaders spoke of specific practice in their schools which they believed had improved as a consequence of school-to-school support. One primary leader commented:

> *"Yes, the way we differentiate groups now and use success criteria as well as how we challenge the more-able was a very positive outcome". (Primary SL -D1-School 4).*

A secondary school leader referred to improvements made in teachers' ability to correctly assess students' work which was attributed to the peer review, along with helping the school to improve their systems for processing and presenting data:

> *"It has massively improved things. It flagged up our strengths in many areas but inconsistence in presentation and inconsistency in teachers' diagnostic assessment came up... I think it has really tided up systems in our schools also. It has really made me consider our use of data". (Secondary SL -H1-School 8).*

The same person gave an example of how the impact of a peer review led to raising achievement for a particular category of students, suggesting that S2SSP helped to raise standards for specific groups:

> *"Picking up on the lack of challenge for the more-able had the biggest impact and led to raised achievement for that group". (Secondary SL –D1–School 4).*

Whilst this indicated that S2SSP supported students generally, this was the only reference made to the process supporting specific learner groups, although targeting groups could be a natural progression leading on from improved teachers' diagnostic tests.

5.3.2   Middle Leaders: positive school improvement aspects

Middle leaders generally expressed positive views about the impact of S2SSP and they focused (like senior leaders) on the benefits of comparison.

> *"It was a partnership with schools working together; designed to see similarities and difference and what we could do together to move us all forward". (Primary ML –E2–School 5).*

As with the comments of senior leaders, references to comparison included judgements about standards and the design of practice. One middle leader referred to a willingness to develop and support each other through dissemination of teaching techniques, which they believed improved learning outcomes, for example, the use of a particular strategic approach to questioning in the classroom. Other comments referred to the role of S2SSP in changing approaches to the assessment of pupils. This also tallied with an example given by a senior leader in the same school, suggesting a level of consistency in their views on the impact of a peer review for their own school:

> *"They found out that there wasn't a cohesive marking or assessment structure throughout the school, which has developed as a result in terms of what to expect from marking". (Secondary ML –H2–School 8).*

Leaders spoke of sharing strategies for school improvement. For example, S2SSP had popularised the idea of 'improvement champions': giving a teacher within the network the role of leading improvement across the schools in identified teaching and learning areas for development. This, they suggested, benefitted the whole peer group and contributed well to improving leadership processes. A primary school middle leader spoke of the benefits of sharing processes through distributed leadership of specific improvement areas, which were collectively identified for joint professional development:

> *"… certainly since we began to focus on individual areas …   the champion for improvement idea where one person drives a focus area for all the schools has really helped to share good practice".*
> *(Primary ML –A2–School 1).*

Middle leaders echoed the view of senior leaders that S2SSP offered a replacement for monitoring previously provided through Local Authority oversight, usually in the form of data collections on standards and through visits from school improvement partners:

> *"With the demise of the local authority, peer reviews act like a critical friend who would have that external eye and observe good practice".*
> *(Primary ML –F2–School 6).*

Several middle leaders referred to the process as supportive, offering a 'friendly' critical eye. A middle leader referred to a change in 'attitude' which helped to build up confidence in individual teachers to 'show-case' their strengths. This also pointed to a growing trust in the capability of teachers from schools other than their own to lead on improvements for the whole peer group:

> *"It has developed into a more 'open door' process and sharing of good practice. People are more open to developing their own skills. It isn't seen as a criticism but how you can get better".*
> *(Primary ML –E2-School 5).*

This appeared to have resulted in a positive effect for middle leaders where suggestions for improvement were viewed and shared between each other.

5.3.3   Senior Leaders: negative aspects

Whilst many of the responses from senior leaders indicated a positive outlook on S2SSP, not all were convinced that the process was a constructive experience. Doubts about the value of S2SSP fell into three categories: resistance to comparison; uncertainty about outcomes and the workload burden.

Some felt that S2SSP did not have the expected outcome or impact with some of those involved seeming to dis-engage from the process. A primary school senior leader referred to a level of discord between some in their peer group, where the disquiet of one member impacted negatively on the whole group:

> *"There was one school that was resistant and not only to myself, but to HMI too. That put a couple of other heads off because it wasn't a pleasant experience for anybody". (Primary SL –J1-School 10)*

A secondary school senior leader referred to difficulties with the process which particularly related to how 'bad news' was communicated, indicating that there was a lack of clear initial protocols on how feedback should be conveyed:

> *"The way that some of our areas for development were communicated to us was difficult to hear. They were highly critical about some things which you would potentially find it in any school". (Secondary SL –I1-School 9).*

Being 'coerced' into participating in S2SSP perhaps accounted for some senior leader initial hostilities towards the process. Schools in an Ofsted category of 'Requires Improvement' were seen as unlikely to welcome yet another scrutinising group with open arms, particularly when the outcomes were likely to be similar. Rather than a whole peer-review, it was suggested in such cases that a review could be 'adapted' to include the concept of 'Champions for Improvement' referred to by mainly primary middle leaders as a positive step.

Some primary senior leaders were non-committal and seemed to be unsure about identifying any specific school improvement benefits which could be linked to S2SSP. There was a hint of 'indifference' from one senior leader who found it difficult to pin-

point how the impact of a peer review on teaching and learning in the classroom could be measured:

> *"In terms of day to day lessons, I don't know how you would measure that really, in terms of the peer review effect, I don't know…".*
> *(Primary SL -E1-School 5).*

Doubts were expressed regarding the value of the time devoted to S2SSP. One secondary school senior leader felt that their experience of S2SSP was not particularly helpful, referring to the inordinate 'amount of time' it took to complete for little return, going on to suggest that their workload had actually increased due to the process:

> *"I felt it took up a lot of time and I mostly didn't agree with the outcomes. I felt that those reviewing our practice had a preconceived idea of our school and so were determined to find improvement issues to comment on". (Secondary SL –K1-School 11).*

Whilst this particular participant was referring to the time it took to carry out initial reviews, the emerging issue of the capacity of S2SSP to reduce workload appears to have sat easier with those groups who went on to share cross-school initiatives in the longer term, highlighting a more sustainable aspect of the system. Those groups who continued to work together appeared to be more likely to build sustainable professional relationships, which in turn increased social capital and enabled more successful outcomes (Stoll *et al.*, 2006; Buysee *et al.*, 2003; Vescio *et al.*, 2008; Hargreaves, 2011; Chapman *et al.*, 2011; Hill, 2011; Bowles and Gintis, 2013).

5.3.4   Middle Leaders: negative aspects

Middle leaders echoed two of the concerns raised by a minority of senior leaders: resistance to comparison and uncertainty about outcomes. They also raised a third

concern: that the S2SSP process had been a matter for senior management with little direct impact on classroom practice.

Some resistance to the comparison involved in the S2SSP practice was evident in defensive remarks made by a few middle leaders. One offered a slightly acerbic sounding response when asked if the S2SSP process supported school improvement in their own school:

> *"I'm not sure… but I now ensure that every single thing we do in class is documented so that should any visitor come into my room again there would be no doubt about the amount of work that we do". (Primary ML –D2-School 4).*

A few middle leaders expressed doubts about whether S2SSP had made any difference in their schools, giving vague and non-committal responses:

> *"I'm sure there were some elements of the review which fed into our school development plan but I'm not sure what they were". (Primary ML –C2-School 3).*

> *"I am not entirely sure… I could not accurately say what they were". (Secondary ML –I2-School 9).*

Although there were fewer of them, secondary middle leader interviewees appeared to be more sceptical than their primary school counterparts about the impact of S2SSP, with some suggesting that the improvements could have happened anyway, or that they did not need an external group of reviewers to identify them. One appeared to be dismissive whilst ambiguously stating:

> *"I think things have improved but I wouldn't necessarily give the peer review credit for this". (Secondary ML H2-School 8).*

Whilst some respondents appeared to understand that S2SSP was focussed on identifying areas for improvement which could be specific to each individual school, there was also a feeling from others that the reviews had little relevance for them as teachers in the classroom, believing it was driven more by senior leaders who were perhaps more remote from classroom realities:

> *"Schools are very different and will have different focuses but there are some aspects that haven't been as relevant to us in the classroom". (Primary ML –J2-School 10).*

This could indicate a lack of cohesion from the perspective of some middle leaders. However, there could be any number of reasons for this view, not least the perceived lack of inclusion in the initial decision making process for some middle leaders. It could also point to a lack of a whole-school approach or poor communication within some of the schools involved. This would need further investigation.

5.4   Research Question 2:   What factors do school leaders believe have affected the success of S2SSP, including barriers and advantages?

This section focuses on factors which participants believed affected the degree to which the S2SSP process was constructive for them. It centres on four emerging aspects: motivation; trust, communication and professional development (as indicated in Table 5.1). The question of what motivated schools to engage in the peer reviews and the importance of trust appears to have had a major influence on the success or otherwise of the system for participants. The level of challenge inherent in the process and how criticisms and failures were communicated was clearly influenced by the level of trust

participants had in accepting the validity of review outcomes. These four areas are explored in more depth below.

5.4.1   Motivation

The question of why some school leaders engaged in, and embraced, the peer review process more than others was examined. Senior leaders referred to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation was located in a shared sense of moral purpose and in shared professional identity. Extrinsic motivation was located in the performance culture that policy has created for schools in England. Some expressed a sense of solidarity with other schools and felt that it was important for those collaborating in the reviews to have a shared 'collective' sense of purpose. One primary senior leader spoke of the need for a shared purpose and drive to move forward and a mutual appreciation of the benefits of schools working together in the first place:

> *"Anyone considering working in this way quickly realises that without a similar moral purpose and drive, collaboration is ineffective".*
> *(Primary SL –E1-School 5).*

 Some leaders referred to established relationships with other school leaders which encouraged them to collaborate. These individuals claimed a moral purpose to support each other and they were more likely to have a positive peer review experience as expressed by Hill, (2011); Hargreaves (2011); Matthews & Berwick (2013); Gu *et al*., (2015). One primary senior leader commented that:

> *"The group of headteachers did have an established sense of camaraderie and mutual respect which helped".*
> *(Primary SL –A1-School 1).*

Others referred to undertaking reviews due to the need to 'fill the gap' left by the absence of support from the Local Authority. Some felt compelled to reach out to others to offset isolation and a feeling of having to 'go it alone'.

The school performance and standards agenda in national school policy also featured prominently in interviewees' references to motivation. Variation between schools was created by verdicts of government inspectors and by the extent to which leaders were driven by the effects of public and judgemental 'peer' views on their professional status.

For some, the motivation lay in attempting to move the school forward from a poor Ofsted rating. One reported that S2SSP was 'thrust upon them' by a senior advisor although at the same time appeared to be open to the suggestion:

> *"We were an Ofsted RI school and needed to see if we were on track to improve so I was advised to go on the EP S2SSP training". (Primary SL –D1-School 4).*

Some other school leaders said they were motivated by the opportunity that S2SSP offered, as an opportunity to pre-empt Ofsted inspection. One reported that peer review provided an opportunity to have 'a fresh pair of eyes' from trusted colleagues without the sense of foreboding often associated with an Ofsted inspection:

> *"It has helped to develop a language around peer review that puts people on their toes but without being uncomfortable" Secondary SL-H1-School 8).*

A senior leader spoke of the peer review providing the opportunity to 'show-off' good practice on one hand, but on the other allowing space where areas of improvement could be taken on board:

"With colleagues with whom you continue to work with over time, you want to showcase everything to be at its best…but without being publicly shamed either". (Primary SL -E1-School 5).

The desire for shared judgement on school performance appeared to be driven by professional pride and commitment.

5.4.2   Trust

Trust featured strongly amongst the things that interviewees had to say about what helped S2SSP to work well. Within this there were two main sub-themes: could the motivation of others be trusted and did other colleagues have the professional knowledge and know-how in order to be useful? Senior leaders spoke of trust being a 'make or break' issue between those in the peer groups. Based on the responses of those leaders who viewed S2SSP as a positive experience, it would appear that the level of trust built up through prior professional relationships or friendships of senior leaders over time, helped in establishing an open-minded attitude to feedback, even if this included some criticism of a school's practice. A primary senior leader spoke of the confidence a group had in each other's ability due to an existing good working relationship. Because of this, she felt that they were more inclined to be open to trying new initiatives and 'think outside the box' when improvement suggestions were put forward by peers. This view was reiterated by a senior leader from another school who felt that without that sense of 'trust and mutual respect' for each other's professional opinions, initiatives such as S2SSP could be easily dismissed as 'yet another fad' which school leaders were adept at ignoring if they did not deem them beneficial. This implies that the success of schemes like S2SSP depended on the extent to which there is already

trust between school leaders, the extent to which the partnerships operates to increase

trust and the extent to which participants were free to work with partners they trust.

In this context it appears that it really mattered how the review groups are formed. S2SSP largely followed a process in which schools chose who they would like to partner with if the option was available to them. They could partner up with known and trusted colleagues. However, opening up to colleagues appeared to carry its own risk as it was also incumbent on reviewers to be honest about their findings. This appeared to raise its own level of challenge, particularly between friendship groups which could have the potential to break down trust if there were disagreements on review findings. The following quotations illustrate this theme:

> *"Without the respect and confidence in others you would put an automatic closure on many new initiatives and ideas". (Primary SL –A1-School 1).*

> *"It has worked because we have established an ethos of trust and mutual respect and, as a result, the reviews have been robust". (Nursery School SL –C1-School 3).*

> *"We had already established respect. I think was essential in being open, trusting and honest with each other". (Primary SL –F1-School 6).*

> *"Yes, I think because the trust was there you have to choose your words carefully when you're reflecting back on what you've observed because you're always looking at it through your own perspective". (Secondary SL –G1-School 7).*

Other senior leaders referred to the value of letting the school that was receiving the peer

review decide what the review should focus upon:

> *"You can narrow the peer review down to a couple of hours on a particular subject that you want to improve soit's an effective tool. If it's just a general look at the school, it becomes less effective because there's too much to do as a result of it". (Primary SL –B1 School 2).*

"We had built up that element of trust, and also because we invited people to come in and look at different things in our school, the findings were more acceptable". (Primary SL –J1-School 10).

Senior leaders did appear to recognise the danger that schools could seek to avoid challenge through their choice of who they would partner with and what they would focus on in a review. But most still preferred a trusted colleague to partner with to someone they did not know.

A secondary senior leader felt that being challenged by colleagues, where a sense of affinity had been established, was easier to accept than being criticised by unknown reviewers:

"Even though there is a danger of cosiness when relationships are built, I found it easier to be honest with known and trusted people". (Secondary SL –I1-School 9).

Others felt that working with unknown colleagues provided a certain amount of emotional distance, enabling negative feedback to be viewed as positively challenging. One participant expressed a level of caution about opening the school up to invited scrutiny from colleagues whom they are likely to work with again:

"There were schools across [area] that I had never worked with, and that, in itself, I found more beneficial than working with schools in the local area. It's a much more honest approach. You're not so worried about what they think or if they compare us". (Primary SL –J1-   School 10).

This also suggests that some would prefer unknown reviewers whom they felt may be better placed to provide appropriate challenge and give an honest appraisal, without fear of upsetting established good relationships or causing embarrassment.

A number of senior leaders believed that having an external facilitator or advisor who could act objectively was the answer to the problem. This view was stronger amongst secondary school leaders and seemed a stronger preference for senior leaders who had been more reluctant to engage with the S2SSP process.

> *"Having completed an initial S2SSP, I don't think it works so well or it is the place of a group of heads to evaluate the teaching and learning in each school overall… An external advisor to oversee the process can offer a fairer perspective". (Primary SL –H1-School 8)*

> *"This was a very useful process – it helped me to realise that we had made a similar start to collaborative work but that our focus and direction could be more defined through the use of an independent facilitator".   (Secondary SL –J1-School 10).*

It was not clear from these transcripts whether the interviewees believed that an external advisor was more likely than colleagues from other schools to be impartial and give a fairer view or because they believed that an external advisor would have more useful knowledge to offer. Moreover, other senior leaders took an opposite view about the relative value of an external voice. One senior leader felt that the group's sense of camaraderie would be disrupted if an external person was present:

> *"I think we were more relaxed with each other because there wasn't an external person there and it seemed to work better". (Primary SL – D1-School 4).*

Different judgements about the usefulness of an external voice are likely to reflect the history of relationships between the schools. Different judgements may reflect different circumstances that the schools face. However, whilst some leaders welcomed voices from schools serving different types of locality, others were sceptical about whether leaders from school which were demographically different could offer useful advice.

Middle leaders also spoke about trust, but they spoke about it as something that had to be established rather than something already existing on which they could build. Whilst senior leaders could choose to build upon relationships they had previously established with leaders of other schools, middle leaders spoke of being placed in a new situation, uncertain whether they could trust those who arrived to cast an eye over their practice. One middle leader expressed concern about the extent to which she could trust evaluators from other schools to offer consistent judgements:

> *"There hasn't been a consistency that has come out. I don't even know if we've gone and reviewed any of the other schools as we haven't been told". (Secondary ML –H2-School 8).*

Some middle leader spoke of feeling a bit tentative about reviewers coming into school and hinted at feeling that there was bit of risk-taking involved, particularly where schools undertook the peer reviews voluntarily 'if it isn't broken why fix it'. Middle leaders used Ofsted inspections as a reference point in their previous experience of evaluation from outsiders.

> *"I think to start with, you're a bit cautious and probably a little bit defensive as well, you know. You're opening yourself up to somebody. When Ofsted come in, they come in and then go". (Secondary ML –G2-School 7).*

With this point of reference, the kind of relationship that the 'evaluators' were expecting was very important for those about to receive an evaluation with one colleague commenting:

> *"The phrase critical friend was used. It didn't feel ominous, not like Ofsted". (Primary ML –F2-School 6).*

It was suggested that trust between middle leaders and those conducting reviews had to be built up. One middle leader referred to a certain sense of relief at the reduced time spent on having to decipher and tackle new initiatives:

> *"It is good to share the load as well. We don't need to 2nd guess what everyone else is doing or what it all means. I don't mind admitting I don't know something to the other middle leaders. I trust them". (Primary ML –B2-School 2).*

A majority of the middle leaders interviewed felt that S2SSP did provide a context in which the necessary trust could build could be built. But they were also keen to emphasise that this was dependent on the initial attitude that participants brought to the process. One secondary middle leader commented on the need to take an open-minded approach to peer reviews based on mutual respect, suggesting that participants should:

> *"Listen to each other with an open mind and don't make any preconceived judgements". (Secondary ML –F2-School 6).*

A primary middle leader concurred with some of the views of senior leaders on the value of being challenged by known colleagues, the opinions of whom are likely to garner more respect than remote Ofsted-type inspections:

> *"There's something about being evaluated by your own peers that makes it harder as you can't discount their opinions as easily as you may do with Ofsted as you see them again". (Primary ML –J2-School 10).*

For middle leaders, trust was also an issue in their relationship with the senior leaders of their own school. How could they be sure about their school leaders' motivation and the way in which their school leaders would make use of the outcomes of the evaluation? Middle leaders were asked about their understanding of the rationale that senior leaders had for participating in S2SSP. A secondary middle leader referred to the way senior

leaders shared the objectives of S2SSP freely with them, which instilled a sense of shared purpose and provided impetus to the process:

> *"they were up-front and talked us through it openly beforehand and explained why it was being done which helped us understand…".*
> *(Secondary ML –I1-School 9).*

However, some comments from middle leaders suggested an undertone of discontent with the process. There was a level of disquiet among some which did not paint a convincing picture, particularly around a perceived 'lack' of trust with one expressing misgivings about how the process was managed:

> *"Some people can get carried away and 'go off' on a power trip – we have had some instances of that".* *(Primary ML –C2-School 3).*

Although the feedback around the themes of trust and mutual respect were positive overall, there were concerns from some about how the peer review process was managed by different reviewers with perceived different agendas.

5.4.3   Communication

The theme of how the level and type of communication (and sometimes lack of it) featured strongly in the responses of the middle leaders. They expressed views about the level of anxiety that negative feedback could create. They also felt that feedback about teacher's performance in particular needed to be communicated in a way that did not have a negative effect on those being reviewed. Middle leaders spoke of the emotional impact as recipients of feedback. However, their key concern appeared to be how and with whom the review information would be shared and how it would be used. One primary middle leader made reference to their own vulnerability due to the wider

'sharing' of outcomes between schools, particularly if they had personally received some negative feedback which affected future relationships with those involved:

> *"It felt worse with staff from schools you know as people would remember if I didn't do well and would judge me". (Primary ML-B2-School 2).*

Interviewees who spoke as reviewers tended to focus on how feedback was provided. One view was that feedback should always include a mixture of positive and negative judgements and should be framed in terms of a judgement on the school rather than a judgement upon any one individual.

> *"I think you have to be quite sensitive when you go into somebody's school…you don't want to be destructive, you need to be constructive". (Primary SL-C1-School 3).*

> *"If you are saying that this school isn't good, you're not necessarily pinning it on any individual, just on a process or a system. You could also comment on good aspects to take back to your own school so it becomes a genuine two-way relationship". (Secondary SL-H1-School 8).*

Another view suggested that feedback should focus on evidence rather than judgement, in order to invite discussion of how to interpret that evidence:

> *"I suppose I keep things very factual… You can't dispute the conclusion unless you dispute the facts". (Secondary SL-G1-School 7).*

These two perspectives were sometimes expressed by the same reviewer, perhaps suggesting a lack of clarity within the S2SSP process about the nature and purpose of feedback from reviews. Some senior leaders spoke of a need to have stated and agreed protocols to ensure reviewers understood challenge and the shape these challenges should take (Earl and Katz, 2006; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009; Chapman, 2018).

Several senior leaders also spoke of a professional conversation that developed their capacity for leadership, not least in finding a constructive language through which to participate in the review process:

> *"It has helped to develop a language around peer review that puts people on their toes but without being uncomfortable". (Secondary SL-H1-School 8).*

The nature of this language (e.g. its terms and idioms) was not explored in the interviews and this might be something for future research.

All interviewees believed the manner in which feedback was communicated was very important, but there was less certainty about what constituted high quality practice in communication. This may be because participants believed that the nature of communication had to be sensitive to the particular context, not least in the level of pre-existing trust between reviewers and reviewed. Nonetheless, interviewees largely agreed that being 'challenged' was an integral part of the process and that school leaders should accept the outcomes, negative and positive, as constructive advice from other professionals. This was with the proviso that constructive advice still needed to be communicated in a professional and supportive manner regardless of the Ofsted category of the school, echoing points made in the literature (Wenger, 1998; West, 2010; Hargreaves, 2011; Feys and Devos, 2015).

5.4.4   *Professional Development*

Interviewees spoke of three ways in which S2SSP provided valuable professional development for participants: (i) for senior school leaders (ii) for middle leaders and (iii) for whole school development.

Senior leaders commented that prior to using the S2SSP programme, their experience of school leadership had been a rather isolated and lonely experience. Some leaders commented that previously they had little opportunity to discuss issues with other headteachers leaders in a 'safe' way or even to admit to needing support. One secondary senior leader spoke of how S2SSP helped to combat a sense of remoteness at senior level:

> *"Schools can be sort of a 'lonely planet' sometimes and you need to hear from colleagues". (Secondary SL-H1-School 8).*

Another commented that S2SSP was an improvement on the past and that most headteachers would not have collaborated in this way previously, particularly without local authority advisor input or targeted funding:

> *"4-5 years ago this was all pretty much unknown … everybody had their own very unique way of quality assuring or followed national initiatives" (Primary SL-I1-School 9).*

One interviewee almost apologised for admitting to needing other colleagues to bounce ideas off and welcomed the chance to collaborate with colleagues in other schools in providing emotional and moral support:

> *"It may sound stupid but just being able to have that professional conversation with somebody who understands the same situation helps. It can be very lonely as a deputy head in one school whereas when you've got three or four you can bounce ideas off each other". (Primary SL-F1-School 6).*

Middle leaders expressed a similar view that collaboration with colleagues from other schools had provided them with a context in which they could develop:

"I really value what I am part of now. We trust each other and know that if anyone is struggling with something we can put all our heads together to try to solve it – you are not on your own". (Primary ML-A2-School 1).

"It really helps to have supportive colleagues in other schools that you can talk to as you can sometimes feel a bit secluded and isolated". (Primary ML-E2-School 5).

"We are better at networking…we do lots of moderation now across the schools and have our own professional discussions on improvement areas to take back to our own school". (Primary ML-J2-School 10).

Working together was viewed as leading to 'shared learning' by some and provided more scope to extend expertise:

"S2SSP isn't just for leadership teams. A very important element of the network is linking up with other members of staff from across the schools. The impact of these groups is varied but all offer an objective view and shared learning between like-minded peers". (Primary ML-B2-School 2).

"it kind of forces you to develop when you are working on something with others". (Primary ML-E2-School 5).

Several senior and middle leaders claimed that S2SSP had fostered professional development through changes in the way their schools operated. At one level this opened up new opportunities for individual professional development:

"There were definitely things that came out of it which fed into our CPD that staff were able to opt into". (Secondary SL-G1-School 7).

Others suggested a cascading effect within their school, through which a new way of working was being developed through a top-down process:

"It works best when you have that relationship with the school, not just with the heads talking to each other, but filtering that down to deputies and subject leaders". (Primary SL-C1-School 3).

Some spoke of the benefits of 'joint enterprise' where middle leaders were deriving good professional development opportunities and skills. There was a suggestion in comments like this that S2SSP was leading to some re-distribution of leadership from senior to middle management with a less hierarchical approach. There were also indications in the responses from middle, as well as senior leaders, that new ways of thinking about responsibilities for improvement were developing in the schools as a consequence of their S2SSP experience:

> *"It helped me to reflect on my own practice and to listen to and take on board good practice in other schools. It has also brought us together as a team which means we are more open with each other". (Primary SL-B1-School 2).*

> *"We are looking at a whole range of things to work on together. We have moved forward from the first review. We now have more of a focus and a clearer plan and you know what's going to be better as a result". (Primary ML-E2-School 5).*

However, the declared benefit of 'shared and distributed' leadership put forward by senior leaders was less obvious for some middle leaders. For some there was a feeling that the process was less inclusive of 'leadership across the school' and did not filter down as much as it should. There was a suggestion that the sense of solidarity and being 'in it together' was not shared by all with one middle leader commenting:

> *"I felt it was not voluntary ... it was intrusive". (Secondary ML-K2-School 11).*

This response indicated that some participants did not absorb the benefits of 'mutuality' suggested in the literature as an essential element of collaborative practices (Louis and Marks, 2008; Matthews and Berwick, 2013; Gu *et al*., 2015). Several interviewees spoke of the impact of S2SSP on school structure and suggested that although professional development was part of the process, it was still a work in progress:

"We are building on it although we haven't quite got a model that works yet". (Secondary ML-K2-School 11).

There appeared to be a consensus of opinion from senior leaders that the value of S2SSP lay in the way they had formulated a collective vision which motivated them in continuing to work together after an initial review. For senior leaders this generally took the form of continuous professional dialogue and the development and sharing of systems, developing leadership skills and sharing school evaluation systems and tools. Examples given included joint work on the most efficient tools to produce School Improvement Plans and Self-Evaluation Frameworks (SEF). These were examples of documents presented to School Governors and Ofsted Inspectors to showcase the school's strengths, and the leadership's capacity to identify improvements.

Some Middle leaders spoke of the value of the increased opportunities to work with other professionals in peer schools and considered the benefits derived from those relationships to have advanced their professional development as teachers and leaders. They spoke of benefits such as the creation of Champions for Improvement; moderation of pupils' work; establishing portfolios of children's assessed writing and agreeing on the most efficient systems for tracking and recording assessments. The most significant outcome for some pointed to greater self-confidence in the capacity of the wider team to reduce workload for the whole and to develop localised research to inform practice.

5.5   Research Question 3: Is the S2SSP system sustainable in the longer term?

As with any network, there are threats to sustainability, particularly when schools chose whether or not to participate and whether or not to continue their participation. Schools

that were intrinsically motivated to participate (Stoll *et al.*, 2006; West, 2010; Hargreaves, 2012) would stay in their S2SSP group as long as they believed there were net benefits to the partnership as a whole. Schools that were extrinsically motivated would only stay in the network for as long they thought they gained more than they lost (Stoll *et al.*, 2006; West, 2010; Matthews and Berwick, 2013; Chapman *et al.*, 2016; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016)

One threat to sustainability reported by interviewees appeared to relate to turnover in school leadership. Since the level of trust and the development of relationships were seen by some as crucial for the success of the partnership, the arrival of new school leaders into the fold would always be a challenge. However, some interviewees believed this could be overcome through having a stable and reliable systematic process:

> *"If you come up with a model which suits your group … then it will stand the test of time regardless of who is in charge as the systems are embedded and not just owned by the headteachers". (Primary SL-A1-School 1).*

The strength of this viewpoint depended on the relative power of governors, headteachers and other members of the leadership team. A new headteacher could find it more difficult to pull out of a partnership in a school with distributed leadership. But changes of leadership can arise from schools being taken over by another school network, notably an academy chain which might want to align practice in the school with a different network.

Several senior leaders framed their comments about sustainability in terms of a cost-benefit calculation for their schools. Partnership demands resources and a school that

believes it is putting in more than its fair share may decide to leave. One senior leader referred to the difficulty in negotiating a deal which could be accepted as fair in terms of resource inputs:

> *"I have tried to create a moderation event between the schools… It hasn't happened since, because I was not prepared to keep breathing life into this thing. It has to be self-perpetuating". (Secondary SL-H1-School 8).*

Other interviewees were sceptical about the long-term benefits of participation and felt it had a natural life cycle. They suggested that schools might extract most of the possible benefit in a few years before reaching a point where sharing in the network would cost them more than they would gain:

> *"I think in its present format it would wear out eventually and you should move onto other schools. If all the schools in the group are eventually equally as good, then you should spread and extend the good practice out to others". (Primary SL-D1-School 4).*

Others worried that the benefits of being in the network could be lost if the necessary trust within the partnership could lead to cosiness and lack of challenge:

> *"the critical friend nature of it won't stand up if you then become pals and you are not learning from each other. Then it's time to find a new way of reviewing but I think we have got a long way to go in terms of our own peer review". (Primary SL-F1-School 6).*

However, for the immediate future for some, senior leaders seemed committed to staying in the partnership and they expected it to grow:

> *"There's another couple of schools that have found out what we're doing and they are quite interested in doing it". (Secondary SL-I1-School 9).*

A range of opinions on the sustainability of S2SSP were expressed, however there was a consensus on the likely benefits of established and embedded systems which could stand the test of time. This is discussed in the next section.

5.6   Research Question 4: Does the EP S2SSP system provide a useful tool for self-evaluation for schools?

The first research question addressed the beliefs that senior leaders and middle leaders had about the value of S2SSP. This fourth question addresses their confidence in S2SSP as a process. Interviewees identified three issues: validity, accountability and transferability. This section considers each issue and then discusses interviewees' views in the light of the literature.

5.6.1   Validity

Most interviewees believed that the S2SSP process resulted in judgements they could be confident about. They believed these judgements were valid:

> *"We've actually devised our own process which any adviser could come in and test to see whether it's a robust process, and I think it would stand up to that test". (Primary SL-B1-School 2).*

> *"I do really think that if its quality assured, and if it's externally accredited, that actually it could work alongside Ofsted". (Secondary SL-I1-School 9).*

Several reasons were offered as grounds for this judgement. First, there was a widespread belief that the evidence that was used in S2SSP reviews was sufficiently broad to be fit for purpose and that this evidence would be interpreted reasonably in view of the circumstances of the school and what it was trying to do. Several interviewees judged S2SSP in a favourable light comparing to Ofsted inspections:

> *"I think Ofsted are just too data led. They go in with preconceived ideas with their data and they've already made their mind up before they go in". (Primary SL-C1-School 3).*

Second, most interviewees expressed confidence in the knowledgeability and fairness of colleagues from other schools who were undertaking reviews:

> *"They had credibility as they know the pressures. They're working at the coal face and you can't dismiss them as much as you could those in their ivory towers". (Primary ML-F2-School 6).*

> *"Some evidence of dissociation from the school seems to be the key. Having a trained Ofsted inspector on the team would be good… We are bringing in people who are not frightened to say what they see". (Secondary SL-H1-School 8).*

> *"I do think it is important to be validated by colleagues outside your own school. They can confirm what we do well and also help with areas which might need to be improved which is always good to hear". (Primary ML-I2-School 9).*

Although some disagreed, the responses indicate that there was general acceptance that colleagues had the necessary expertise to deliver on S2SSP expectations.

5.6.2 Accountability

Interviewees made reference to the level of accountability arising from that required by DfE or Ofsted on the grounds that S2SSP was 'less threatening':

> *"I think Ofsted could learn a lot from peer review. I think it's non-threatening and you're not going in threatening people's jobs. You've got time to listen to people, you've got time to walk round and meet people". (Primary SL-C1-School 3).*

However, there was some awareness that Ofsted could view an S2SSP review as being too sympathetic and cosy, with the possibility of group members overlooking key areas which needed to be improved and softening an outcomes' report. Senior leaders

expressed the view that accountability for outcomes was part and parcel of the school review process. However, there was no clear agreement about the form that that accountability should take, other than producing annual review reports which would be similar to what the Local Education Authority would previously have required.

In principle, school leaders are accountable to their governing bodies. This is how 'self-managing schools are supposed to work (DfE, 2017). Interviewees reported that S2SSP evaluation outcomes were reported to governors, but they disagreed about the power of this governance arrangement. Senior leaders reported that governing bodies had not been involved in setting terms of reference for reviews that had been carried out in their schools. Outcomes from reviews appeared to have been directed by groups of school leaders rather than by governing bodies. One S2SSP group, after undertaking a round of peer reviews in each other's schools, used the outcomes to create a peer 'Group School Development Plan'. Some senior leaders believed that governors lacked the expertise to form plans for improvement. For example, one commented that:

> *"I think that if they were discussing best practice in terms of governance, I could see the impact of that. But if it was about best practice in terms of teaching and learning, I don't think they can make a judgement about that". (Secondary SL-I1-School 9).*

Nevertheless, a minority of senior leaders felt that it would be desirable for governors to have greater involvement if they could develop the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute effectively:

> *"It would be a really good idea if there was the skill set in the governing body, that they could be invited to take part in, or at least shadow a peer review. That would give the governors a fantastic insight into the school". (Primary SL-B1-School 2).*

In light of the responses given, there would be an expectation that governors would need to be involved in the school's peer review process from the outset, not least in agreeing that the school would benefit from being involved in the process. This may be particularly true of schools within Academy Trusts.

5.6.3   Transferability

Finally, interviewees were asked whether they believed the S2SSP evaluation system could be easily transferred to other groups of schools. They raised three areas of concern: variation in school type (in terms of governance and sector); variation between school catchment areas (in prior attainment and socio-economic status); and variation in the size of the partnership. There was not much agreement on the level which should be attached to the importance of these three issues.

Some interviewees believed that the S2SSP evaluation system could feasibly work across boundaries such as secondary/primary or academy/non-academy groups. S2SSP did include academy and maintained schools and this combination did not appear to be raise any problems in this partnership. It was interesting to note that one academy school senior leader felt that the work done between their mixed (academy/non-academy) schools in their S2SSP group had more impact on school improvement for them than anything done between the schools in the Academy Trust to which they belonged.

However, others felt that, given the nature of competitive based structures and the pressure on schools to perform well, it was highly unlikely that Multi-Academy Trusts would want to share resources to benefit schools not in their own trust:

"Why would a school that becomes part of a MAT then not devote the peer review time to their own MAT schools?" (Secondary ML-H2-School 8).

Interviewees also raised the issue of operating the evaluation process in groups of schools serving very different localities. Reservations were expressed around the difficulties which could arise in forming peer reviews involving schools with very different pupil characteristics in terms of attainment and socio economic status. One secondary senior leader contrasted their own school where it was a problem "just getting them through the door and then attempt to engage unresponsive students is a daily reality" with schools in 'more affluent areas. The experience of those functioning within diverging demographic cohorts was raised as an obstacle as schools in affluent areas could focus more on raising academic standards with more compliant learners. In contrast, another senior leader suggested that a peer review with a high performing school would throw some light on whether the contrasting demographics would make a difference:

"I would like to review the highest performing schools in the city just to see what's different". (Secondary SL-K1-School 11).

Contrary to this concern however, some research has indicated that schools within contrasting contextual demographic make-ups were able to collaborate on school improvement successfully (Chapman and Muijs, 2014).

One senior leader suggested that the S2SSP evaluation system worked well because it enabled schools to bond together in relatively small groups. It was believed this fostered the kind of trust that allowed evaluations to be more probing and challenging.

5.7 Discussion

5.7.1 Research Question 1: To what extent do school leaders believe the S2SSP system supports and influences reliable school improvement and raises standards?

The majority of interviewees were confident that S2SSP had led to elements of school improvement. They were happy to cite examples of changes in practice which they attributed to the process and which they regarded as improvements. The evidence that interviewees relied on to support their claims of improvement was less clear and this was not probed deeply in the interviews. The interviews did, however, show that there had been some fairly widespread changes in the kind of practice that was considered good. Many of these related to the assessment of pupils. A minority of respondents were sceptical about whether there had been meaningful change. One middle leader regarded S2SSP as a process which may change some aspects of school leadership and management with little impact in the classroom.

The interviewees emphasised the role of comparison between schools in their accounts of the S2SSP process, although the use of data comparisons which could be linked to the network activities was at an early stage. Most of the interviewees, whether senior or middle leaders, regarded comparison as a helpful process which clarified judgements about standards, spread practices that were believed to be good and led to the adoption of change strategies which they believed would foster school improvement. However, a minority of interviewees had not experienced this comparison as a helpful process. There were a few references to the defensiveness of other schools or a belief that they had received unfair criticism. It was not possible to tell from this evidence whether the

minority of negative experiences were due to the way in which school-to-school support had been conducted in these instances or whether negative experiences were the product of initial defensiveness.

Most interviewees believed that S2SSP had increased school capacity through collaboration with other schools. These judgements were strongly associated with an assumption that monitoring and evaluation were essential processes for any school and the belief that S2SSP provided the school with a sound mechanism to carry these out. The minority of interviewees who regarded S2SSP as an additional burden on their workload also appeared to be sceptical of the benefits of external monitoring and evaluation per se.

Finally, interviewees' beliefs tended to be uniformly positive or negative. Most interviewees believed that outcomes were positive and tangible, comparison was constructive and workload was reduced. A minority believed outcomes were unclear, comparison was neutral or harmful and workload was increased.

Referring to the summary in Table 5.1 we can see that the themes in the interviews aligned with three of the themes in the literature: *focus on student outcomes*, *sharing evidence* and *allocating resources*. However, there was little mention in interviewees' responses of the sense of moral purpose that was prominent in the literature on improvement in a 'school-led system' (e.g. Hill, 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Matthews and Berwick, 2013). Leaders spoke about collaboration as a means to an end rather than an end in itself, although a few felt compelled by a sense of moral purpose

which is picked up in the next section. Most senior and middle leaders did appear to take it for granted that they should be willing to support other schools, they articulated the rationale principally in terms of the benefits for (their) professional development rather than an intrinsic moral duty. This appeared to have been underpinned in the main by a sense of 'professional trust' or lack of it, which some felt was an influencing factor.

There is some connection between this point and the ways in which interviewees referred to student outcomes. The majority of interviewees were clear in their belief that S2SSP was addressing pupil outcomes. However, they referred almost exclusively to outcomes in terms of academic attainment rather than broad personal development or character education. This observation is consistent with the interpretation of EP that was offered by Hatcher (2014). Nonetheless, the emphasis in these accounts on academic outcomes for pupils and a belief that S2SSP had resulted in improvements for pupils is consistent with the evidence from Chapman and Muijs (2014) that federated schools had outperformed non-federated schools in particular aspects and within contrasting contexts.

Interviewees generally believed that 'sharing evidence' lay at the heart of the S2SSP process and was necessary to be able to work together effectively. The majority agreed with the expectations in the literature (Stoll *et al.*, 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016) that when schools share evidence and interpretations of evidence this more often leads to improvements in practice. In general, interviewees' references to sharing evidence suggested 'one-way traffic'. For some, the review process placed one school in the position of 'recipient' and other schools in the position of

'supporter'. Whilst the scheme as a whole involved a network of mutual support, teachers' immediate experience of S2SSP was perhaps not best described as 'sharing'. This imbalance deepened the risk that recipients might feel criticised and defensive, but this only surfaced in the accounts of a minority of respondents. Most regarded the support they had received as constructive and valuable. This suggests that for the majority there was sufficient trust in the reciprocity of S2SSP as a whole to allow the process to be supportive. It appears that there was generally sufficient trust to support school improvement in the manner expected by West (2010), NCSL (2012, 2013) and Carvalho and Goodyear (2014).

In the case of S2SSP, the process of sharing evidence may be described as 'collaboration through comparison'. Interviewees referred to a process of identifying difference and similarity between schools. The identification of what would count as improvement rested in the professional judgement of the teachers involved in the S2SSP process. This localised process of judging effectiveness and improvement contrasts with the approach that the government has encouraged through establishing the Education Endowment Foundation which has tried to identify 'what works' in any school (as expressed in their 'Teaching and Learning Toolkit' (https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit), placing 'collaborative learning' between students also high on their impact scale. It also contrasts with the process of 'competition through comparison' (Davies *et al.*, 2003). One senior leader reported that she had changed her own behaviour as a result of becoming part of the S2SSP network:

"I'm more receptive now to people just coming in. I don't feel competitive any more. I feel now that we need a sense of collaboration because I've learned that we haven't all got the answers ourselves". (Primary SL-J1-School 10).

These comparisons indicate some of the complexities in the central government policy environment in which schools are expected to work. From this perspective it may be surprising that respondents did not refer to tensions in collaborating with schools with which one arm of policy was expecting them to compete. This may have been because parental preference for a local primary school (Burgess *et al.*, 2011) diminished the sense of competition between schools. In any case, there appears to be little evidence of a positive association between competition and school improvement (Gibbons *et al.*, 2008).

The majority of respondents believed that the effects of S2SSP on school capacity meant that there was an improvement in the allocation of resources as envisaged by Hill (2011) which is consistent with self-reporting from school leaders in an earlier case study (Woods *et al.*, 2013). A difficulty with this evidence is that there may be some confirmation bias in respondents' reporting. If they feel positive about S2SSP they are likely to believe that capacity has been increased. Those who were doubtful about the positive effect of S2SSP believed that workload had increased.

5.7.2   Research Question 2: factors affecting the success of S2SSP

This section has presented evidence of senior and middle leaders' views about factors that contributed to the successes and challenges (or failures) of S2SSP. These are summarised under four headings which are reproduced in *Figure 5.1*. Sub-themes are presented in the bullet points within each quadrant of the figure. This final sub-section

on results linked to Research Question 2 discusses these findings in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and considers key aspects of the process which users found to have impacted most on the use of S2SSP.

Figure 5.1 Themes and sub-themes in interviewees' beliefs about factors affecting the operation of S2SSP
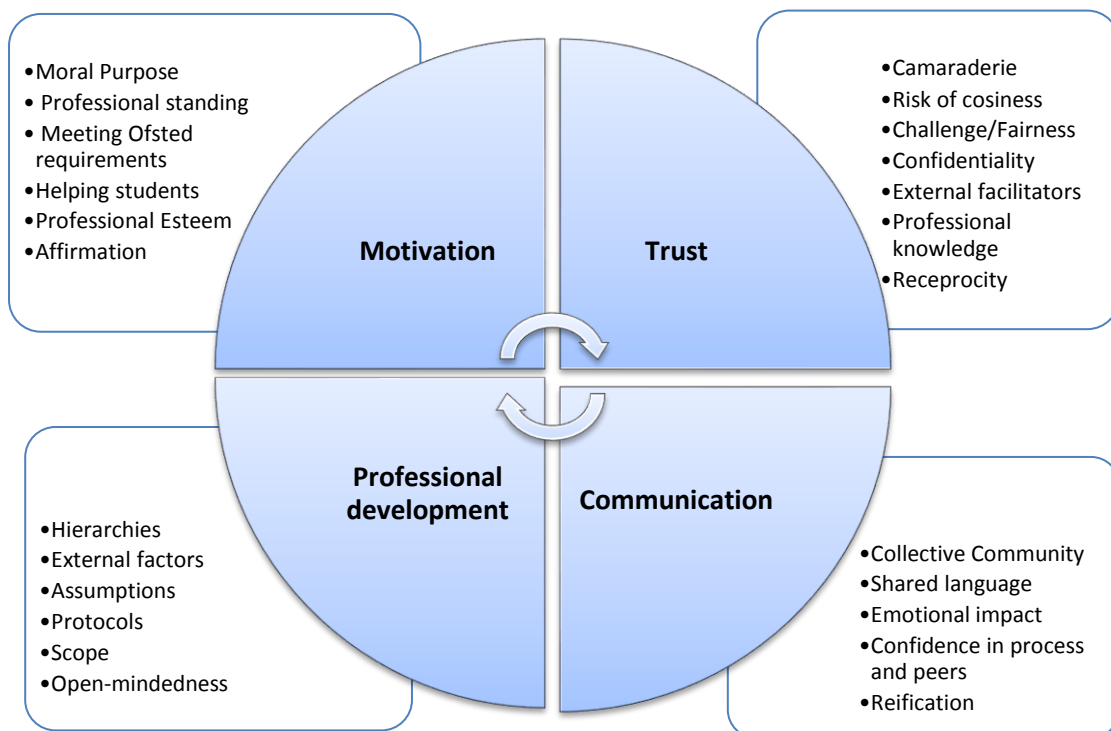
Motivation: Chapter 2 noted the importance attached to the motivational aspect of 'moral purpose' in advocating collaboration for school improvement ((Berwick, 2010; West, 2010; Hill, 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Owen, 2015). The literature conveyed a sense of professionals being intrinsically motivated to improve education through collaboration with colleagues in other schools. Some of the interviewees in this study voiced these sentiments and explicitly referred to their 'moral purpose'. However, motivation is rarely a simple thing and other voices (and sometimes the same voices)

also referred to other motivations. There were several references to using S2SSP to address the expectations of Ofsted inspectors so that the performance of schools was not judged 'inadequate'. In addition, there were some references to what could be termed 'professional esteem': a desire to be seen by professional colleagues to be doing well. It is not possible to tell from this whether references to professional esteem are a by-product of the inspection regime or whether they would exist anyway. Interviewees did not refer to a desire for school improvement in order to attract parents and to maintain or increase the number of students on roll. It is possible that 'social desirability' bias deterred some interviewees from revealing motivations that focused on competition for pupils as it risked being viewed as pro-market led.

Nonetheless, the references to school performance were sufficient to suggest that moral purpose although a feature was not the prime motivational factor driving participation in S2SSP. The purpose of the school inspection has been to motivate school leaders to be anxious about the performance of their school as judged by league tables and inspectors' reports. Notwithstanding evidence that school inspections have had limited effect on school improvement (e.g. Ehren and Visscher, 2008), critics (e.g. Hall and Noyes, 2009) do not dispute the pressure on schools exerted by an inspection regime. Other studies (e.g. Davies *et al*., 2005) have reported evidence of schools' motivation to perform relative to professional peers. The mix of governance systems within which schools in England are expected to operate means that motives are always likely to be somewhat mixed. This mixture is, perhaps, unavoidable when motivation focuses on students' academic achievement. Literature on collaboration between schools has urged a focus on student attainment (Stoll *et al*., 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Rincón-Gallardo and

Fullan, 2016). This is equally consistent with an intrinsic motivation to help students and an extrinsic motivation to perform well in a school inspection or to attract parents. If motives are mixed, participants in any school network have reason to be cautious about the motivations of their partners and this may inhibit cooperation.

Trust: Chapter 2 also noted the emphasis in previous literature on the element of trust required between partners in a school network (e.g. Stoll *et al*., 2006; West, 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan, NCSL, 2012; Matthews and Berwick, NCSL, 2013; Carvalho and Goodyear, 2014). Networks rely on reciprocity, so trust between partners is necessarily central to the way they operate. There appeared to be two main issues in interviewees' concerns about trust: (i) Could they rely on reviewers to make an expert and fair judgement? (ii) Could they rely on reviewers not to share information from a review with others who might use the information to the disadvantage of those reviewed? There were indications that interviewees were conscious of the tensions in both issues. In the first issue there was a consensus that fairness and challenge were both desirable, but also a recognition that this was difficult to achieve. Recipients of a review are more likely to regard a judgement as fair if it is favourable, but this might lead to a cosy relationship in which there is little challenge. In the second issue, those being reviewed might have more confidence if information from the review was not shared with others. But then the whole idea of the network rested on improvement through comparison by collaboration.

The interview responses give some indications of how trust may develop. Several interviewees spoke of the importance of pre-existing relationships between leaders of

different schools. Trust takes time to develop. It requires respect for the knowledge and judgement of others as well as confidence in their motivation. Some senior and middle leaders suggested that it would be helpful to have an external facilitator or expert whose motivations were not bound up with belonging to another school in the network. Perhaps this was a response to not having previously established strong ties with leaders in other schools.

Communication: Chapter 2 did not highlight the role of communication in the operation of school networks. This seems surprising given that the literature on collaboration between schools had readily referred to the notion of 'communities of practice'. The literature (e.g. Wenger, 2000; Tusting, 2005; Carvalho and Goodyear, 2014) emphasised the role of language in the development of practice in a community, not least in the 'reification' of certain practices or the rationale for a practice which encourages it to become a 'taken-for-granted' norm. Moreover, the literature on professional learning communities in schools, rather than on school-to-school collaboration (see for example Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999; Vescio *et al.*, 2008), has paid considerable attention to the role of language inherent in the development of teachers' capacity to learn together from their practice. In contrast, there is little mention of communication or language in government sponsored reports that have advocated school collaboration and advised on how to make these collaborations successful. Matthews and Berwick (2013) refer to communication in their initial summary but then this more or less disappears from their 50 page report. The 'ten common messages' through which Stoll *et al.*, (2015, pp. 6-8) summarises the advice for school

collaboration arising from a 30 month research and development project mention neither language nor communication.

The literature referring to communities of practice suggests that participants in a school network might face communication issues whilst a shared language (in this case about school review) is developed (Carvalho and Goodyear, 2014). Understanding the change process itself which involves a clear articulation of a phased approach to the introduction of improvement programme, helps to create the environment which embeds new ways of working which in turn help to sustain it (Chapman, *et al*., 2015).

The importance of how language is articulated came to the fore for some participants. Several senior leaders reported that they had developed a shared language about school review that they believed had improved their practice, a shared language being a key ingredient of developing a culture of trust. However, the interviewees did not refer to difficulties in understanding what colleagues actually meant. The interviewees did express some concern about the emotional impact of what was communicated and how it was put forward by reviewers. Some took personal offence at comments made by individual reviewers which in turn for them called into question the professionalism and motivation of those involved. It would seem that they saw the 'communication' issues as closely tied to the issue of trust. Whilst the words used by reviewers mattered, these were more likely to be accepted if the recipient trusted that reviewer's expertise and intentions. The issues of motivation and trust were clearly bound up with the level of acceptance of challenges to be addressed and how these were articulated. This raises the

question of the use of initial protocols and external adviser support to secure trust (Earl and Katz, 2005; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009).

Professional Development: The literature in Chapter 2 noted the emphasis on the continuous professional development benefits which can be derived through shared practice within school networks (e.g. Stoll *et al.*, 2006; Webster-Wright, 2009; Hargreaves 2012). It envisaged teacher development through schools working together as peers to identify and address the scope for improvements in practice. It also appears to assume that hierarchical relationships (either within or between schools) will not intrude on teachers' readiness to respect the views of colleagues they are working with. There may also be an assumption that teachers will be intrinsically motivated to seek improvements for students and that they will tend to agree on what counts as 'improvement'. A key feature of this type of practice is that teachers will review each other's work: a teacher might have their work reviewed at one time, but then subsequently they might review someone else's work.

Equality in the review process was a central design feature of S2SSP and interviewees spoke readily about the professional development they believed had resulted. Senior leaders, in particular, were keen to report on the difference S2SSP had made to their professional lives by creating a network community in which they could share with and learn from others. The findings from middle leader interviews were also generally positive, but middle leaders' views were more mixed than those of senior leaders. Several interviewees reported that S2SSP had changed the nature of professional development in their schools, affecting the structure of relationships for the better where

they spoke of the opportunities for learning with and from peers. These changes looked very much like the impact of school-to-school collaboration predicted in the literature (e.g. Buysee *et al*., 2003; Vescio *et al*., 2008; Hargreaves, 2011; Hill, 2011; National College, 2013).

The four areas highlighted above provide an integrated view of factors that impacted on whether or not S2SSP was a success or failure for individuals and groups using it. The outcomes were mixed and show an amalgamation of factors which affected the outcomes. Some of these were organisational and could be addressed through establishing clear protocols and establishing structured opportunities for shared professional development. A surprising element was the prevailing 'human' element of joint endeavours where the emotional toll and quality of the relationships between participants appears to have had a greater impact than anticipated. Issues around motivation and trust readily came to the fore. There were palpable testimonies from some who clearly felt aggrieved at various aspects of the peer review process. Some of these were linked to mistrust in the motivation and capability of reviewers. Others were scathing about the lack of professional protocols and how feedback and outcomes of the peer reviews were communicated. This seems to be linked to the use of, or the misuse, of appropriate language to convey weaknesses and offer challenges.

The four aspects of Motivation, Trust, Communication and Professional Development presented above encapsulates the main areas of the S2SSP process which users felt had the most impact on its successful use. Whilst there are examples of positive experiences for many, one of the main areas of scrutiny arose around the need to provide evidence of

impact to validate claims of effectiveness. For others, there are aspects such as ensuring clarity of purpose and commitment, the lack of which causes confusion and discontent for some. These aspects question how key contentious elements can scupper the best laid plans unless they are addressed (Earl and Katz, 2005; Hadfield and Chapman, 2009; Chapman and Muijs, 2014).

5.7.3   *Research Question 3: the sustainability of S2SSP*

Participants in this study talked about several factors that they believed affected the long-term sustainability of S2SSP: reciprocity; enduring benefits; mobility of school leaders; and adaptation. The literature on school-to-school collaboration (e.g. (e.g. Chapman *et al*., 2010; Hargreaves, 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016) has suggested that school networks can address these issues through appropriate structures and processes. This section briefly summarises participants' beliefs about the threats to sustainability and the degree to which they believed that S2SSP was structured in a way that was likely to cope with these threats.

One of the stated aims of S2SSP is to create a sustainable partnership for school improvement. This 'sustainability' aim aligns with reports by central government (e.g. Stoll *et al*., 2006; Hill, 2011) and the literature on a desirable effect of school-to-school collaboration (e.g. Chapman *et al*., 2010; Hargreaves, 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016). The literature has suggested several ways in which a school network could create the conditions for its own sustainability. Following on from Wenger (1998), a culture of school leaders supporting each other with a sense of 'all being in the same boat' needed to be fostered (Hill , 2011). This plea for a sense

of common purpose echoes the ethos of co-operatives. In contrast, Chapman *et al.*, (2010), Hargreaves (2011) and Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that creating structures and processes is the basis for sustainability. Structures and processes could make collaboration easier and less costly, reducing the amount of time spent in negotiation. They could also create contractual obligations which make it more difficult for a school to withdraw, increasing the incentive to try to make things work.

Interviewees' responses suggest several threats to these hopes: extrinsic motivation; turnover amongst senior leaders; unfair allocation of resources; diminishing benefits and lack of challenge. Reliance on a sense of 'being in it together' is vulnerable to each of these threats. When schools are required to operate in a competitive environment in which they are each held accountable through government Inspections and Reports there is always an incentive for extrinsic rather intrinsic motivation. The pressure this exerts on school leaders can increase turnover and discourage applicants (Oplatka and Tamir, 2009). Building processes and structures that bind schools together looks more likely to resist these pressures and more likely to build a sense of common identity. A network that has agreed processes which fairly distribute the burden of providing the resources needed by the partnership should also address the threat that one school may feel disadvantaged. However, this is bound to be challenging in an environment in which it is the relative than absolute performance of schools that is judged. The threat is reduced if schools are in a network with other schools with which they are not in competition or they are operating in a locality with an increasing school-age population.

The final two threats (diminishing benefits and lack of challenge) appear more difficult for either of the solutions that have been offered to the sustainability problem. They are also difficult to quantify and more evidence is needed about their severity. Although some of the interviewees were concerned about the possibilities, they were looking to the future rather than describing their current experience.

5.7.4   Research Question 4: The S2SSP evaluation process

Self-evaluation by schools has emerged in the context of a national system of accountability to central government enforced through a system of public (Ofsted) inspection. This is a high stakes inspection system which can result in schools being placed in 'special measures' and which can lead to a change of leadership or ultimately lead to school closure. From this perspective, school self-evaluation has been interpreted (Perryman, 2006; Ozga, 2009) as 'self-discipline'. Schools have internalised the requirements of the state to the extent that they can be trusted to keep themselves in line. When interviewees referred to Ofsted they did not appear to question the standards they attributed to Ofsted, although they did believe that S2SSP offered a more trusting and less stressful way of monitoring adherence to these standards. This contrasts with advocacy of school self-evaluation (e.g. Devos, 1998; MacBeath, 2005) that has urged schools to find their own voice. Interviewees generally accepted Ofsted and its requirements as 'a fact of life'. However, although interviewees did not challenge standards and priorities dictated by the state, they did generally trust their peers in S2SSP to offer a fairer judgement than Ofsted of performance against those standards.

There is evidence (e.g. Hofman, Dijkstra and Adriaan Hofman, 2009; Schildhamp, Visscher and Luyten, 2009) that school self-evaluation can be a vehicle for school improvement. Nonetheless, the literature on school self-review (e.g. Kyriakides and Campbell, 2004; Janssens and van Amelvoort, 2008) has identified several challenges: credibility (can school self-review be trusted?); nature of teachers' professionalism (can we assume that they are motivated by the common good and can we assume they have deep professional knowledge?); ownership (can we assume that teachers possess and are ready to use a voice that is independent of state judgements?); stakeholder agreement (do the interests of stakeholders agree on what counts as school improvement?); school climate (how can a school create a climate that is conducive to effective school self-evaluation?); and the ethics of comparison (how can we judge negative effects of evaluation upon a teacher relative to negative effects on pupils of bad teaching?).

These challenges have been identified in the context of self-evaluation by single schools. Networks like the EP S2SSP seek to overcome these challenges through peer evaluation that is embedded in ties between schools that facilitate challenge within a climate of trust. These school-to-school evaluation systems address the primary problem of credibility (or validity) through external evaluation by trusted peers. Despite this, a number of interviewees believed that credibility and fairness would increase if there was some input that was external to the network as a whole.

A commission established by the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT, 2018) related credibility to accountability suggesting that 'top-down' accountability (schools accountable to government) should be replaced by 'lateral accountability' (schools

responsible to other schools in their network). This implies a much more tight-knit network than the S2SSP network established by EP. The interviewees in this study did not refer to being accountable to the other schools in the partnership for outcomes, although some intimated that a sense of loyalty and responsibility was a feature.

The formal accountability system for schools in England affords precedence to central government inspection processes eg. Ofsted, which may be supplemented by oversight from an academy trusts' board of governors responsible for school 'self-management'. According to Brill *et al*., (2018) this system is not working well. Most interviewees in this study stated that they preferred S2SSP to the Ofsted Inspection process, but, in general, they did not believe that school governors were equipped to take responsibility for accountability in this system.

Views were also mixed about the degree of transferability of the S2SSP system. Interviewees saw the strengths of the system as possibly particular to the local characteristics of the network. It was sufficiently small to foster trust and sufficiently homogeneous to foster belief in the credibility of reviewers from other schools. Some doubts were expressed about the feasibility of overlaps between S2SSP and Multi-Academy Trusts. In essence, S2SSP was a rather loose-knit network which was in competition with Multi-Academy Trusts that operated tight-knit networks.

CHAPTER 6   CONCLUSION

6.1   Introduction

This study set out to research a key development area in education in England with a view to establishing the extent to which the introduction of a school improvement and self-evaluation tool (S2SSP) has been effective in supporting school leaders in raising standards in participating schools. The findings are particularly relevant to members of EP, who are the main facilitators of training in the use of S2SSP. The study may also be of interest to a wider school improvement focused audience in this metropolitan area and elsewhere, for example, Regional School Commissioners, who operate under a DfE directive on school improvement, and the Local Authority, which is still required to have broad strategic oversight of educational outcomes for the city. Current school policy in England relies heavily on the judgements of school leaders and their ability to self-evaluate on school improvement. The Ofsted School Inspection remit specifically focuses on school leaders' ability to make accurate judgements on their own school improvement position. This reliance is part of the justification for an emphasis on school autonomy. Therefore, policy encourages us to take seriously what school leaders have to say about the effectiveness of initiatives in which they are involved.

In attempting to answer the research questions, the data analysis highlighted a number of issues which were central to the level of success of S2SSP. These findings are summarised in Section 6.2 which answers Research Question 1 using the evidence from

participants. Section 6.3 - 6.5 answer Research Questions 2 to 4. These sections comment on the research in the light of the model presented in Figure 5.1. That figure highlights four main themes in the operation of S2SSP: motivation, trust, communication and professional development. The concluding comments note tensions between some of the sub-themes within each of the main themes. For example, within the main theme of motivation there is a tension between 'moral purpose' and 'meeting Ofsted requirements'. The concluding comments note how the success of the partnership depends on finding ways to live with these tensions. These sections also note the importance of the relationships between the four themes. When tensions within a theme are successfully resolved or accommodated then there are positive spill-overs to the other themes. When tensions within a theme become problematic they create negative spill-overs into the other themes. Limitations of this research are discussed in Section 6.6. The chapter ends with Section 6.7 which offers some comments on the implications of the study.

6.2 Research Question 1 Summary: To what extent do school leaders believe the S2SSP model supports and influences reliable school improvement and raises standards?

This section summarises the views of senior leaders and middle leaders on the impact of S2SSP on school improvement. The first key finding is that most of the participating school leaders regarded S2SSP as effective in supporting at least some aspects of school improvement. However, this view was not universally shared. Therefore, it makes sense to consider the criteria that school leaders used to judge the effectiveness

of S2SSP. How were differences between judgements related to school circumstances and culture? In what ways were differences in opinions related to how S2SSP was organised and experienced by individual groups?

Senior leaders largely accepted the academic performance framework within which schools in England are presently expected to operate. Interviewees almost universally treated raising pupil attainment as the indicator of school improvement. There was little evidence of schools taking ownership of the purpose of education in the manner suggested by the literature on 'moral purpose' in school improvement. The focus on pupil attainment was accepted, but most interviewees believed that other school leaders within their network were better equipped than Ofsted inspectors to judge school performance and school practices.

Most, but not all, senior and middle leaders also regarded comparison between schools as a natural and valuable school improvement process. Improving the salience and accuracy of judgements made in evaluative reviews of their own schools seemed to lie at the heart of this reasoning. The minority of interviewees who did not regard this comparison as useful based their judgement on a belief that reviewers from other schools lacked the experience and knowledge to judge what was achievable in their school and a belief that practices that 'worked' in other schools were not easily transferable to their own school. The value of comparison was not contested on grounds that reviewers were focusing on the wrong outcomes.

S2SSP largely resolved the motivation tensions (*Figure 5.1*) between 'moral purpose',

'meeting Ofsted requirements' and 'professional standing' by accepting the priorities in

government policy. Moral purpose was exercised within the framing of Ofsted

judgements. The strains in these accommodations became apparent chiefly in relation to

professional standing. Some schools that were finding it more challenging to meet

Ofsted requirements found it harder to sustain their motivation towards S2SSP when

they were feeling threats to their professional standing.

Interviewees also believed that S2SSP had created a new set of professional

relationships between schools that added to schools' capacity to improve (as depicted in

the lower left quadrant in *Figure 5.1*). This increase in capacity was observed in access

to professional expertise beyond the school and in the opportunities for professional

development that the network provided. School leaders spoke of the opportunity to

evaluate their own schools using the professionalism of the 'group' which they believed

set the scene for an honest, relevant and up to date school improvement review. Most

participants perceived positive relationships between professional development, trust

and communication as depicted in *Figure 5.1*. They contrasted this process with the

high-stakes performance orientation review associated with Ofsted Inspections,

believing that the peer reviews for the most part led to the development of a more

'rigorous' improvement strategy which involved leaders at different levels in

participating schools (Robinson *et al.,* 2011; Carvalho and Goodyear, 2014). In line

with what was suggested in the literature, a high level of trust was required for this

'social capital' to be effective (Hargreaves, 2011; Matthews and Berwick, 2013).

Middle leaders generally agreed that one of the key benefits of S2SSP was the sharing

and pooling of staffing as a resource, and in particular hum resource and expertise, especially for smaller schools (Hill, 2011; Hill *et al*., 2012).The perspective of developing a learning 'community of practice' (Wenger, 1998; Carvalho and Goodyear, 2014) was evident in leaders' assertions that S2SSP had helped them to develop higher-order professional skills through a system which impacted on the effectiveness of whole school leadership and management. Senior leaders generally reported that S2SSP provided them with an opportunity to engage in high quality professional development in action rather than theory. Senior leaders stated that they valued being able to share problems within a professional community which understood the complexities. This was in contrast to their previous experiences of feelings isolated in their posts. Many of the school leaders reported that they had much to gain from working with others who were facing similar issues around school improvement strategy such as governance, finance, staffing and dealing with the external environment within similar contexts.

Some school leaders felt that working in senior positions tended to leave them more isolated. Senior leaders suggested that the time invested in their collaborative enterprises allowed them to naturally feel more confident and supported (Wenger, 1998). They believed that collaborating with others through S2SSP had helped to combat a sense of isolation for some and saved money through joint ventures by pooling expertise.

School leaders who expressed a positive view of S2SSP emphasised the role of collaboration in developing their schools as 'learning communities'. That is, they related S2SSP more immediately to improvement *processes* than to improvement

outcomes. In line with what Stoll *et al.,* (2006); Louis and Marks, (2008) and Meirs and Buckley, (2010) suggest, the question of how the collaborative process supported and sustained enquiry and knowledge generation arose (Chapman and Muijs, 2014). Learning through the process, rather than having a specific end goal, was seen by some as valuable in itself and helped towards developing a school improvement culture (Wenger, 1998).

Nonetheless, whilst most participants felt that the S2SSP programme was a good thing, they believed that the process also provided challenges, one of which was the need for allowing time to embed. This was particularly true for those who were at the early stages of undertaking peer reviews: finding their feet and navigating how it may need to be adapted to suit individual group circumstances and leaders. It also appeared to be the case that navigating the dynamics of the 'people' within the groups proved challenging for some and took time, even within friendship groups where the desire to collaborate was shared (Wenger, 1998). This was true in a few instances where strong characters were thought to have had undue influences over events which for some created a negative 'mood'. Those senior leaders who sought out S2SSP as an evaluation tool to support school improvement were understandably more driven to ensure positive outcomes. They felt compelled to get something out of the time and energy they had invested in conducting the peer reviews.

For those who felt S2SSP was not a particularly useful process, there were two main sources of concern the presence of which sometimes led to a failure to sustain the process beyond initial reviews: one centred on the issues of trust with some questioning

the motives and capabilities of those carrying out reviews (Hofstede, 2010; Matthews and Berwick, 2013; Gu *et al.,* 2015); the other centred on a concern that the S2SSP process depended on senior leaders choosing to collaborate with colleagues with whom they had already built up professional trust (Hargreaves, 2003; Fullan *et al*., 2012). Without this initial element of trust in the impartiality of others, the process was seen as likely to fail. These concerns illustrate how an unresolved tension in one of the quadrants of *Figure 5.1* may spawn problems elsewhere in the model. Trust was more natural when school leaders felt that they knew each other generating camaraderie but also a risk of cosiness. This trust spilled over into a belief in the motivation of others. Other leaders who felt excluded from this shared experience and leaders who felt that their professional knowledge was not sufficiently respected by others were more inclined to be cautious about the motivation of others.

Some senior leaders pointed to areas of contention where it was felt that even with the best of intentions, the reality of getting the process to work for everyone proved problematic because of the complex nature and uniqueness of school contexts. The overall feeling from those school leaders who felt they were coerced into working with a 'more successful' school leader was that S2SSP was inappropriate for them as they were already burdened enough with external scrutiny and advice. A few school leaders appeared to be openly hostile to the idea of S2SSP because they felt that what was promised through the collaborative process did not materialise: an absence perhaps of what Wenger (1998) termed 'the glue' to hold it together. It would appear that for some, being open to the collaborative process from the beginning was an essential element in

its success. There was a stated need to ensure all stakeholders were on board with the process (Chapman and Hadfield, 2009).

Middle leaders who were not wholly supportive of the S2SSP process, were sceptical of whether the evaluation process was really a 'whole school' endeavour or just an exercise for school leaders. They were not convinced about the clarity of purpose. Some middle leaders in secondary schools in particular felt that the process was mainly 'for senior leaders by senior leaders' and had little relevance for them in their day to day work on improving teaching and learning.

Promoters of MATs also see the multi-academy system as helping to combat isolation as school leaders are compelled to work together. However, opinions were expressed by some respondents that MATs could cause groups to draw inwards, potentially creating a protectionist environment. The same could, of course, be said of S2SSP groups.

6.3   Research Question 2 Summary: What factors do school leaders believe have affected the success of S2SSP, including barriers and advantages?

This study identified four factors that interviewees thought had influenced the success of S2SSP: motivation, trust, professional development and communication (*Figure 5.1*). The following summary highlights ways in which these four themes are related.

Some of the literature (Berwick, 2010; West, 2010; Hill, 2011; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Owen, 2015) has emphasised 'shared moral purpose' as a key motivator for

successful school collaborations. This assertion suggests that 'public service motivation' (Francois, 2000; Gregg *et al.,* 2011; Davies, 2018) will drive effective school collaboration in the public interest. The evidence in this study suggests a mixture of motivations. Some school leaders espoused motivation to work together to meet performance requirements laid down by central government. They also indicated that they were motivated by esteem from their peers. Therefore, it is not easy to work out what participants believed about the importance of different motivations for the effective operation of their network. There was, however, a broad consensus that 'common purpose' was important.

Therefore, whilst the participants in this study appeared to largely accept the government's school performance culture as a given, they did talk about their collective purpose in a way that was difficult to reconcile with the government's espousal of competition between schools as a mechanism for school improvement (as anticipated by Adnett and Davies, 2003). If we interpret recent policy through the words of participants in this study it looks like there has been a shift in policy from expecting comparison between schools to be driven by parental choices to comparison between schools driven by professional esteem in the context of the judgements and sanctions of government inspectors.

An emphasis on motivation by moral purpose has been frequently related to the importance of collective ownership of a school network (Fullan, 2003; Miers and Buckley, 2010; Chapman and Muijs, 2011; Robinson, 2011). Participants in S2SSP felt that the system worked best when all the members in a group had '*bought into a shared*

vision'. This involved a more limited sense of 'moral purpose' in readiness to work for improvement in other schools through school review. Schools were conscious of how much effort other schools put into this process and the stability of the networks appeared to depend on schools sticking to a reciprocal arrangement (Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves, 2013).This included a willingness to accept the priorities of a school when determining the focus of a review. Adaptations of the S2SSP to fit particular situations were viewed by participants as indicators of the usefulness of the S2SSP model. There was general consensus among senior leaders that S2SSP built a keener sense of solidarity among participants which was viewed as a positive aspect.

The second major theme in factors affecting the success of S2SSP was again the issue of 'trust'. Participants spoke of trust as dependent on belief in the motivation and knowledge of others. The success of a review depended on reviewers being genuinely motivated by a desire to see another school improve and by the reviewed schools to trust in this motivation. It also required reviewers to have some knowledge and experience to offer and for the reviewed to believe that this knowledge and experience was relevant. Some appeared to be particularly anxious about how reviewers might use the knowledge about teachers and the school that they acquired through the review. Conducting a review created opportunities for reviewers to identify very good teachers they might wish to employ in their own schools. Participants did largely believe that S2SSP had created environments in which there could be frank and open discussions. They did generally believe that this had 'opened minds' to new ways of working where participants could become '*architects of their own futures*' (Carvalho and Goodyear, 2014).

Participants believed that it would be difficult to maintain the necessary sense of shared motivation and trust in a large network of schools. Being established members of consortiums or clusters in local areas within similar contexts was thought to be a good starting point in providing a stable and non-competitive environment (Feys and Devos, 2015). Pre-existing friendships between senior leaders was believed to provide a firm basis for trust in the review process. However, participants also recognised that high levels of trust between schools and their leaders could drift into complacency. A shared vision could turn into an accepted way of doing things and an acceptance of levels of outcome that could be judged unsatisfactory by others. Some participants believed that the risk of complacency would be reduced if at least some of the review team were not previously known to those being reviewed.

The third theme was communication. There was less certainty about what constituted high quality practice in communication. This may be because participants believed that the nature of communication had to be sensitive to the particular context, not least in the level of pre-existing trust between reviewers and reviewed. The manner in which feedback was communicated was considered to be very important. Nonetheless, interviewees largely agreed that being 'challenged' was an integral part of the process and that school leaders should accept the outcomes, negative and positive, as constructive advice from other professionals. This was with the proviso that constructive advice still needed to be communicated in a professional and supportive manner.

Participants spoke of the impact of how senior leaders had communicated the purpose and process of S2SSP within their school. Middle leaders in some schools believed that S2SSP had been a process fashioned between school leaders and imposed upon them. The communication was not simply about the way in which things were phrased by colleagues when reporting back on reviews. Middle leaders felt that they needed to be included in conversations on the rationale for undertaking the process which would allow them to develop their contributions more and provide them a meaningful voice in the process.

The final theme was professional development. Participants believed that readiness to participate in S2SSP was maintained by the opportunities for professional development that it provided. Senior leaders contrasted a previous 'lonely' professional experience with being able to share problems and developments with peers in other schools. They believed that they had developed professionally through their interactions with colleagues. These interactions had provided new ideas and opportunities to articulate and reflect on their experience.

Senior leaders also believed that S2SSP had provided good professional development for middle leaders who had become crucial members of 'change' teams. Senior leaders were particularly supportive of the '*Champions for Improvement*' element of the process which offered follow-on and more focussed training for middle leaders. This, some suggested, extended high quality joint development practice (JDP) for middle leaders which helped sustain continuous school improvement between schools. This was particularly evident where middle leaders were given the opportunity to project-

manage key development areas of joint relevance. Through the '*Champions for improvement*' process, middle leaders reported that they had developed leadership skills which spread out horizontally as well as vertically across their schools; creating elements of what (Hargreaves, 2013; Chapman *et al.*, 2016; Drew *et al.,* 2016), called a 'flattening of hierarchies' and a breaking down of barriers in their collaborative practice. This in turn appeared to alleviate the pressures of external scrutiny and acted as a conduit for extended opportunities for sharing school improvement experiences within a supportive environment.

A number of senior leaders believed that the process also helped middle leaders to take ownership of and articulate their own vision for particular school improvement areas: an outcome explored by authors such as Meirs and Buckley (2010), which they termed '*incremental innovations*': What begins as 'sharing' practice becomes 'co-construction of practice' (Hargreaves (2011). The small amount of mainly qualitative evidence put forward in this study would suggest that giving middle leaders the autonomy and space to grow and develop was instrumental in supporting higher order school improvement and professional development within some S2SSP groups.

So the dominant message in the data was belief in positive reinforcement between the four quadrants of the model in *Figure 1*. Risks to this positive assessment were only articulated by a minority of participants and they focused on tensions within each quadrant. There was a tension between school and professional determined 'moral purpose' and adherence to the definition of success laid out by government policy. The government definition of success allowed limited room for variation in the purposes that

were pursued by school leaders and constraints on their performance that followed from their circumstances. The main tension in the trust quadrant lay in the dependence of trust on familiarity and the risk of familiarity drifting into lack of challenge and usefulness. The main tension in communication lay in the need for a shared language and the risk that participants would learn how to say the 'right thing' whilst the communication drifted away from the reality of the lived experience in different schools. The main tension in professional development lay in the distribution of the costs and benefits. Since it was very hard to measure these, there was always a risk that some schools might feel they were not getting a good deal.

6.4 Research Question 3 Summary: Is the S2SSP system sustainable in the longer term?

Most participants believed that S2SSP would endure, at least for a while. They identified a number of factors they believed would affect its sustainability. To some extent, participants' views on sustainability could be seen as reflecting their expectation that S2SSP would continue to benefit from the factors they had identified as contributing to its success.

Given the emphasis that participants placed on trust, they naturally stressed the importance of partners' reciprocal behaviour and the persistence of '*shared and accepted aims and goals*' between the schools (Chapman and Muijs, 2014). They identified several threats. First, they were concerned that schools might become weary of the network's demand on their resources. They referred to the length of time (not

least in review and progress meetings and demands on middle leaders) it took to carry out S2SSP in each school and believed that in a few cases this had led a few schools to abandon the process after the first round. They also referred to tensions created by difficult internal circumstances that from time to time affected individual schools. They believed that attempting to juggle issues in their own schools (particularly if the school was in a vulnerable position) could result in a school becoming totally inward facing and insecure about exposing itself to external judgement. Given participants' belief that it took quite a long time for relationships between senior leaders to build a fund of trust, it was also not surprising that they believed that participation in S2SSP could be threatened by the arrival of a new headteacher.

Doubts were expressed by some participants about whether the benefits from review by partner schools would be sustained. That is, they expressed some concern that they would exhaust the knowledge held by colleagues in a few reviews and then they would just get more of the same. Participants who expressed these concerns wondered whether voices external to the network would be needed to generate continued and credible challenge. Some felt that it would be difficult to maintain impartiality and keep the process on track without employing an 'external facilitator' to oversee and manage it. They suggested that professional distance reduced the risk of emotions or strong characters overtaking events, which had the potential to cause some to disengage from the process.

Participants did identify professional development for senior and middle leaders as a key outcome of S2SSP. For example, many participants believed that the '*Champions*

for improvement' process had been nurtured and had developed leadership skills. From the perspective of most of the middle leaders in the study, S2SSP created the environment for them to grow within a safe and supportive environment with their own points of reference. Being recognised as key school improvement members both within and across schools helped to motivate and sustain their professional endeavours (Stoll *et al.*, 2006). Middle leaders spoke of the benefits of having ownership of initiatives which they were allowed to manage under their own velocity. They developed their own 'vision', rather than working in parallel with or focussing on bringing someone else's to fruition and created their own networks within networks and building their own sense of camaraderie and solidarity (Hill, 2011).

The more formal nature of being designated C*hampions for improvement*' appeared to have had a motivating effect on middle leaders, leading to longer-lasting and effective working groups (Earl, Watson and Katz, 2003; Hargreaves, 2011). Therefore, the sustainability of these benefits was central to views about the sustainability of S2SSP as a process. In principle it is fairly easy to imagine this as an on-going process as new middle leaders are developed. However, this needs to be set against the risks of innovation fatigue or the process becoming reduced to a routine.

Finally, the literature on school-to-school collaboration has suggested that formal structures and processes are critical for long term sustainability. However, it appeared that S2SSP was a development tool rather than a rigid structure. The emphasis seemed to be about 'working together on a journey' rather than working within a structure with pre-defined outcomes. It appears that enquiry and pursuit of knowledge, intellectual

challenge and shared understanding became the driver. Whilst most senior leaders in this study began with the initial framework presented through the EP S2SSP programme, it became clear that those who continued to work together were also those who 'adapted' the framework to suit their own purposes (Robinson, 2011). The sustainability of S2SSP appeared to rest on senior leaders being prepared to be flexible and a willingness to adapt structures to suit their changing circumstances.

6.5   **Research Question 4 Summary: Does the S2SSP model provide a useful tool for self-evaluation by schools?**

The usefulness of the S2SSP school evaluation process can be judged in terms of the interests of the participants or in terms of interests of society as a whole. From the perspective of the participants in this study, the general judgement must be that it is useful up to a point. Most of the participants believed that the process had helped their schools and had fostered professional development. They believed it provided a focus and whilst being open to adaptation to perceived needs of different schools. If we judge a process by its acceptance amongst the professionals using it, this study provides evidence of usefulness.

From a broad perspective it is more difficult to judge. One debate about 'school self-evaluation' has focused on whether this involves schools finding their authentic voices, or whether it involves schools exercising self-discipline to bring them in to line with the dictates of central government. The terms in which school leaders spoke of the benefits of S2SSP suggests 'self-discipline' rather than developing a distinctive voice for

participating schools. Nevertheless, the S2SSP process does give schools scope to concentrate on their chosen areas for development and participants reported this as a clear benefit when compared with an Ofsted inspection.

A school evaluation process like S2SSP may also be judged in terms of its credibility. Any judgment about credibility rests on assumptions about the appropriate criteria to use when evaluating a school and how to assess the performance of the school relative to reasonable expectations. An observer who is confident that the performance of a school can be fairly judged by an impartial outsider is always likely to be concerned that when schools judge each other they will be too generous. An observer who believes that schools are driven by pure public service motivation and that they are able to make fair judgements about the challenges a school faces is likely to believe that a process like S2SSP will necessarily be a good thing. The evidence in this study suggests that these two positions fail to capture the lived experience of schools that are constrained by complex environments and driven by a mixture of motives.

6.6   Limitations of the study

My aim has been to add to the body of evidence about school-to-school support through a study of the way that participants have experienced one scheme in one locality. The study is based on 'enquiry' and sets out to discover rather than gather information (Denscombe, 2010). It captures the views of participants in a school-to-school support process in one metropolitan area. A study of this kind necessarily has two main limitations: particularity to the time and place and social desirability bias.

The study involved a relatively small number of school leaders in schools in one metropolitan area. However, it does provide some insights into the experiences of those who took up S2SSP (26 school leaders surveyed representing 37% of the 70 leaders who were originally contacted, plus 21 subsequent in-depth interviews with school leaders). At the time of completing this study, S2SSP reported that over 120 (about a third) schools in the metropolitan area had taken up S2SSP training but they had not yet measured the impact on school improvement. Therefore, whilst this study includes a wide range of voices of participants in this scheme, it cannot claim to tell the reader what happens in other school-to-school support networks. Moreover, the study provides evidence of the views of participants and these views are constrained by the particular experiences of those individuals and influenced by their level of commitment to the scheme.

The study uses evidence from anonymous questionnaires and interviews. There is a risk of social desirability bias in the evidence from interviews, since interviewees may wish to present their views in a way that they think is acceptable to the interviewer. The consistency between the general judgement in the anonymous questionnaires and the interviews suggests that the social desirability bias problem was not that great. This optimistic interpretation is supported by the willingness of a minority of interviewees to be open about their lack of confidence in S2SSP.

I have attempted to remain impartial and to avoid 'making the case for' or 'selling' the product as far as possible and to let participants relate their own experiences. However,

my professional position and experience will have influenced me in developing my own opinions and are naturally shaped by my own ideological views which may come through in the narrative.

6.7   **Implications**

This final section first suggests some implications for this S2SSP scheme and then offers some suggestions for research in this field.

First of all, this study suggests there is good reason to continue with the scheme. This is not a trivial matter because school-to-school networks do take a lot of effort and participants commented on the danger that people might become weary with the amount of time they are putting in. Most of the participants in the S2SSP scheme believed that the benefits outweighed the costs both in time and effort. However, it should be noted that neither the costs nor the benefits were being systematically measured. This could turn out to be a problem if imagined or expected benefits did not materalise or if lack of independent evidence undermines belief in the existence of real benefits. There is also a problem of how success or failure is measured. Some would question how outcomes can be evidenced without using comparative data on student outcomes? These are challenges which the system users need to consider.

Second, participants were asked for their suggestions on how S2SSP could be improved and these are summarised in *Table 6.1*. Some of these recommendations are not easy to act upon, but there are some general themes. Middle leaders asked for more

responsibility and earlier involvement in the process. School-to-school support is sometimes portrayed as part of a movement towards more distributed leadership, but it is not necessarily experienced in that way. Conversely, it might be argued that a review process needs to have scope to challenge middle leaders and this challenge may not necessarily come from other middle leaders. There are competing arguments here that are not easy to resolve. There are also some contradictions in participants' recommendations. There is a call for the process to be focused on evidence, but also a call to move away from data-led reviews. There is not a clear consensus here about what should count as evidence or how evidence should be interpreted. There is also a question mark over accountability and to whom or what S2SSP groups should be accountable? This creates a tension at the heart of any review process and a need to consider if the time and resources invested in programmes such as S2SSP should be able to grasp the opportunity to show evidence of impact on student outcomes.

Table 6.1   *Participant Recommendations for successful S2SSP Reviews*

	Factors to be considered	Participant Recommendations
1.	**Trust** is a defining factor in successful outcomes	Establish mechanism from the outset for building up group relationships and navigating team dynamics Ensure reviewers are well-trained within a mutually agreed peer review framework Groups with some professional history trust each other more Trust middle leaders to engage equally in the process
2.	Importance of f**airness and consistency**	Non-defensive and open professional dialogue Adopt agreed protocols and contract first Willingness to engage on equal terms Involve middle leaders from the start
3.	Ensure full **commitment** from the whole team/community	Each school in group to put in equal effort Create a sense of joint local pride between schools in the group
4.	Agree aims and rationale Be **open-minded** and **adaptable**	Review the form of the review and bespoke elements where needed Be flexible in light of school contexts
5.	Ensure outcomes are clearly **evidence based**	Have a clearly understood focus for reviews Avoid subjective commenting Be evaluative rather than subjective
6.	Provide **challenge** but agree on how this is communicated	Have a clear 'statement of intent' from the outset Provide challenge within mutually agreed framework Take an honest but supportive approach to avoid possible friction and ill-feeling
7.	Consider an **external facilitator/validator** in the initial stages	External moderator to provide credibility and validity Agree level of accountability with deadlines
8.	Have **less** focus on **data** led reviews	Do not treat a peer review as a practice Ofsted inspection Reduce the time taken to carry out reviews
9.	Limit the **number** of schools	Larger numbers dilute the trust element Small groups of 3 in S2SSP recommended

The literature on school-to-school support has emphasised a value in formal structure and process, yet the emphasis in S2SSP is on relationships and adaptability. There are plausible arguments for and against each of these emphases. The participants in this study stressed the importance of trust and challenge. Ideally these might work together: more trust might allow more challenge. But there may also be a tension if participants

choose not to challenge because they do not want to undermine trust that has been built up. This tension may be related to the recommendation for small groups of schools. This would help to build up relationships, but it may encourage a degree of cosiness. It was suggested by a participant that one answer could be a system where every two years one school leaves the group of three to join another group. This might foster the sense of external scrutiny and challenge that some participants favoured and could also disseminate expertise. Another possibility could be some review of the process itself. Of course this would demand more resources, but if the scheme is to have a long-term future it needs to have some internal mechanisms that keep pushing it forward rather than settling for 'just going through the motions'.

6.8 **Summary**

The outcomes of the study suggest that S2SSP provides a credible and semi-externally validated school improvement tool for those using it. As with most alliances, the strength of S2SSP appears to lie in the 'social capital' derived from working within a supportive 'learning community' with the associated benefits arising from that. Enabling different categories of teams, such as *Champions for improvement*, to lead the 'change' process was regarded as highly effective for participants in this study.

The findings indicate that a rigid structure isn't what is required for users of S2SSP, although this would be at odds with being able to determine any measurable benefits. The programme appeared to work best where space was made for teams to be flexible in their approach which helped to sustain it. Where it worked well, participants shared a

common desire to engage in and contribute to 'system change'. This has the potential to shape the landscape of ownership of school improvement for school leaders in the metropolitan area. It is surprising that consideration has not been given to the need to gather some evidence of measurable impact related to student outcomes. This is particularly so as users of the S2SSP programme in this study expressed a wish to have the impact of their work officially recognised by Ofsted. The Education Partnership may wish to consider through their training programme how impact can be uniformly measured.

As a professional doctorate, this study adds to the knowledge base for the Education Partnership advocating the use of the S2SSP programme. As the use of the programme and its impact has not previously been researched, this study will shed light on its likely impact on school improvement in the city and will inform future organisation of the training provided. This will be of interest to present and potential users of the programme. It may also be of interest to practising school leaders and co-ordinators of other types of school networks and partnerships who may benefit from the new knowledge gained through the addition of an intensive case study to the researched field.

The chapter ends with two suggestions for future research. First, the study has noted that participants expressed more mixed motivations than has sometimes been suggested in the literature that has cited 'moral purpose' as a key driver. It is hard for school leaders to avoid mixed motives when they are subject to such pressures. They are expected to fall in line with government (hierarchical) priorities. They are expected to

respond to parental (market) wishes. School-to-school support networks do not exist in a vacuum. Future research might provide us with a better picture of how these competing pressures are bearing on school leaders' motivations. Research might also add to our knowledge of the consequences of these mixed motives.

Second, this study has gathered evidence at one point in time at the early stages of a school-to-school collaboration. It has raised questions about the sustainability of the network: what are the consequences of senior leader turnover? How can a balance of trust and challenge be maintained in a longer term? How can a network avoid settling into complacency? The value of school networks depends on how they develop over time and this looks like an important topic for future research.

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LIST OF APPENDICES

Press Article:

1. **City Post Newspaper Report on BEP 17.3.15**

City Education Partnership official launch

Respected former education secretary Estelle Morris will take charge of improving performance at city schools in her new role as head of the City Education Partnership.

The partnership, a rapidly growing group of more than 300 school headteachers, has appointed Baroness Morris of Yardley as chairman as it takes over responsibility for school improvement from the city council.

Baroness Morris said:

"*This is a most exciting time in the history of the city's education. The creation of EP is an important milestone on the journey towards a model where schools are responsible for their own improvement and the improvement of others. Now more than ever schools need to work together and continue the strong support school leaders have for each other. All the research tells us this works best and you have many teaching schools and leaders of education to draw on. But schools must not be isolated from each other and need to be part of a wider education community*".

Sir Mike Tomlinson, City Education Commissioner said:

"*I welcome this decision by the City Council. It is crucial that these new arrangements prove effective for all schools in the city. This model of school to school working has proved to be effective in other parts of England*." Elkes, N. 2015, Business Life Statement.

2. **19.10.15 City Council Press Office**

Education Partnership (EP) is holding its official launch today, Monday 19th October, after a full, vibrant and effective first month in its strategic partnership with the City Council. The partnership has been created to celebrate the success of the City's schools, galvanise them to support other schools, and so raise achievement and ambition for the city's children and young people as part of the City Challenge.

Baroness Estelle Morris, Chair of the Board said of EP:

"*The strategic partnership is probably one of the most important thing to have happened to the city's schools for quite a few years and I hope that everybody feels that they not only want to be part of it but they can't afford not to be part of it.*"

Cllr Brigid Jones (City Council) said:

"*This is an exciting time for education in the city and I'm really pleased to see the progress the Education Partnership has already made. We know that schools can achieve far more collectively than they can on their own and harnessing this power and talent we can drive through the innovation and improvement....*"

Sir Mike Tomlinson (Schools Commissioner) said:

"*Absolutely all the evidence whether here or overseas points to the fact that the best school improvement process is one where schools work with other schools*"
EP website 26.1.16 Statement on EP School-2-School Support Programme

The Model

Our powerful School-to-school Support Programme has been developed, in partnership with CfBT, as a City wide model within a national framework.

We at EP are really excited and encouraged that so many schools in our city have chosen to work together through our School to School Peer Review Programme.

There are already over 70 schools of all types who are participating, some having joined as existing partnerships and others having used the opportunity to form new clusters with EP support.

Through empowering staff and supporting and challenging each other, schools are giving themselves the opportunity to continuously improve. This will ultimately result in giving our children and young people the chance to be the best that they can be.

*invite you to a **free** one day conference for system leaders in*

Wednesday 25th February 2015
At ………………………………

SHAPING THE FUTURE

Your system leadership role as we redefine school improvement in

A personal invitation to city system leaders:

- ***Headteachers of Teaching Schools,***

- ***National Leaders of Education (NLEs),***

- ***Local Leaders of Education (LLEs),***

- ***Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs),***

- ***National Leaders of Governance (NLGs),***

- ***BEP Board and Committee members.***

School improvement in the city is changing! This conference will inform you of the latest changes and the vision for the City over the next 5 years. Importantly, it will help you to understand your key role as a system leader in the City and how you can really make a difference.

We are committed to a school-led, continuous self-improving system where *every* school can benefit through peer review, support and challenge. We know that there are many positive stories and we are determined to share and learn from top quality data and best practice in our City. At the same time we are committed to supporting our most vulnerable schools. This means working collaboratively, building capacity and challenging each other in a positive climate.

Please join us for this very special conference where all the City's system leaders come together for the first time!

- **Charlie Taylor**, CEO, National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL)

- **Steve Munby**, CEO, CfBT

- **Pank Patel**, Regional Schools Commissioner

We hope that **EVERY** city system leader will attend.

Please book your place *no later than Wednesday 11 February 2015* via the following link:
http://servicesforeducation.co.uk/index.php/learning-assessment/las-events/system-leaders-conference-2015-registration

Association of
Central Teaching Schools

DfE (Government) funded Networks and Collaborations in England from 1997

Date	Network Type	Main Features
1980-98	Improving the Quality of Education for All (IQEA)	Collaborative research began towards the end of the 1980s at the University of Cambridge. Involved teams of researchers working in partnership with colleagues from schools to identify ways in which the learning of all members of the school community could be enhanced.
1997	Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997)	A major review of the British higher education system through widening participation and lifelong learning
1998	Education Action Zone (EAZ)	LEA funded groups of schools (20) and local business stakeholders working as a Forum on school improvement in areas of high deprivation with business sponsorship. Research concluded that it failed.
1998-2005	Beacon Schools	High performing schools disseminating good practice to other schools
2001	Excellence in Cities (EiC)	Programme superseded EAZs, created to also attract private funding. Initially for secondary schools – developed mentoring system particularly for ethnic minority students which had some success.
2002-10	Improving Schools Programme (ISP)	Originally targeted on bottom 5% below floor targets but extended to include bespoke support to a wider range of schools
2002-2006	Networked Learning Communities (NLC)	National College funded set up to encourage individuals to create a community of networked learning between individuals from different environment who could learn from each other.
2002-2010	Academies (introduced by Labour Government)	Underperforming secondary schools taken out of LA/Borough control and run by independent trusts; converter academies also introduced (USA Charter style).
2003	Schools facing Challenging Circumstances (SfCC)	Development of leadership to improve systems in schools to improve outcomes for students

Date	Network Type	Main Features
		from low socio and economic backgrounds.
2003 – 2010	London Challenge	Strategy where individual Boroughs worked together to improve educational achievement outcomes in low-performing secondary schools in London.
2004-5	Primary Strategy Learning Networks (PSLN)	Groups of 5-8 lower performing primary schools (said to have been a third of primary schools nationally) collaborating with the purpose of raising standards in literacy and numeracy.
2006	Leadership Improvement Grant (LIG)	Government centrally funded to support collaboration between schools and encourage school leaders to share school improvement developments.
2006	Professional Learning Communities (PLC)	Combined DfES, GTC, NCSL study to provide examples of effective professional learning practices.
2008 onwards	Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances	Extra funding to support schools in deprived areas.
2008-20011	Greater Manchester Challenge	Part of City Challenges where Metropolitan Boroughs worked together to create a shared vision of school improvement following London Challenge Model.
2008-2011	Black Country Challenge	Part of City Challenges where smaller Local Authorities in the West Midlands worked together to create a shared vision of school improvement based on London Challenge.
2009-10	Extra Mile	Focused on raising aspirations and motivation to learn through sports.
2010 to present	Free Schools (Coalition Government initiative)	Centrally funded but privately run independent schools with own curriculum (based on Swedish model).
2011 to present	Teaching Schools	Designation awarded to Outstanding schools to pursue outreach school improvement support.
2011 to	Teaching School Alliances	Groups of Teaching Schools creating co-

Date	Network Type	Main Features
present		ordinated outreach school improvement support (more recently linked to providing support to 'at risk' schools
2012 to present	(MATS/MACS) Multi Academy Trusts or Companies	Groups of schools under the umbrella of a Multi Academy Trust with a single Board of Trustees
2013-2014	School Improvement Partnership programme (SIPP)	Tackling educational inequality in Scotland
2013	LIG	Local Improvement Groups as part of SIPP set up to improve schools facing challenges for those facing severe socio-economic inequality in their communities.

Online Article: UK 'second best education in Europe'

Sean Coughlan BBC News education correspondent

- Accessed 8 May 2014
- From the section Business

The UK is in second place among European countries and sixth overall

South Korea is top, with three other Asian countries and Finland making up the top five, in rankings from education and publishing firm, Pearson. The rankings include higher education as well as international school tests - which boosted the UK's position. Pearson chief executive John Fallon highlighted the economic importance of improving education and skills.

These latest international comparisons, compiled for Pearson by the Economist Intelligence Unit, emphasise the success of Asian education systems, with South Korea, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong in China rated as the highest performing. But it shows a strong performance from the UK, which is ranked sixth, behind only Finland in Europe and ahead of countries such as Germany, France and the United States.

Finns no longer flying

Finland, which was previously in first place, has slumped to fifth, and there has been a wider downward trend for a number of Scandinavian countries.

It also records the rise of Poland, which has been hailed for reforming its post-Communist education system and sits in the top 10.

TOP 20 EDUCATION SYSTEMS (Source: Pearson/ Economist Intelligence Unit)

- 1. South Korea
- 2. Japan
- 3. Singapore
- 4. Hong Kong
- 5. Finland
- 6. UK
- 7. Canada
- 8. Netherlands
- 9. Ireland

- 10. Poland

- 11. Denmark

- 12. Germany

- 13. Russia

- 14. United States

- 15. Australia

- 16. New Zealand

- 17. Israel

- 18. Belgium

- 19. Czech Republic

- 20. Switzerland

These rankings are based upon an amalgamation of international tests and education data - including the OECD's Pisa tests, and two major US-based studies, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (Timss) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (Pirls).

They also include higher-education graduation rates, which helped the UK to a much higher position than in Pisa tests, which saw the UK failing to make the top 20.

Innovation

So far, the education community is only at the stage of "dipping its toe" in applying the lessons of international data and research, says Mr Fallon.

"There is a huge amount of innovation in schools and colleges around the world. And the biggest challenge isn't finding brilliant teachers or high-performing schools - it's how to share that, and how you replicate that at scale."

Where Pisa test results are very high, he says, "our job is how to replicate this".

But he says globalisation will have limits and that education systems will always have a strong national and local identity - shaped by "community, culture and language".

Sir Michael Barber, a former Downing Street adviser, who is now Pearson's education adviser, says the rankings and report provide "an ever-deeper knowledge base about precisely how education systems improve themselves".

"The rise of Pacific Asian countries, which combine effective education systems with a culture that prizes effort above inherited "smartness", is a phenomenon that other countries can no longer ignore."

Russell Hobby, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "Given the criticism of schools by many of our politicians you could be forgiven for thinking that our education system compares unfavourably with others. Yet when alternative research becomes available, it shows a different picture."

Sample Report

S2SSP Feedback Report 2015-16
St Elsewhere Primary School, City

Aim: Peer Review of the school's performance with a particular emphasis on achievement, teaching and leadership

Reviewers:

Senior Leaders from the 3 peer schools (6)

Role of the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher

The Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher played a full and active role in the review, effectively acting as the 5/6th team members and party to all discussions and feedback.

Introduction

This is the third review day of a collaborative peer review of the three schools which follows training on S2SSP. The reviews are intended to assist the schools in further developing their close partnership, support and trust. They will build their collective evaluation skills in terms of the quality of teaching and leadership and the achievement of pupils. Each review will provide an external check on the schools' progress and its self-evaluation. Once all reviews have taken place the team will evaluate the process and outcomes and reflect on the skills they have developed.

Date	Activity	Leadership
Day 1	Introductory training	PS
Day 2	Review of ANO 1	PS with HTs/DHTs from the 3 schools
Day 3	Review of ANO 2	HTs of St A & St B
Day 4	Review of ANO 3	HTs of St A & St B + PM visit from PS
Day 5	Summary evaluation of the process	PS

Evidence base:

- Analysis of school data including SATs results and RAISEonline

- 15 classroom observations including several joint observations as a moderation activity

- Scrutiny of pupils' work in English and mathematics

- Discussions with the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher

- Discussions with other senior and middle leaders

- Discussions with pupils Key Stage 1

- Overview of school documents including in-house data.

Feedback:

Feedback was regular over the day so that the Headteacher and Deputy Headteacher were clear about how the review was progressing and to ensure clarity and transparency. The final oral feedback at the end of the day was delivered to the whole team.

Context

ANO 1 received an Ofsted inspection on ………… 2014 and was judged to be *good*.

The Ofsted guidance stated the school was not outstanding because:

- The proportion of outstanding teaching and level of challenge is not high enough to secure rapid progress for all pupils, particularly the most-able.

- Teachers do not check regularly enough in every lesson that pupils are making good and outstanding progress.

- Targets for the progress of pupils are not consistently set high enough to enable them to make outstanding progress.

- Information collected about pupils' performance is overly complicated and does not provide a clear enough picture of their progress and attainment

- The monitoring and evaluation of the governing body do not focus well enough on the main areas for school development

The Headteacher and Deputy have been in post 6 and just under 3 years respectively. The Deputy Headteacher and has taught at the school for some years.

The school is one-form entry with more girls than boys. The school is made up of predominantly white British pupils so the proportions of ethnic minority groups and pupils with English as an additional language are well below national averages. The largest ethnic minority groups represented are white and black Caribbean and African with 6-8 pupils.

The proportion of children with SEND at school action is higher than national 14.7% (N 9.7%) but this is steadily decreasing as interventions and support are effective. The proportion of School Action Plus and Statemented children is well below national averages. The stability of the school role is slightly higher than national with 3.3 difference. The school's deprivation factor is well above the national figure 0.31 (N 0.24).

The proportion of pupils eligible for the Pupil Premium is approximately 26% which is broadly in line with the national average (27%).

Pupils' attendance and broader safeguarding issues were not included in this review.

<u>THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PUPILS</u>

The EYFS

- On entry, at least a third of the children are working within the 40-60 months band in the prime areas with the exception of speaking and listening in present cohort.

- There are cohort fluctuations over 2 years in the entry data for literacy and maths. Data for 2015 shows most children enter below age related expectations in reading, writing and shape, space and measure. There is a stronger profile in these areas in 2014 with a third to over a half of the cohort in line with age related expectations in literacy and maths respectively. Children enter reception below age related expectations in understanding the world and expressive arts and design. More progress is made in these areas.

- 63% of pupils achieve a good level of development, which is above the national average of 52%.

- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and shape and space from low starting points so that they are in line with national expectations on exit.

- The school rightly identifies a need to review the expressive arts provision (-25%) to ensure progress is in line with national, particularly for boys.

- No information was available for FSM

Key Stage 1

- The percentage of pupils who reach the standard required in the **year 1 phonics** check is very high at 87% compared to 69% nationally (2014 figures). Boys achieve very well with 85% compared to a national figure of 65%. Girls also achieve well 15% above the national figure (73%). There is no gap between the attainment of boys and girls.

- FSM children achieved well above the national average (100%) as did school action children (60%). All non- SEND children achieved the expected standard.

- The **year 2 phonics** re-check shows both boys and girls attainment is above national expectations with100% of non- SEND children achieving the expected standard. SEND pupils achieving above national.

- By the **end of KS1** (2014) attainment is above national in reading, writing and maths with sig+ in level 3 reading, level 2B writing level 2A+ and level 3 maths.

- **Achievement over time at the end of KS1** shows that reading, writing and mathematics are above average and have been significantly above in 15 out of 20 judgements over 5 years. There is an upward trend in, writing and maths over 3 years and sustained significantly above average attainment in reading over 2 years. Attainment across all subjects has risen over 3 years.

- By the **end of KS1** boys are attaining better than girls in all subjects but the gap is widest in maths (1.6).

- FSM children attain higher than non FSM nationally in all subjects but not higher than non FSM in school.

- School action children attain higher than the national except in reading which is in line with national.

Key Stage 2

- In 2014 pupil attainment is significantly above national averages in all subjects and sig+ at level 4B+ and level 5+ in maths, writing and EGPS.

- At level 4 girls attain slightly higher than boys at reading, and EGPS and boys attain higher than girls in writing. Both boys and girls achieved 100% in maths.

- Pupils with **FSM** achieve higher than those who do not have FSM nationally in maths reading and writing combined, and in maths, writing and EGPS. In school comparison shows FSM children achieve better than non FSM in writing and as well as non FSM in maths. Non FSM achieve better than FSM in MRW, reading and EGPS.

- Lower prior attainers achieve better than national expectations at level 4.

- At level 5 both boys and girls attained higher than the national averages with boys attaining sig+ in maths.

- Overall, the achievement of boys and girls is similar with only 0.20 aps difference. However, girls scored 1.4 aps higher than boys in reading.

- FSM children attain better than non FSM nationally in maths and broadly in line with non FSM in writing and EGPS.

- Lower prior attainers achieve better than national expectations at level 5 maths.

- **Achievement over time at the end of KS2** shows that pupils achieve consistently above national and significantly above in 4 of the 5 years in all subjects, and significantly above in 2 out of 3 years in maths and reading. In 2014 there is a Sig+ in writing and EGPS, with an upward trend in writing.

Progress KS1-2

- Pupils make good **progress** in maths (14.1APS). Reading 1**2.4**

- APS writing 13.1APS. A number of pupils make more than expected progress (3 NCLs). Reading 10 pupils (38%), writing 7 (27%), maths 9 (35%).

- The cohort APS *in reading is in line with national but lower than writing and maths in the school. Maths is particularly strong with* a high number of pupils achieved 3 levels progress in each subject, *and particularly in reading.*

- Almost all groups achieve in line or better than national expectations other than girls writing and prior middle attainers.

- **Value-added** score from KS1-2 shows an upward trend from 2012 with mathematics particularly strong.

- Pupils entitled to the **Pupil Premium** (on FSM) make better progress than national in maths and writing but not in reading (and not better than their peers in school).

The evidence available indicates that achievement is *outstanding* mainly because entry data shows the majority of pupils' starting points are below age related expectations (with a few exceptions). By the end of Y6 children achieve above national with a number of children making 3 national curriculum levels progress in all three subjects.

The school's self evaluation is *good.*

THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

Classroom observations of parts of 15 lessons and scrutiny of pupils' books (in literacy and mathematics) showed that the majority (87%) of teaching is *good and better.* In 8 out of 9 **English** lessons observed 89% of lessons were good or better. In 4 out of 5 **Maths** lessons

observed 80% of lessons were good or better.   One good science lesson was observed. The following characteristics were demonstrated during the review.

Outstanding **teaching** was observed in EYFS, Y5 and Y6 which represents 20% of lessons seen. Where there is outstanding practice,

the pace of learning is exceptional with a high level of challenge, maximizing opportunities for pupils critical thinking and decision making. There were high expectations of the teaching assistants. The teachers demonstrated excellent and accurate assessment of prior knowledge and there was a fine balance between imparting knowledge authoritatively and allowing children to find answers through deeper evaluation and questioning. Excellent outdoor provision in EYFS promotes high quality independent learning.

Good teaching was observed in 67% of lessons seen. Where there is good teaching

- There is good pace of learning with differentiated tasks suited to all ability levels.

- Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge creating a positive climate for learning.

- Pupils are able to concentrate well and sustain their learning through the lesson because they are provided with interesting activities, demonstrating good *behaviour for learning.*

- Teaching assistants are used effectively to promote optimum learning outcomes. They are able to focus on individual needs and provide suitable support, especially for the least able.

- Good quality marking with evidence of pupils responding focuses on narrowing specific gaps in attainment.

- Cross-curricular links are strong providing context for the learning.

- The environment supports learning through display and classroom ethos.

- Pupils understand what is expected of them measuring the outcomes of their learning using crafted success criteria

- Teachers extend learning through the use of *higher order* questioning techniques which challenge and extend pupils.

- Teachers are enthusiastic and have good relationships with pupils

- There is evidence of good use of ICT as a tool for learning.

The common features of **teaching which *requires improvement*** (in 11% of lessons) included:

- Effective gap task marking is not embedded as normal practice to support accelerated learning.

- The working walls are not used consistently and effectively to demonstrate the learning process and to display children's work as a good example of the required outcome.

- Higher ability children spend time completing learning tasks not suited to their learning needs during the first part of the lesson.

- Differentiation is not used appropriately to set higher order learning challenges for more able pupils. Often an increase in quantity of the same outcome rather than deepening the learning experience.

- Pace is slow resulting in less enthusiasm from the children.

- The Teaching Assistant is not used effectively to maximise learning opportunities throughout the entire lesson.

The evidence available indicates that teaching is at least good.

HE BEHAVIOUR AND SAFETY OF PUPILS

- There is a strong faith culture within the school which encourages good behaviour, and a deep respect for each other. The …. base of the school, demonstrated through the website and the range of activities linked to religious events in school and the church community, is the basis of pupils' very good spiritual, moral and social development.

- Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the school and their teachers and have a clear understanding of how their 'voice' is heard. If there are any incidents of bullying or misbehaviour they would know what to do or who to go to for support. Behaviour is managed consistently well through the skilled work of staff at all levels.

- The children are friendly, polite and welcoming. They enjoy sharing their learning experiences with adults and are confident in social situations. Movement around the school is orderly, calm and positive.

- Relationships between pupils and with the staff are very good in and out of lessons.

- Pupils enjoy coming to school and are openly proud of their school.

- They feel safe and can articulate safeguarding practices such as effective cyber monitoring.

- The staff operate a comprehensive child-centred approach to learning. Throughout the EYFS all children are encouraged to make independent decisions about their learning and justify their thinking building self-confidence and resilience. More vulnerable children are supported through well planned effective interventions which have a clear impact on their social and academic needs.

- School leaders ensure the well-being of every child is a priority and have detailed knowledge of their individual needs. The SENCo is extremely effective in ensuring appropriate agencies and provision is fully supporting those on the SEN register. The impact of all interventions is robustly monitored against impact on children's development and learning.

- The school encourages excellent parental links through informative weekly letters and home school learning initiatives particularly in reading.

- Attendance & safeguarding have not been part of the review

The evidence available indicates that behaviour and safety are *good*. The school's self-evaluation is *good*.

THE QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SCHOOL

- The Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher consistently communicate high expectations and a clear, shared aspirational vision for the school. They demonstrate accurate self-evaluation, have a comprehensive knowledge of the school and have robust systems and policies in place to drive the school towards ensuring the highest levels of achievement and personal development for all pupils.

- Leaders accurately judge the teaching as good and are actively seeking to analyse the common characteristics of what constitutes outstanding lessons so that a greater proportion of teaching is outstanding and aspects of outstanding teaching are pervasive across the school.

- Senior leaders have expertly built a leadership team which demonstrate ownership and drive, resulting in a highly skilled and cohesive team unified in their commitment and vision for the school

- The leaders in school have developed an engaging curriculum which promotes a thirst for knowledge and a love of learning and ensures high attainment for all children including those supported by the pupil premium.

- The Head Teacher is currently undertaking higher level professional studies which will further impact on the excellent relationships with parents, with a specific aim to achieve positive benefits for pupils.

The evidence available indicates that leadership and management are *good* but has the capacity to move to outstanding through dedicated and aspirational leadership.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN ISSUES RAISED BY THE REVIEW

1. **Improve pupils' achievement in reading so that children make a minimum of 14 APS progress and more achieve 16 points APS across Key Stage 2 (outstanding progress) by:**

   - Focusing on assessment at end of Key Stage 1 ensuring accurate moderation at L3b

   - Close the gap between FSM and Non-FSM (in the school)

   - Monitoring the quality of teacher assessment and the impact of provision throughout the school to ensure on average 4 points progress per year.

   - Further developing staff skills at understanding the requirements at Level 6 through engaging with the local secondary school.

2. **Improve the quality of teaching so that a greater proportion is *outstanding t*o raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that:**

   - Teachers plan to include higher order questioning resulting in a deeper learning experience for children, particularly the more-able. Questions are expertly matched to purpose, impacting on pace of learning.

   - That a climate is set that encourages learners to pose questions take risks with answers encouraging them to justify their reasoning and understanding.

   - There is more evidence of teachers systematically and effectively checking pupils understanding throughout the lesson, using their excellent subject knowledge and astute awareness of prior learning to reshape the task, accurately match it to the learning needs of children guaranteeing outstanding progress is made.

   - Quality and constructive feedback excellently guides the pupils towards outstanding progress in their learning.

3. **Improve the learning environment to ensure that in both English and Maths**

- The working walls demonstrate the learning process and provide an example, to the pupils, of the expected outcomes.

- Model examples of pupils own work, which explicitly demonstrate the success features, serve to inspire others.

We recommend that the above is monitored closely by senior leaders on a half-termly basis and reported to the Governing Body termly.

We would recommend that the school seeks external or collaborative peer evaluation annually and focuses on the key areas (eg 1, 2 and 3 above) so that senior leaders and governors can *drill down* to the school's specific needs and actions and be able to demonstrate improvements.

Please note:

This review is not an Ofsted inspection and may not reflect Ofsted judgements and outcomes.

Dear Colleague

I am undertaking a doctoral research project which seeks to look into the effectiveness of the School to School Peer Support Programme in the city, promoted through EP. The aim of this research is to gauge if the S2SSP Programme is effective in supporting high quality school self-evaluating. Does it work and can it be used by any school, locally or nationally, as an adaptable tool for self-evaluation leading to sustained school improvement?

The questionnaire below is aimed at senior leaders who have undertaken a peer review with other schools in the last couple of months/years or those who have had some experience with working with other schools on school peer review models (two or more schools supporting each other). I would be very grateful if you could also forward the questionnaire to deputy or assistants heads if they were also involved and would be willing to complete it.

Please be assured that data gathered from you will remain private and confidential. The questionnaire allows anonymity and invites participants to give their names only if they wish, to aid administration. Anonymised quotes may be used. You may withdraw from this research at any time (which will take place within the next 12 months) - see contact details below. All information collected will be kept in a confidential password protected electronic file and any used in this study will be anonymised. All data provided by you will be deleted from the study immediately if requested by you. The study, when it is completed, will be kept by the University of Birmingham and will be accessible to the public.

Thank you in advance for your time in supporting research from our City schools. **Questionnaire Link:**

Yours faithfully

Anna Murphy
Email:

If you would like to know more about the study before completing the questionnaire, please contact me email.

The supervisor contacts at The University of Birmingham are:
Dr. Thomas Bisschoff
Dr. Kit Field

Participant Questionnaire to Strategic Leaders

Dear Colleague

I am in the process of gathering information for a doctoral research project on a School to School Peer Support Programmes in the city and would like your support if you are able to give a few moments of your time.

The research project, as part of the Education Leaders and Leadership Doctorate at The University of Birmingham, is intended to study the impact (positive or negative) of school to school peer reviews (S2SSP) on school improvement through the perspective of a range of stake holders, particularly in relation to our city schools. I am interested in the views of those who have perhaps played a part in promoting or supporting S2SSP in a wider strategic context, or who may have opinions on possible weaknesses in the process as an effective school improvement and self-evaluation tool, hence by reason for contacting you.

Please be assured that data gathered from you will remain private and confidential. The questionnaire allows anonymity and invites participants to give their names only if they wish, to aid administration. Anonymised quotes may be used. You may withdraw from this research at any time (which will take place within the next 12 months) by contact me. All information collected will be kept in a confidential password protected electronic file and any used in this study will be anonymised. All data provided by you will be deleted from the study immediately if requested by you. The study, when it is completed, will be kept by the University of Birmingham and will be accessible to the public.

If you are able to support, please complete the short questionnaire through the link below. Please type n/a to any questions which may not be applicable to you or if you feel you are not in a position to answer. Any general comments at the end on peer reviews would in any case be appreciated.

Questionnaire Link:

Thank you once again for your help.

Kind regards,

Anna Murphy

If you would like to know more about the study before completing the questionnaire, please contact me by email:

Email:

The supervisor contacts at The University of Birmingham are:
Dr. Thomas Bisschoff   . Dr. Kit Field

Thematic Structure linked to the Literature themes   Appendix 8

Constructs from the literature	Research Questions to be explored	Questionnaire Senior &Strategic Leaders	Interview Questions Senior Leaders	Interview Questions Middle Leaders	Relevant Sources
1. School Improvement; raising standards	*Q.1: Is S2SSP a reliable improvement tool; does it help to raises standards?*				
a) Quality self-evaluation; inquiry & Knowledge generation; challenge; Improved student outcomes	a) Can specific improvements be linked to the S2SSPR process?	S2SSP supports high quality self-evaluation and school improvement	Has S2SSP helped to improve teaching and learning? How were you able to measure this?	Do you think teaching and learning has improved due to the process? In what way?	Earl, Watson & Katz (2003); Stoll *et al* (20006); Hargreaves & Fullan (2012); Hopkins and Hatcher (2014); Carvalho & Goodyear (2014)
b) Mmutual respect; engagement; solidarity; collaboration	b) Is there a sense of solidarity and 'looking out for each other' in S2SSP?	S2SSP helped to build strong relationships with other schools	Were all the schools involved on an equal basis?	To what extent were you involved in the S2SSP in your own school?	Bauman (2001); NCSL (2006); Louis & Marks (2008); Matthew & Berwick (2013); Armstrong (2015)
c) Behaviour; attitude; Power bases; conflict; competitive; communication	c) Does the process build a sense of comradery and mutual support?		Did middle leaders find it a worthwhile process? In what way?	Has the process improved your confidence as a leader?	Wenger (1998); West (2010); Hargreaves (2011); Feys & Devos (2015)
2. Vision; Culture and Motivations	*Q.2 Factors which affect a successful S2SP*				
a) Aims & Beliefs; shared vision; moral purpose; imperatives; selflessness	a) What motivated you to take part in S2SSP?	What would you say are the basic values which underpin the S2SSP process	What motivated you to work with other schools on a peer review?	What do you know about the S2SSP which took place in your school?	Stoll *et al* (2006); West (2010); Hill (2011); Hargreaves (2012); Matthews & Berwick (2013); Gu *et al* (2015); Owen (2015)
b) Culture of openness; trust; respect; integrity	b) Is there a sense of trust, openness and honesty?	What do you think are the main ingredients for successful S2SSP?	Was it easy or difficult to be open and honest with senior leaders in the other schools?	Did senior leaders discuss the process openly with staff beforehand?	Hofstede (2010); Matthews & Berwick (2013); Gu *et al* (2015); BEP (2016); NAHT (2016)
c) Communities; Joint values; shared ownership; relationships	c) Does it only work for particular schools? What about schools in difficulty?	What are the main objectives of S2SSP?	Why work with those particular schools?	Has S2SSP helped to build professional relationships with peers in other schools?	Wenger (1998); Bauman (2001); Davies *et al., (*2003); Lewis & Marks (2008); Miers & Buckley (2010); West, 2010; Hargreaves & Fullan (2012; Carvalho & Goodyear (2014); Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan (2016)

3. Facilitators and Barriers	Q.3 Advantages and disadvantages				
a) Supporting factors Non-confrontational feedback; Fairness	a) Is there willingness to challenge other school leaders?	S2SSP could be difficult to implement in some types of schools	How comfortable were you in feeding back to colleagues in other schools?	How did you feel about staff from other schools observing you teach?	Meiers & Buckely (2010); West (2010); Woods *et al,* (2013); Carvalho & Goodyear (2014)
b) Risk Taking; Credible external advice & support	b) Is S2SSP judgemental or not? Is communication a factor?	S2SSP could be a burden to high performing schools	Do you think an external advisor should oversee the process?		West (2010); NAHT (2012)
c) Effectiveness; reality check; ownership; Reflection & Enquiry	c) How secure is S2SSP as a self-evaluation tool with teeth?	The S2SSP works well in supporting school improvement.	How happy were you with the outcomes of the review in your own school?	Did you fine the process useful? In what ways?	NCSL (2006); Stoll *et el* (2006); Robinson *et al* (2011); Gilbert (2012)
e) Performance; Achievement Data Sharing evidence	e) How is success measured in schools?	What if anything had the biggest impact in the school?	Do you think improvements can be specifically linked to the peer review? How?	What if anything improved/changed in your school due to S2SSP?	Stoll *et al* (2006*); Gibbons et al* (2008); West (2010); Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan (2016); Chapman *et al* (2016)
f) Quality JPD leading to significant change; opening up opportunities; professional capital	d) Does S2SSP support professional development; build strong relationships?	Engaging with other schools provides good professional development	Has working with other schools helped you as a school leader? How?	Did you get a chance to work with the staff in the other schools afterwards?	Wenger (1998); Stoll *et al* (2006); Hopkins & Higham 2007; Webster-Wright (2009); Kennedy (2015)
g) Wellbeing; Personal and social development and relationships; human capital	e) Does S2SSP provide well-being for all involved? Is social capital a feature?		To what extent did you find the process in your own school stressful?	How did you feel during the review process?	Wenger (1998);); Louis and Marks (2008); Hill (2011); Hargreaves 2011; Matthew & Berwick (2013)
h) Moral and social capital; Self-efficacy & authenticity Distributed leadership Joint professional dev. System Leadership	f) Who/what drives the process? What happens if main drivers move on? Is leadership distributed?	S2SSP was effective in supporting professional development	Did the process rely on individuals to hold it together? Has it supported distributed leadership?		Putnam(2001); Buysee *et al* (2003); Stoll *et al* (2006); Hopkins & Higham (2007); Vescio *et al.,* (2008); Hargreaves (2011); Chapman *et al* (2011); Hill (2011); Bowels & Gintes (2013)
4. Sustainability, impact and Challenge	Q.4 Is S2SSP a valid and effective evaluation tool				
a) Sustainability; resourcing; Longevity of process	d) Does S2SSP build a culture of sustainability?	Wastes valuable time focussing on other schools	Will S2SSP stand the test of time? What would help sustain it?	How happy are you to continue with the review process?	Louis and Marks (2008); Hill (2011); Carvalho & Goodyear; Woods *et al.,* (2103); (2014); Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan (2016)

b) Context, Capacity Academies; Multi-Academy Trusts; Competition	Is competition a factor in deterring collaboration? Does it matter if types of schools are mixed?	S2SSP is suitable for a mix of all school types and sizes eg. academies and non-academies	Do you think competition between schools will increase as more become academies?	Do you think it matters if different types of schools work together on S2SSP?	NCSL (2006); Matthews & Berwick (2013); Burgess *et al* (2011); Adnett & Davies (2003); Hopkins & Higham (2007); Greaney & Higham (2018)
c) Accountability; Mutually beneficial; Limitations Alignment; Reciprocity	b) Is reciprocity possible if not all S2SSP schools are equally successful?	ll the schools involved benefited from the S2SSP process	Did all the schools benefit equally? Did you agree with the final review outcomes?	Have you been involved in any reciprocal reviews in other schools?	Wenger (1998); Stoll *et al* (2006); Hargreaves (2011); Woods *et al*. 2013; Carvalho & Goodyear 2014; Rincón-Gallardo & Fullan 2016
d) Transferability; Flexibility; Autonomy & Ownership; Reflection; Governors	c) Can the S2SSP model be flexible and tailored to suit individual purposes or situations?	Is there anything you would change about the S2SSP process which would improve it?	What advice would give to others embarking on a review?	Is there anything about the process that you would change?	Wheatley (1999); Stoll *et al*. (2006); Louis & Marks (2008); Hill (2011); Carvalho & Goodyear (2014); Greaney & Higham (2018)
e) National implications Validity; DfE Policy; effect of Academies	e) Could S2SSP deter stressed or isolated leaders from leaving headship?	How do you see S2SSR going forward	Did working with other schools help to relieve some stresses of the job?	Do you think the S2SSP model could transfer anywhere in the country?	Fullan (2003); BEP (2016); DfE; Ofsted (2017); Greaney & Higham (2018)
f) Ofsted Framework; Quality assurance; Effective School Self-evaluation	f) Will Ofsted view S2SSP as strategically important?	S2SSP should be validated by Ofsted? Why?	Should school governors be involved?	Do you think S2SSP should be validated by Ofsted?	Chapman (2015); NCSL (2016); DfE (2016); Ofsted (2016)

Middle Leaders Interview Schedule   Appendix 9

No.	Interview Questions	Prompts
1.	**Vision & Culture**	
a	What do you know about the S2SSP which took place in your school?	
b	Did senior leaders discuss the process openly with staff beforehand?	If not, do you think they should have? Did you trust them?
c	Has S2SSP helped to build professional relationships with peers in other schools?	Strong or weak?
2.	**School Improvement & Value Added**	
a	To what extent were you involved in the S2SSP in your own school?	
b	Has the process improved your confidence as a middle leader?	How?
c	Did you get a chance to work with the staff in the other schools afterwards? How do you think they felt?	Has it continued?
d	How did you feel when the review was taking place?	Did you find it stressful?
e	Do you think your teaching and leadership has improved due to the peer review process?	In what way?
3.	**Facilitators & Barriers**	
a	How did you feel about leaders from other schools observing you teach?	
b	How easy or difficult did you find the process?	What was the easiest/most difficult?
c	Did you find the process useful in any way?	In what ways?
4	**Impact & Relevance**	
a	What if anything improved/changed in your school due to S2SSP?	
b	Do you think it matters if there are different types of schools working together on S2SSP?	
c	Have you been involved in any reciprocal reviews in the other schools?	Are they the same schools as the original S2SSP?
d	Is there any advice you would offer to others embarking on a peer review process? What would you change, if anything, about the process?	
e	How happy are you to continue with the review process?	Any reasons why?
f	Do you think the S2SSP model could be used easily in any school setting or combination of schools?	
g	Do you think S2SSP should be validated by Ofsted?	In your experience did they value your peer review (If applicable)?

Senior Leader Interview Schedule

No.	Questions	Prompts
1.	**Vision & Culture**	
A	What motivated you to get involved with school peer reviews initially?	
B	Did you explain the peer review process to staff beforehand?	
C	What brought those particular schools together?	What it matter if an RI school was included?
D	Was it easy or difficult to be open and honest with senior leaders in the other schools?	
E	Has the peer review process helped build professional relationships with middle leaders in the other schools?	How?
2.	**School Improvement & Value Added**	
A	Has S2SSP systems helped to improve on-going teaching and learning in your own school?	How do you know?
B	Do you think all the schools were involved on an equal basis?	
C	Has working with other schools on peer reviews helped you as a school leader?	In what way?
D	Did you find the process in your own school stressful?	In what ways? Did you trust the other school leaders?
E	Did the staff find it a worthwhile process?	
F	Did the process rely on one leader to hold it together?	If applicable, has it enabled distributed leadership?
G	Do you think an 'external' advisor should oversee the process?	Would it help validate it?
3.	**Facilitators & Barriers**	
A	Did you agree rules of engagement to start with?	Did you trust and have confidence in the other school leaders?
B	How comfortable were you in feeding back to colleagues in other schools?	Did you agree with their feedback?
C	How happy were you with the outcomes of the review in your own school?	Did you agree with them?
4.	**Impact & Relevance**	
A	Do you think improvements can be specifically linked to the peer review?	How?
B	Do you think S2SSP would work in a climate of competition between different types of schools?	Free schools; academy chains
C	Do all the schools benefit from the peer review process?	Anyone who didn't. Why?
D	What advice would you give to others embarking on a peer review?	What would help to sustain the process? Protocols?
E	Do you think your own S2SSP will stand the test of time?	What would help sustain it?
F	How did you feel about the process afterwards? Did you find scrutiny of peers less/more stressful than Ofsted?	More or less stressful than Ofsted?
G	As part of leadership, did S2SSP involve governors?	Has it continued?

Middle Leaders Interview Request
University of Birmingham
Post Graduate Educational Research Project
School of Education

June 2016

Dear Colleague

I am undertaking a doctorial research project which seeks to look into the effectiveness of the School to School Peer Review & Evaluation Programme, promoted through EP. The aim of this research is to gauge if the S2SS Programme is effective in supporting high quality school self-evaluating. Does it work and can it be used by any school, locally or nationally, as an adaptable tool for self-evaluation leading to sustained school improvement?

As your school has been involved in a school to school peer review, I am writing to ask if you would be willing to be a participant in this research project. This will involve a *one-to-one recorded interview with me for approximately 30 minutes* to gauge your personal opinions and feelings about the peer review programme and to gather your thoughts about the effectiveness and sustainability of the process. I am planning to undertake the interviews in July, September and October 2016.

Please be assured that data gathered from you will remain private and confidential. All data collected will be anonymised, including quotes, and individual schools and staff will not be identified. You may withdraw from this research at any time. All data provided by you will be deleted from the project immediately if requested by you. All recorded data will be deleted when the study is complete. My supervisors for this research are:

1. Principal Supervisor   Professor Peter Davies, School of Education, ▮▮▮▮▮▮
2. 2nd Supervisor   Dr. Tom Bisschoff, School of Education, ▮▮▮▮▮▮

I will contact you to discuss the next stage of the project within the next two weeks and, if you agree to take part, to gain your consent. I am happy to visit your own school at a date and time convenient to yourself or to discuss the project further over the phone or by email at any time. I can be contacted at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or by phone on ▮▮▮▮▮▮

I very much hope that you will be able to support this research project and help to make a valuable contribution to what is currently known about the school peer review process in this city.

Yours faithfully

Anna T. Murphy
EdD Student
School of Education
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston

I agree to being interviewed as explained above and have had the process explained to me.

Signed ……………………………….………………..　　　　Date: ………………………………

Senior Leaders Interview Request
University of Birmingham
Post Graduate Educational Research Project
School of Education

June 2016

Dear Colleague

I am undertaking a doctorial research project which seeks to look into the effectiveness of the School to School Peer Review & Evaluation Programme, promoted through EP. The aim of this research is to gauge if the S2SS Programme impacts on high quality school self-evaluating. Does it work and can it be used by any school, locally or nationally, as an adaptable tool for self-evaluation leading to sustained school improvement?

As your school has been involved in a school peer review evaluation, I am writing to ask if you would be willing to be a participant in this research project. This will involve a *one-to-one recorded interview with me for approximately 30 minutes* to gauge your personal opinions and feelings about the peer review process itself and to gather your thoughts about the effectiveness and sustainability of the process. I am planning to undertake the interviews in the Summer and Autumn Term 2016.

Please be assured that data gathered from you will remain private and confidential. All data collected, including quotes, will be anonymised and individual schools and staff will not be identified. You may withdraw from this research at any time which will take place within the next 12 months. All data provided by you will be deleted from the project immediately if requested by you. All recorded data will be deleted when the study is complete.

My supervisors for this research are:
1. Principal Supervisor   Professor Peter Davies, School of Education, �▓▓▓▓▓

2. 2nd Supervisor   Dr. Tom Bisschoff, School of Education, ▓▓▓▓▓▓

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I very much hope that you will be able to support this research project and help to make a valuable contribution to what is currently known about the school peer review process in this city.

Yours faithfully

Anna T. Murphy
EdD Student
School of Education
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston

I agree to being interviewed as explained above and have had the process explained to me.

Signed …………………………………………..   Date: ………………………………

SCHEDULE OF SCHOOL TYPES WHETE INTERVIEWEES WORKED

Category	Name	School type	Ofsted Classification	Student Capacity	Semi-structured Interviews Senior Leaders		Semi-structured Interviews Middle Leaders	
1. Small/average sized mixed intake primary	School A	1 form entry primary *Maintained*	Good	210	A1	1 x Senior Leader	A2	1 x Middle Leader
	School B	1 form entry primary *Maintained with nursery*	Good	210 + 30 EYFS	B1	1 x Senior Leader	B2	1 x Middle Leader
	School C	1 form entry primary *Academy*	Outstanding	210	C1	1 x Senior Leader	C2	1 x Middle Leader
	School D	1 form entry primary *Academy*	Requires Improvement	210	D1	1 x Senior Leader	D2	1 x Middle Leader
2. Larger primary two/three form entry mixed intake schools	School E	2 form entry primary Academy	Outstanding	350	E1	1 x Senior Leader	E2	1 x Middle Leader
	School F	2 form entry primary *Maintained*	Good	420	F1	1 x Senior Leader	F2	1 x Middle Leader
	School G	2 form entry primary *Maintained*	Good	420	G1	1 x Senior Leader	G2	1 x Middle Leader
3. Secondary Schools mixed intake	School H	Secondary *Maintained*	Good	1,200	H1	1 x Senior Leader	H2	1 x Middle Leader
	School I	Secondary *Academy*	Outstanding	900 + 6th Form	I1	1 x Senior Leader	I2	1x Middle Leader
	School J	Secondary *Maintained*	Requires Improvement	600	J1	1 x Senior Leader	J2	1 x Middle Leader
	School K	Secondary *Maintained*	Good	600	K1	1 x Senior Leader (phone)		n/a
						Total 11		Total 10

Note Student Average Age: EYFS = 3 –4 yr olds; Primary = 4–11; Juniors = 7–11; Secondary = 11 – 16+

SENIOR LEADER SCHOOL TO SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE

Headteachers and Senior Leaders: the outcomes of a S2S Support Programme (*S2SSP).*
Please state your position in the school …………………………

1. Please tick the box that most relates to your responses to the statements below:-

		Strongly Agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree or disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
A	The S2SSP process works well in supporting school improvement					
b	The Peer Support process was effective in meeting specific improvement objectives					
c	Engaging with other schools has provided good professional development for staff in our own school					
d	The S2SSP process helped to build strong relationships with other schools					
e	I feel all the schools involved benefitted from the Peer Support Programme					
f	School peer review supports high quality self-evaluation					
g	I think the outcomes of a S2SSP should be recognized and validated by Ofsted as an effective school improvement tool					
h	We have continued to use the Peer Review process to support school improvement					
i	There should be a limit on the number of schools in a peer review group to be effective					
j	Having undertaken a peer I did not feel it benefitted my school					
k	I would prefer to manage my own school improvement					

2. What would you say are the basic aims and values which underpin the S2SSP process?

3. Did the S2SSP meet the stated aims? Briefly explain your answer.

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4. What was the greatest impact of the S2SSP on improvements in your school?

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5. Having completed a S2S Support Programme is there anything you would change about the process itself?

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6. How do you see the S2SSP process going forward on a local or national level, particularly in light of the DfE academisation programme?

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Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

STRATEGIC LEADER ELECTRONIC SURVEY SCHEDULE

Please state your professional designation …………………………

Note: S2SSP is an acronym for School to School Support Programme

1. Please give a brief outline of your involvement in or knowledge of S2SSP

2. Please tick the box that most relates to your responses to these statements:-

		Strongly Agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree to disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
A	S2SSP process works well in supporting school improvement					
B	S2SSP helps schools meet their specific school improvement objectives					
C	S2SSP provides good professional development for leaders at all levels in schools					
D	The S2SSRprocess helps staff in schools build strong professional relationships					
E	S2SSP is suitable for all school types of schools					
F	S2SSP supports high quality school self-evaluation					
G	Having S2SSP validated as an effective improvement tool by Ofsted would encourage take-up					
H	There should be a limit on the number of schools in a peer review group to be effective					
I	S2SSP could waste valuable time by focusing too much on other schools					
J	S2SSPcould be difficult to implement in some types of schools					
K	S2SSP could be a burden to high performing schools					

3. Briefly, what would you say are the basic aims and values which underpin the S2SSP process?

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4. What do you think are the most important basic ingredients for success when embarking on a S2S Support Programme

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5. Do you think S2S Support Programme will work within an increasingly academised school environment? Briefly give your reason below.

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6. Please add any further comments on S2SSP if you wish.

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Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Survey Response Matrix: Appendix 16

Comparison between Quantitative and Qualitative survey responses from Senior & Strategic Leaders

Themes arising

Research Questions:
1. To what extent do school leaders believe the S2SSP model supports and influences reliable school improvement and raises standards?
2. What factors do school leaders believe have affected the success of S2SP?
3. What are the barriers and advantages of S2SSPR; is it a sustainable process?
4. Does the S2SSP model provide a useful tool for school self-evaluation?

Themes arising	*Senior Leaders:* **Quantitative responses** (n=26)	*Senior Leaders:* **Qualitative responses**	*Strategic Leaders:* **Quantitative responses** (n=5)	*Strategic Leaders:* **Qualitative responses**
		Q3. What would you say are the basic aims and values which underpin S2SSP?		**Q4. What would you say are the basic aims and values which underpin S2SSP?**
Aims, values and vision		*A shared vision amongst staff for genuine collaboration between schools.		*School to school support done with schools not to schools
Meets Specific objectives		*It does what it says on the tin		*A belief in a school led self-improvement process in partnership with other schools *Willingness to embrace reciprocal learning - sharing best practice to address individual school needs and collective cluster needs
Trust, confidence and respect		*Relies on professional trust *The trust between schools has certainly developed *Schools need to develop a secure trust with each other which develops further over time *There must be mutual trust and support. All schools need to see this as a supportive process *A trusting, open relationship where meaningful and developmental discussions are key *Builds a culture of trust and transparency *Over time the trust between schools has certainly developed and it has helped that the schools involved already worked closely together		*Collaboration challenge, mutual respect and empathy *Honesty *Trust; Generosity *An open willingness to learn. *Courage to give and receive difficult messages. Trust, respect integrity Reciprocity, honesty *Honesty and prior agreement on protocols and outcomes; give/ receive honest feedback
	Q.2(a) S2SSP	**Q4. What was the greatest impact of S2SSP on school**	**Q.3(a) S2SSP works**	**Qualitative responses linked to impact on**

	works well in supporting school improvement	improvement?	well in supporting school improvement	school improvement theme
School Improvement and Raising Standards	*96% agree that S2SSP supports school improvement*	*Benchmarking standards *The S2SSP working party of schools has evolved into a very strong and effective improvement group. *We needed S2SSP as documentary proof that we had made improvements *It triggered early trial of an alternative curriculum model *Almost immediate feedback, identification of areas for improvement and the interactive workshop where improvement ideas were shared and discussed. *It builds the capability and capacity of schools to be self-improving, leading to better outcomes. *We work with like-minded colleagues who support the drive towards ensuring improvement takes place. *Identify areas of strength and areas for development. *Who would not want to improve their school?	*100% agree that S2SSP supports school improvement*	*A belief in a school led self-improvement process *In our increasingly fragmented system with different levels of accountability, peer review can really support improvement *Develops outstanding practice
	Q.2(d) S2SSP builds strong professional relationships	**Qualitative responses linked to professional relationships theme**	**Q.3 (d) S2SSP builds strong professional relationships**	**Qualitative responses linked to professional relationships theme**
Professional Relationships	*92% of senior leaders agree S2SP helps to build strong relationship with schools *8% did not agree [are they the 8% who agreed they would prefer to manager their own school improvement Q2(k)]*	*It helped that the schools involved already worked closely together. *If it were a number of schools involved that were less familiar, that trust would not necessarily be there *Built on excellent professional relationships *Enabled good professional conversations. *There was the opportunity to learn from each other. This has made an impact *Everyone has something to offer *All schools need to see this as a supportive process *Learning from others to ensure students get the best possible education	*100% of strategic leaders agree S2SSR helps to build strong relationship with schools*	*Working in partnership with leaders from other schools builds confidence
	Q.2(c) Engaging with other schools provides good professional development	**Qualitative responses linked to professional development theme**	**Q.3(c) Engaging with other schools provides good professional development**	**Qualitative responses linked to professional development theme**
Professional	92% agree that	*Where Heads and Deputies were involved it allowed great		*S2SSP can't just happen at HT/ DHT level

development	S2SSP does provides good professional development	discussion and improvements. It was good that the workshops involved the teachers as well *An enjoyment of sharing professional strengths - being able to give and receive of each other to the advancement of each school; builds meaningful and focused collaboration through follow up actions and support *Enables significant numbers of school staff and members of governing bodies to reap the professional development benefits of engagement in peer review *Through the practice of school, departmental and teacher peer review it enables significant numbers of school staff and members of governing bodies to reap the professional development benefits of engagement *Excellent CPD for Head and Deputy which impacts on leadership and whole school improvement		
Sharing good practice		*The opportunity to compare scenarios with similar school and action points was beneficial *Sharing resources and ideas across the schools allowed for a much wider range of information and publications to be trialled and explored. *The opportunity to visit other schools and take part in the process was worthwhile *To share good practice and identify strengths/weaknesses *The pooling and development of initiatives and sharing of good and outstanding practice *Creates platform on which the improving data and knowledge can be drawn upon and added to *Sharing good practice through distributing leadership throughout the school *Share good practice; validate the school's monitoring and evaluation schedule * S2SSP will be vital to ensure schools continue to improve due to the reduction in local authorities capacity to support schools improvement	100% agree that S2SSP does provide good professional development	*Working in partnership with leaders from other schools is a positive *Willingness to embrace reciprocal learning *Sharing best practice to address individual school needs and collective cluster needs *School /practice-centred. * Done effectively it is a mechanism for sharing practice and getting external quality assurance *It's most definitely the way forward! Working in partnership with trusted leaders of other schools generates rigorous and challenging, high quality self and peer review; ultimately leading to raised standards
	Q2(b) S2SSP meets improvement objectives	**Qualitative responses on S2SSP meets specific improvement objectives theme**	**Q3(b) S2SSP meets specific improvement objectives**	**Q5 link. What are the most important ingredients for success?**
Culture & Ethos	*92% agreed that specific improvement*	*Ethos of selflessness- supporting others through being proactive *Supports a drive for and endorses improvements	*100% agreed that specific improvement objectives could be met*	*Willingness to listen and understand. Ability to challenge Openness, honesty and transparency *Giving of time to others.

	objectives could be met	*Understand the culture, ethos and context within which the leadership of the school are striving to accelerate or maintain school improvement, *Develops a culture of shared responsibility for outcomes across a group of schools *The embedding of strong professional camaraderie amongst all the peer schools leadership teams impacting on school development in all key areas *The key value is in effective peers understanding the culture, ethos and context within which the leadership of the schools are striving to accelerate or maintain school improvement, give constructive feedback and offer further practical support. *A strong culture of trust and transparency has been built between the participating schools.		Avoiding talking about own school *Importance of self- review prior to the process *Sharing the rationale for S2SSP with staff *Importance of initial meeting between HT and Lead Reviewer to ensure the Review is focused and organised with agreed lines of enquiry *Evaluation sharing common language *Celebrating success as well as improvements *A well-established "contract" between all – understand purpose / scope / boundaries / *Time for evidence gathering / evaluation / professional dialogue. A school improvement project - shared endeavour....rather than episodic hit-and-run judgement making. *Place as a key priority on calendars; integral to monitoring and evaluating school improvement. Must involve all staff
	Q2(e) All schools benefit from S2SSP	**Qualitative responses links on 'all schools benefit from S2SSR theme**	**Q3(e) All schools benefit from S2SSP**	**Qualitative response link – n/a**
Equal but different value	*92% agreed with this statement* *8% did not agree representing 2 out of 26 respondents*	*Whilst each school will have its own unique characteristics and needs, the pooling of and development of initiatives and sharing of good and outstanding practice leads to improvement for all when internalised in each schools own way *One did not feel the S2SSP process benefited their school	*80% agreed with this statement* *The 20% who did not represent 2 out of 5, which is significant*	***Explored further through in-depth interviews with senior leaders***
	Q2(f) S2SSP supports high quality school self-evaluation	**Qualitative responses links to 'S2SSP supports high quality school self-evaluation' on theme**	**Q.3(f) S2SSP supports high quality school self-evaluation**	**Q2(i) Link. 'S2SSP could waste valuable time by focusing too much on other schools'**
Validity of school self-evaluation	*96% agree that S2SSP provides high quality self-evaluation* *However, 32% were neutral or agreed with the statement that they **would***	*We have undergone two peer reviews in which I feel judgments we made regarding the school were validated *We were able to get feedback on our performance in an informal but effective way *Identifying weaknesses were did not really know existed and then acted upon them with enormous levels of energy because external views carried some weight for a mandate. *External validation and scrutiny is a key component of school improvement, particularly in the absence of an LA	*100% agree that S2SSP provides high quality self-evaluation*	100% disagreed with this statement

	prefer to manager their own school improvement which to an extent counteracts the positive outcome to Q2(f) above	body and so should become commonplace. *To support and strengthen the school's self-review process. *We had three fresh pairs of eyes evaluating our school in a supportive manner *This external validation and support to improve schools is invaluable in the light of academisation *We went first and had two external verifiers talking part - this made everyone stay on their toes and do a robust and thorough job		
	Q.2(i) The number of schools in a S2SSP should be limited	**Qualitative responses on theme: the number of schools in a S2SSRshould be limited**	**Q.3(h) The number of schools in a S2SSR should be limited**	**Qualitative linked response to theme –n/a**
Collaboration & Accountability	*92% agree that all the school benefitted from S2SSP*	*Work collaboratively in order to raise standards *We felt embarrassed or even ashamed of what others thought and respected them enough to do something about it *To work collaboratively in order to raise standards *Builds an understanding of accountability to raise standards *Mutual support to develop all schools so that every child is afforded the best level of education	*80% agreed with this statement* *20% responded negatively*	*To be explored in in-depth interview question for agreement/disagreement*
	Q.2(g) S2SSP should be recognised and validated by Ofsted	**Q6. How do you see S2SSP going forward on a local or national level?**	**Q.3(g) S2SSRshould be recognised and validated by Ofsted**	**Qualitative linked response to theme - n/a**
Ofsted Validation	*96% agreed that S2SSP should be validated by Ofsted as a good school evaluation tool.*	*It is a broader remit that the Ofsted framework. *Leaders supported and empowered to not only be their own school inspectorate but have peer support to hone these skills objectively in other schools *To be able to access this support almost as a rehearsal for Ofsted was extremely beneficial *Provide a more honest remit than Ofsted. *Would like to see S2SSP ratified as an alternative approach to the punitive Ofsted process. *Should be encouraged as an alternative to Ofsted. *I'd like to see it replace Ofsted as a way of continuous self-improvement rather than a subjective 'stick to beat us with' that is highly dependent on the team that you get. *If it were recognised by Ofsted as a way for schools to	*100% of respondents agreed that S2SSP should be validated by Ofsted as a good school evaluation tool.*	

		move forward it may reduce the 'need' for all schools towards becoming an academy which has its roots in financial gains rather than educational *On a national level this could be recognised by Ofsted as a successful tool for school improvement, reduces the need for academies. *It should be recognised by Ofsted as a way forward.		
		Q6. Will academisation affect the future of S2SSP?		**Q.6 Do you thing S2SSP has a future in an increasingly academised school environment?**
Academies MATS & MACS		*Peer Reviews may reduce the 'need' for all schools to become an academy which has its roots in financial gains rather than educational. *I think schools need to link for peer reviews with schools outside of their Multi-Academy. *As a MAT (Multi Academy Trust) I am looking forward to carrying out the peer reviews at the five other schools. This will build upon the strengths and areas of development for each school- working on common goals *As a school in a MAT we are using the model next year with all the schools in the MAT. *Our school is a part of an academy yet benefits more from S2SPE than it does from being an academy *S2SSP is a powerful tool. It should continue, regardless of academisation *I would be sad to lose it as an improvement tool *This could end up being the only method of working across different schools.	100% believe that S2SSP has a future in an increasingly academised school environment	*Schools will be without an LA to organise this type of work so it will be needed more. *The level of whole school involvement needs to be developed. *In our increasingly fragmented system with different levels of accountability, peer review can really support improvement. *MATS potentially signal greater isolationism and there is a danger that peer review within them exacerbate it. *The whole process is founded on schools working with schools, sharing best practice and resources, addressing individual and collective needs. *Because in the world we are heading into, there is less money and less centralised resources.
	Q2(h) We have continued to use S2SSP to support school improvement	**Linked qualitative responses on theme: We have continued to use S2SSP to support school improvement**	**Q3(j) S2SSP could be difficult to implement in some types of schools**	**n/a**
Sustainability	*80% supported this statement* *20% did not agree*	***The reasons why a significant % have not continued with S2SSP to be explored in in-depth interviews***	*80% agreed with this statement with 20% neutral*	***Explore how senior leaders feel about this in in-depth interviews***
Negatives themes arising	**(n=26)**	**Senior Leader Negative Responses**	**(n=5)**	**Strategic Leader Negative Responses**
Sense of Fairness		*The report was of poor quality and what was talked about at the feedback meeting wasn't represented in writing		40% agreed with the statement 'S2SSP could be difficult to implement in some types of

around implementation		*There were some issues around how the reviews were conducted "just that it wasn't right"; not organised *Could feel more invasive and less supportive	schools' with another 40% being neutral which is significant
Burden to some schools		*We felt like we had committed fully to the approach but felt very badly let down by others who seemed happy to put the boot in to us yet didn't offer their own school up	No strategic leaders agreed with the statement that S2SSP 'could be a burden to high performing schools'
Did it benefit schools?	*8% of senior leaders felt that S2SSP did not benefit their school*	*Clashes with what some felt S2SSP was for; felt acting like mini Ofsted for some *Issues arose around how S2SSP was conducted *The first S2SSP did not help with school improvement; no follow up; no helpful comments	*It depends on preparedness by the reviewed school to be honest and open and the reviewers to be able to challenge - there is a risk that neither may happen

Q5. Is there anything you would change about the S2SSP process?	**Senior Leader Responses**
	*Ensure there is a fair and consistent approach for each party to adopt *Ensure a specific and clearly understood focus for the review *Focus on evidence based monitoring and evaluation rather than subjective commenting *It was a too bit hectic - so many forms of monitoring were undertaken in one day eg book monitoring, pupil conversations with all Key stages, governor interview, lesson observations, SLT meeting there should also be a deadline for things to to demonstrate impact *Having a pre meeting to set the agenda to discuss different aspects was useful and meant the day of the review was most effective *Go into the review with a sharper focus based on the schools own self-evaluation *Possibly a final feedback to the team members from an external validator to confirm findings and suggest further developments for the peers as well as the school itself *May need external validation/moderator as there's a danger of over-familiarity at the end *Limit the focus of the review to one main area and avoid scrutiny of too much data *If there were a larger number of schools that were less familiar, that trust would not necessarily be there
Thematic areas on which to expand	**Responses from Senior & Strategic Leaders**
Counteract Isolation	*To limit the previously very isolated role of the Head Teacher *Opportunity to talk with people who are doing the same job and therefore understand the pressures. *Addresses 'school' isolation *Schools cannot afford to be insular or look towards just one set of schools
Moderation of S2SSP outcomes	*Providing a moderation of school's own self evaluation

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Adaptability & Flexibility	*We have developed our own version of the Champion for Improvement model *Needs to include as many different types of school leaders as possible *We have evolved a model of working parties, as identified by the headteachers *Strongly for a flexible collaborative model in line with S2SSP which our schools are greatly benefitting from *We've resisted elements of the EP model for now; we felt it lacked bite but may have to go back to them in the absence of anything else of value *Modifications were made as the group progressed through the cycle of reviews
Time and limitations	We get a more accurate picture of a school due to the amount of time that is allocated to the process
Cost Effectiveness	Participation involves time but cheaper than consultants/Ofsted