

A practical guide to  
what middle leaders can  
do to improve learning  
in secondary schools

# Eight strategies for improvement

This booklet sets out eight areas in which middle and senior leaders can make a difference to learning. On the pages which follow, you will find practical suggestions for each of these, set out in colour coded sections. For each, we list what middle leaders can do and how senior leaders can support and enable them to work effectively.

- 01 Focus on learning and teaching
- 02 Generate positive relationships
- 03 Provide a clear vision and high expectations
- 04 Improve the environment
- 05 Provide time and opportunities for collaboration
- 06 Distribute leadership: build teams
- 07 Engage the community
- 08 Evaluate and innovate

The headings used here reflect eight strategies for improvement originally developed in NCSL commissioned research (Harris/Chapman, 2001) on successful leadership of schools in challenging circumstances. They were used in an earlier Leading Edge publication, *Making the Difference: A practical guide to what school leaders can do to improve and energise their schools* which is available from [research@ncsl.org.uk](mailto:research@ncsl.org.uk) or online at [www.ncsl.org.uk/leadingedge](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/leadingedge)

# Introduction



## Using the materials

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# 01



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## Middle leaders





"In our team, we give each teacher a class folder at the start of the year. The folder includes detailed information on learning styles, for example indicating the number of boys and girls who are visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learners."



"In our school, meetings run in threes. The first is an administration meeting, the second is a faculty learning meeting and the third is an inter-faculty learning meeting where we explore issues of teaching and learning. The last provides a supportive environment where middle leaders have opportunities to share good practice, coaching and mentoring."

## Middle leaders



"We run voluntary teaching and learning workshops where the team shares expertise and supports itself. They are run in a spirit of democracy where everyone can learn. Fit them in whenever people feel that they can get together."



## Senior leaders





**As senior leaders, model what you expect others to do.**





## Practitioner voice

teaching

learning

becoming involved in, or initiating, a whole-school activity related to school improvement

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## Senior leaders





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# 03



School Leadership



## Senior leaders



# 04 strategy



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## Middle leaders





## Senior leaders





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## Middle leaders

## Senior leaders



"Most people described them as slow and frustrating, so we abolished them for six months. In that time, subject leaders and year heads had to find other ways to communicate. In their place, we set up inter-faculty learning workshops and professional alliances which were, in practice, coaching relationships between groups of three staff."





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# 06



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"We took the last period off, worked until seven o'clock then socialised over a bottle of wine and a meal. Administration was banned! It was our single most productive time and the best investment we made. You're paid to lead, after all."

"I have to ensure every member of my team is seen as crucial to the success of the department and school."

## Senior leaders



# 07 strategy

## Middle leaders





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## Senior leaders



## Senior leaders



The Leading Edge Seminar Series is designed to explore current and significant aspects of leadership, draw on best practice nationally, and bring together successful school leaders to generate new understandings. It offers a dynamic forum for school leaders to engage in professional dialogue, discussion and debate, through seminars that allow and encourage an active exchange of perspectives drawn from leading edge research and practice.

The series provides opportunities for school leaders to learn from and with each other, to offer a degree of challenge and to bring together research and best practice.

## The principles



We would like to thank the middle and senior leaders who attended the two Leading Edge seminars at NCSL and provided such a thoughtful and stimulating debate. Particular thanks need to go to the middle and senior leaders who worked with us to refine and critique *The Heart of the Matter* and who led the second session in partnership with us.

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For further development opportunities, including building capacity for school improvement and developing learning-centred leadership, please visit NCSL's web site at [www.ncsl.org.uk](http://www.ncsl.org.uk)

Your comments on these and any other NCSL materials are always welcome. Please email us at [research@ncsl.org.uk](mailto:research@ncsl.org.uk)

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