



Schools Linking and Social Cohesion:

An Evaluation of The Linking Network's
Schools Linking National Programme

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Executive Summary

- The Linking Network was established in 2016 as the new home for schools linking in England with the support of the Pears Foundation.
- Schools linking is recognised and funded by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, DfE and Pears Foundation as a means of fostering improved levels of social cohesion at local community level.
- During the 2016-2017 academic year The Linking Network supported schools linking in 11 Local Authority areas in England. At the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year schools linking was established in a further 9 Local Authorities and at the start of the 2018-2019 academic year it is likely that at least 5 new Local Authorities will begin schools linking in a network which will by then stretch from Newcastle upon Tyne in the North to Kent in the South.
- In the first two years of its life TLN schools linking has doubled in size and reach. More than 17,500 children and young people in over 450 schools are now involved in schools linking.
- The Linking Network establishes purposive, facilitated and sustained classroom-based contact between children and young people from different geographical, ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.
- TLN schools linking enables children and young people to explore identity, celebrate diversity, build community and champion equality through the development of mutual understanding, critical awareness and openness, empathy, respect for difference and active citizenship.
- TLN schools Linking adopts a hub and spokes networked approach to linking, whereby the central TLN team facilitate, guide and enable the development of schools linking that emerges organically in different parts of England – local linking with national backing.
- Schools linking is increasingly seen at local, regional and national levels as an effective means of delivering Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural education; exploring 'British' values, PSHE and Citizenship curriculum obligations and raising pupil achievement.
- TLN was established and is run by experienced classroom teachers who provide relevant and informed CPD, learning resources and activities.
- TLN aims to build sustainable schools linking that is locally owned and to develop linking more widely across England.

1. Introduction

1.1 Social Cohesion and Difference

One of the defining dilemmas of life in twenty-first century Britain relates to the building of cohesive community life in an increasingly diverse society. Difference can often be read as a short-hand term for ethnic and religious diversity and whilst this is vitally important in an educational and political context, there is more to difference than ethnicity and faith. The challenge of difference also relates to our socio-economic status. People living in affluent and poor communities increasingly live in 'different worlds' and rarely meet on equal terms. A third feature of difference that impacts on the building of inclusive and cohesive communities relates to where we live. Life in inner city communities or on outer city estates is quite different from life in a gentrified city centre, a suburb, market town or village. Where we live makes a difference to the way we see the world and can skew our ideas about people living in very different communities. This report, which arises from an 18-month evaluation from 2017-2018, examines the role that The Linking Network's national Schools Linking programme in primary and secondary schools can play in fostering greater understanding and mutual respect, thereby contributing to social cohesion.

1.2 The Purpose of this Evaluation

Commissioned by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department of Education and Pears Foundation in January 2017, this evaluation was tasked to explain and assess 'The Linking Network's [TLN] Schools Linking National Programme. The evaluation began in February 2017 and concluded with the presentation of this final report in July 2018. The following features of schools linking will form the basis for this evaluation:

1. The features and effectiveness of the TLN schools linking model.
2. The growth of TLN schools linking and its relationship with local linking programmes.
3. The demographic reach of TLN schools linking.
4. The impact of schools linking on pupils, teachers, schools and communities.
5. Challenges and difficulties and strategies for overcoming them.
6. The criteria that need to be met to build sustainable schools linking.
7. The scalability of schools linking
8. Innovations and new possibilities in relation to schools linking.

1.3 Methodology and Ethics

This evaluation of the Schools Linking Programme is shaped by a commitment to Participatory Action Research (PAR), which is rooted in the work of Kurt Lewin (1951) and Paulo Freire (1970). PAR is characterised by a partnership model of research whereby participants are viewed as active partners, rather than the passive objects of study, and by a commitment to addressing specific 'real-life' challenges to bring about specific change (Stringer, 1999). Action Research is widely used within educational practice, planning and research as a means of ongoing critical reflection and progressive development. As Figure 1 below indicates Action Research is a cyclical process, beginning with a focus on a specific issue and moving through observation and reflection to the identification of key issues and the development of targeted action plans intended to facilitate more effective practice.



Figure 1: Action Research¹

Within this evaluation the Action Research cycle is applied to the approach utilised in the TLN Schools Linking National Programme. The action research cycle can be envisaged in the following way:

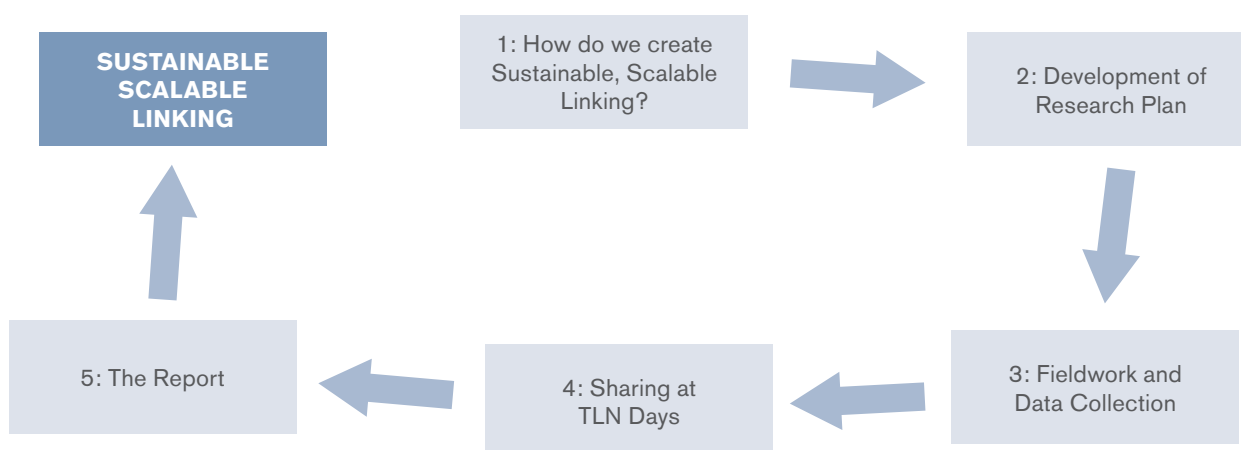


Figure 2: Action Research and Schools Linking

The evaluation has adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative modes of social research. By triangulating specific aspects of pupil level data, surveys of local area facilitators, interviews, focus groups with local area linking facilitators, participant observation at TLN Network days and document analysis it has been possible to present a holistic evaluation. It is important to stress, however, that, whilst it would add a valuable dimension to research into schools linking, it has not been possible to observe linking in action in the classroom. This evaluation has focused exclusively on the features and effectiveness of the TLN Schools Linking National Programme.

Pupil level data

The Department for Education National Pupil Data requests team was approached on two occasions to request the release of pupil level data that is tied to Unique Pupil Numbers but unfortunately these requests were denied. It was therefore necessary to contact the Headteachers of schools involved in linking to ask them to supply anonymised pupil level data directly to me on password protected Excel spreadsheets. This change of plan enabled me to simplify and tailor the request to Headteachers, ensuring a bespoke gathering of the data most relevant to schools linking. All data is GDPR compliant, has been stored on an encrypted password protected Coventry University computer and will be destroyed five years after end of the evaluation in accordance with the Ethical Approval granted by Coventry University for the research to be undertaken.

Surveys

Four attitudinal surveys were used with local area linking facilitators during the evaluation period. In June 2017 an initial base-line survey was used to map the landscape in relation to the linking experience and goals of all individual facilitators (existing and new areas) and their motivation for becoming involved in the programme. In November 2017 a 'State of Play' survey was completed by facilitators at The Linking Network day in Manchester and by email. This invited facilitators to comment on the following issues – 'hopes and worries'; 'challenges' and difficulties; 'good news stories'; the methods used to initiate linking relationships; Headteacher and Senior Leadership Team support; Local Authority support; the support provided by TLN and plans for the future.

Interviews

A total of 28 interviews with local area linking facilitators were conducted during the evaluation with linking facilitators in the 11 existing and 9 new local authority areas, the TLN Directors Linda Cowie and Meg Henry and three other members of the TLN staff team. Furthermore, two members of the TLN Board of Trustees (Bishop Toby Howarth and Denise Poole) and Bridget McGing, the Deputy Director of the Pears Foundation were interviewed to provide a broader strategic perspective on schools linking.

Focus Group Activities

A range of small focus group activities were used with facilitators at TLN Network Days to enable discussion and

elicit further non-verbal data. A 'Joys and Sorrows' exercise used a poster split into four sections – 'Joys', 'Sorrows', 'Uncertainty' and 'Bright Ideas' – in order to facilitate discussion between facilitators from different areas on what had gone well, frustrations/disappointments, areas of uncertainty/questions and new approaches to linking. A second 'Journey Towards Sustainability' exercise (together with a prompt sheet) invited facilitators to map the milestones from their point of 'departure' (beginning linking) to their 'destination' (sustainable schools linking). Both exercises stimulated animated discussions and provided valuable extra data. Copies of the focus group activity sheets are found in the Appendix to this report.

Participant Observation

All forms of ethnographic social research are characterised by participant observation, whereby the researcher, takes a passive observer's role in 1-1 conversations, group exercises, lunch and coffee breaks and whole group activities to develop a fuller picture of a context, community or organisation. Whilst not as focused as interviews, nor as precise as quantitative analysis, participant observation generates more organic and naturally occurring data, which can give rise to informal

insights not shared in formal group activities, thereby adding an important layer to data capture.

Document Analysis

Primary data gathered during fieldwork was supplemented by a detailed analysis of unofficial and official documents, ranging from TLN PowerPoint slides, policies, resources and web site to previous evaluations, DLGC and DfE policies on social cohesion, faith literacy, schools linking and 'British' values and Ofsted handbooks and guidelines on Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) education. Use of semiotics (identifying and analysing key symbolic references) and discourse analysis (identifying key strands of narrative/thematic discourse and analysing their interconnections. (Johnstone, 2002).

Ethics

All research projects undertaken by researchers from Coventry University are required to be assessed by the University's Ethics Committee before fieldwork is begun. This evaluation was given ethical approval in June 2017 before any fieldwork began. All data collection and analysis has been carried out in line with Coventry University ethical research guidelines and is GDPR compliant.



Figure 3: Network Linking Facilitator training¹

1. All of the photographs in this report have been taken by TLN staff or Linking Facilitators during the 2017-2018 academic year and all of the people featured in the pictures have given their explicit consent for them to be used in this report.

2. The Search for Social Cohesion

2.1 Mapping the Landscape

Two contrasting factors inform the search for social cohesion in 21st century Britain. Both have a significant impact on the context within which Schools Linking takes place and emphasise its importance.

First, the ethnic and religious landscape in the UK has been transformed in recent decades. Diversity has become part of the everyday experience of millions of people in small towns and suburbs and not just a feature of big cities like London, Birmingham or Manchester. In recent years we have witnessed the emergence of 'plural' towns and cities where no single ethnic group forms a majority of the local population (Simpson and Finney, 2007 and Simpson, 2013) and our diversity has become superdiverse (Vertovec, 2007). Another layer of complexity that impacts on Schools Linking relates to the ways in which children think about their own identity in a diverse society. Cross-cultural relationships are not a new phenomenon but have become increasingly important factors in urban life. Between the 2001 National Census and its 2011 successor the community of people self-defining as dual heritage doubled in size to 1,200,000, making someone like the athlete Jessica Ennis not just the face of the 2012 London Olympics but an increasingly important role model for young people in 21st century Britain. Schools Linking takes place on the front-line of such social and cultural change.

Secondly, however recent years have also been marked by increasingly visible examples of the demonising of difference, the rise of Far-Right movements such as the English Defence League and Britain First and in the number of reported hate crimes, especially since the EU Referendum in June 2016. Whilst the tragedy of 9/11 has cast a long shadow a more localised low-level eruption of violence has had a more direct impact on the social policies of successive British governments and on schools linking. In the summer of 2001 street violence broke out between working class Pakistani-British and White-British youth from socially excluded communities in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham, all of which were, at the time, amongst the 10% most multiply deprived neighbourhoods in England and Wales according to the Indices of Deprivation. The street violence in Bradford led directly to the birth of schools linking in England, as I note below. Following the violence, the then Home Secretary David Blunkett tasked Ted Cante to lead an Independent Review Team to assess barriers to community cohesion. The resulting *Cante Report* (2001) has been widely

criticised for making far reaching recommendations on the basis of limited evidence, underplaying the impact of poverty and inequality on community cohesion and making questionable assertions about residential segregation (Shannahan, 2017). In spite of this the report has had a major influence on the attitude of successive governments towards the relationship between diversity and social cohesion. This changing policy culture has had a direct impact on schools and, by extension, on TLN's schools linking. Cante's views continue to implicitly influence UK government social policy seventeen years after the 2001 street violence in the North West of England but have been widely critiqued and accused of misreading multiculturalism (Meer and Modood, 2012).

2.2 Policy Responses

The factors briefly summarised above have had a direct and long-lasting impact on social policy agenda of the Labour government (1997-2010), the coalition government (2010-2015) and the current Conservative government (2015-present). This is not the place to analyse such social policy in any detail but because it has had a direct and indirect impact on local communities and local schools it is important to recognise the way in which it has framed the development of The Linking Network and its Schools Linking National Programme. Following the publication of the *Cante Report* the Home Secretary David Blunkett began to develop plans for the introduction of a British citizenship test and ceremony, the first of which was held in 2004.¹ The challenge that the Labour government and, more recently the Coalition government and current Conservative governments have faced in their pursuit of social cohesion is that debates about 'Britishness' are inherently controversial, running the risk of resurrecting memories of Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 'rivers of blood' speech. The sociologist Tariq Modood (2005, 9) summarises the dilemma in clear terms in his call for a more dynamic and evolving understanding of 'Britishness', 'We require Britishness to be an inclusive identity, not one that says to some people, 'well, you are here but you are not British until you are sufficiently like us.' In Chapter 6 of this report I return to this theme when discussing the ways in which TLN Schools Linking interprets and addresses what have been termed 'British values'.

A second policy strand relates to attitudes towards multiculturalism and apparent residential segregation, both of which inform the development of Schools Linking in the classroom. Drawing on the Cante tradition of community

cohesion, former Prime Minister David Cameron spoke about British multiculturalism at a security conference in Munich in 2011, suggesting that, 'Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream.'¹² Cameron, like his Labour counterparts a decade earlier, made a clear connection between multiculturalism and segregated communities. Five years later, Dame Louise Casey (December 2016) stepped into this debate with the publication of *The Casey Review: A Review into Opportunity and Integration*. Casey placed a greater emphasis on the ways in which poverty and inequality inhibit integration than Cante had fifteen years earlier but made similar claims about residential segregation, particularly, she argued, within sections of the British-Muslim community. The suggestion that Britain is becoming a more segregated society has widely accepted amongst policy-makers but Simpson (2013), for example, notes that the UK has become less (not more) segregated since the 2001 National Census. It is true, however, as Casey (2016) notes that in a very small number of communities 80+% of people self-define as belonging to a 'minority religion' and that the ongoing 'White flight' has led to increased levels of White residential segregation. Both the decline in broader residential segregation and persistent segregation amongst a small percentage of the Muslim community and a much larger percentage of the White community form part of the social context within which Schools Linking seeks to foster greater understanding, mutual respect and social cohesion. These themes continued to feature in the 2018 *Integrated Communities* Green Paper, which outlined the policy proposals that will guide Theresa May's government's approach to building social cohesion. Like the *Casey Review* before it the *Integrated Communities* Green Paper (2018, 12ff) recognises that social exclusion denies people, particularly within some minority ethnic communities, opportunities and inhibits integration. However, again like the *Casey Review*, the *Integrated Communities* Green Paper continues to rest on the work of Ted Cante on community cohesion and residential segregation and devotes much of its energy to exploring migration, school segregation, residential segregation, low levels of English language proficiency, personal cultural and religious norms and values and a lack of meaningful social interaction. Schools linking takes place against this policy background and, whilst TLN was consulted in the process of writing *Integrated Communities*, the tenor of the Green Paper raises important challenges as the network continues to evolve and grow.

A third policy strand that has had a major impact on the context within which Schools Linking takes place relates to the Preventing Violent Extremism (Prevent) strategy introduced by the Labour government in 2007 as part of its wider CONTEST programme. Prevent was intended to understand and counter violent and non-violent extremist ideologies and the circumstances that fostered such radicalism, with a particular focus on the activism of the Far-Right and some forms of Islamist ideology. Although people were referred to the Prevent 'Channel' programme for a variety of reasons, the National Police Chief's Council figures from 2015-2016 show that 14% of referrals related to Far-Right extremism, 68% were connected with Islamist extremism (NPCC, 2016, 43/16, 3). Schools Linking provides a tried and tested toolkit for teachers who want their pupils to reflect on the challenges that both narratives pose to the celebration of diversity and the building of social cohesion.

2.3 Implications for Education

The social cohesion policy responses and attitude of leading political leaders towards multiculturalism summarised above have re-framed the public and political atmosphere within which Schools Linking operates. Whilst the broader scope of Prevent has focused on community relations in wider society the introduction of obligations on schools in July 2015 has had an impact on Schools Linking. In their research into the effects of Prevent in schools, Busher, Choudhury, Thomas and Harris (2017, 11-17) highlight the challenges that the new duty poses. In Chapter 6 below I note the ways in which TLN has addressed these new obligations and their embodiment in the exploration of 'British' values in a creative, inclusive and supportive manner that foregrounds the central importance of safeguarding children. TLN is in a strong position to help teachers to respond to these new duties in a constructive and progressive manner that gives teachers the tools to, 'explore identity, celebrate diversity, champion equality and promote community.'¹³

Before turning to the development of TLN and the characteristics of its Schools Linking model it is important to note the importance of the guidelines laid down by Ofsted in its October 2017 *Inspection Handbook* and their implications for local linking programmes. Three points are of particular relevance. First, Ofsted notes that the National Curriculum in England specifies that all state-funded schools must offer a curriculum that fosters the spiritual,

moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils, in line with the 2002 Education Act. The effectiveness of SMSC (Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural) provision within a school is a key element of Ofsted inspections. The features of effective SMSC provision that Ofsted identifies represent can be used to help us to measure the effectiveness of an important element of TLN's Schools Linking National Programme. However, in saying this, it is also important to recognise the extent to which the programme impacts positively on pupil achievement:

- Enabling pupils to thrive by promoting self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence
 - Preparing pupils for life in modern Britain
 - Helping pupils to embrace 'British' values as defined below
 - Promoting equality, challenging stereotypes and the use of derogatory language
 - Enabling and a greater understanding of and respect for people of all faiths and none
 - Ensuring that pupils feel listened to and safe
 - Encouraging open debate whilst protecting pupils from radicalisation and extremism
- Fostering greater understanding of a pupil's own identity and of pupils from different backgrounds
 - Enabling pupils to become thoughtful, caring and active citizens.

Second, in light of the Department for Education's 2014 guidelines, Ofsted makes it clear that SMSC within schools is expected to embody what it terms 'British' values. These are identified as a respect for democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for and tolerance of people from different faith or belief backgrounds. Above the word 'British' is placed in inverted commas in order to reflect the argument that the markers identified are arguably more properly defined as broader 'human' or cosmopolitan values (Busher at al, 2017). Third, the 2015 extension of Prevent obligations to schools as part of what the Department for Education (DfE, 2015, 5) referred to as 'schools and childcare providers wider safeguarding duties' and the protection from 'the risk of radicalisation' has provided a new context for Schools Linking. The framing of Prevent obligations as safeguarding poses new challenges for the way in which pastoral care is perceived in schools, given that any concerns about the welfare of individual students are now referred to the Local Authority, which may forward these to the anti-radicalisation Prevent 'Channel' programme (Busher et al, 2017). The way in which TLN has sought to respond to these new challenges in its Schools Linking National Programme is considered in Chapter 4.



Figure 4: Rocks in Rochdale

3. The Story of The Linking Network

3.1 The Roots of Schools Linking

Schools linking was born in the summer of 2001 in the aftermath of street violence between young Pakistani-British and White-British men in several inner-city neighbourhoods in Bradford. In the aftermath of arrests in majority Pakistani-British communities following the violence the Headteachers from the semi-rural Eldwick and the inner-city Girlington Primary Schools in Bradford met to talk about developing a link between Year 6 pupils in both schools. As Claire Ackroyd, Pauline Grant, Janice Kershaw and Angie Kotler (2003) note this conversation between two Headteachers in 2001 marks the beginning of schools linking in the UK. Formally launched by Education Bradford, which was led by Angie Kotler in January 2002, this first local expression of schools linking attracted regional and national attention. Pupils were invited to speak with Home Office representatives, were featured on BBC 'Look North' and in September 2002 a total of 20 Primary and Special Schools were linked for the first time.

The development of schools linking in Bradford began to attract national attention and a similar initiative was launched in Tower Hamlets in East London in 2006. Against this backdrop and that of the 7/7 terrorist attack in London 2005 Sir Keith Ajegbo was asked by the Education Secretary, Alan Johnson, to chair a 'Diversity and Citizenship Curriculum Review'. Following the resulting *Ajegbo Report* in 2007 the 'Schools Linking Network' (SLN) was established with financial support from the then 'Department for Children, Schools and Families' and the Pears Foundation (which has provided consistent funding since 2007) in order to initiate schools linking programmes in a further 40 local authority areas. In 2011 the network was cited by the *Runnymede Trust* as an example of good practice in relation to fostering dialogue and building social cohesion amongst school children.



Figure 5: Pupils from Bradford enjoy a Linking Day

3.2 Evaluations and New Beginnings

In the years since its emergence in Bradford schools linking programmes have been evaluated on three occasions (Raw, 2006, Raw, 2009 and Kerr at al, 2011 for the Department for Education). In 2016, nine years after its establishment, the Schools Linking Network was re-framed and re-named 'The Linking Network' to emphasise its commitment to long-term community-based linking, alongside its core schools-based linking work. The Chair of TLN's Board of Trustees, Bishop Toby Howarth (Bishop of Bradford) pointed to the importance of schools as sites of social cohesion building in interview on 1st June 2018, suggesting that the quality contact needed to foster social cohesion demands more than chance encounter or voluntary meetings where people who are already committed to intercultural dialogue gather. Schools, he noted 'are almost the only place where you get everybody.' He went on, 'you don't want to go back to the days in Bradford of bussing, you're not going to change people's housing, so you've got to create spaces for people from often monocultural schools to meet.' (1st June 2018).

It is tempting but mistaken to represent schools linking as the educational arm of this community cohesion agenda (Miah, 2015, 20) or to imply that its focus has been limited to fostering dialogue between children from different ethnic backgrounds (Austin and Hunter, 2013, 68ff). In interview, Bishop Toby made this point in clear terms when talking about integration, 'The media and the government reduce it to ethnicity and religion – it's all about Muslims. What we're saying is absolutely not. There's as much of an issue for a kid who never meets a Muslim as there is for a Muslim kid who thinks everyone speaks Urdu. Integration is about everyone' (1st June 2018). During the fieldwork upon which this evaluation is based it has become clear that the affirmation of diversity and equality lie at the heart of the schools linking facilitated by The Linking Network and is seen as the foundation upon which sustainable and inclusive patterns of social cohesion must be built. Contemporary schools linking relates to far more than ethnicity and seeks to foster dialogue and greater mutual understanding around a wider cluster of expressions of difference, including faith/belief, social class and urban, suburban and rural communities. These two factors reflect the ongoing development of TLN and its approach to schools linking and place it in a strong position to foster dynamic patterns of social cohesion in the coming years.

4. TLN's Model of Schools Linking

4.1 Values, Principles and Theory

TLN Schools' Linking is shaped by a clear ethical and pedagogical vision, which is clearly summarised on its web site:

The Linking Network supports schools and communities to develop a positive, cohesive ethos by helping children, young people and adults to explore identity, celebrate diversity, champion equality and promote community.⁴

More specifically TLN (2017) identifies five core aims:

1. To develop and deepen children and young people's knowledge and understanding of identity/ies, diversity, equality and community.
2. To develop skills of enquiry, critical thinking, reflection and communication.
3. To develop trust, empathy, awareness and respect.
4. To provide opportunities for children and young people to meet, build relationships, work together and contribute to the wider community.
5. To provide opportunities for adults who work with children and young people to share good practice, increase understanding of the issues of identity and community in their districts and to broaden perspectives.

These aims effectively reflect the philosophy that guides TLN's work, 'The Linking Network takes as its starting point the need for us all to develop the skills of dialogue, to be able to communicate across real or perceived boundaries and to develop a vocabulary of shared humanity.' Three important themes are touched upon in this summary of the values that guide the work of TLN. First, the recognition that effective dialogue can only occur when we understand it as a learned practice that relies on the development of the techniques, attitudes and practices that facilitate deep listening, empathy and mutual respect. Second, the recognition that communities can become fragmented when attitudes towards different identity markers such as social class, ethnicity, religion or gender foster isolation, discrimination or inequality, thereby harming social cohesion. Third, an ethical commitment to an

equality that arises from our common humanity. The four key questions that TLN Schools Linking revolves around distil the organisation's guiding philosophy and core aims in a succinct and accessible manner:

1. Who am I?
2. Who are we?
3. Where do we live?
4. How do we live together?

TLN draws on the Intergroup Contact Theory first developed by Allport (1954) to provide the theoretical underpinning for its schools linking. Allport (1954) argued that interpersonal contact is the most effective means of reducing prejudice if four key conditions are met.

1. The relationship between dialogue partners is an equal one.
2. Dialogue partners share and agree common goals.
3. Contact is characterised by an ethic of cooperation rather than competition.
4. The contact is supported by broader relevant authorities or institutions.

The central premise of Contact Theory is that facilitated contact, which meets the above criteria, challenges the unexamined stereotypes that different groups may perpetuate about other people. Such contact, it is suggested, overcomes the depiction of certain groups as cultural 'insiders' and others as (sometimes threatening) 'outsiders'.

Four forms of contact are apparent in TLN schools linking. First, the positive outcomes of contact rely on its development over an extended period of time, which enables the forging of greater trust and deeper relationships. In schools linking pupils link with each other for one academic year. This enables the development of meaningful contact but, as some local area facilitators suggested during this evaluation, a longer-term linking project could enable the development of deeper relationships and collaborative projects. Second, Crisp and Turner (2009) suggest that positive contact outcomes can be facilitated by imagining face-to-face contacts prior to the actual encounter. This 'imagined

contact hypothesis' already plays a role in TLN schools linking through the work that pupils prepare and exchange before the face to face meetings with children from another school. Such valuable work could be developed further. Third, what Mazziotta, Mummendey and Wright (2011) call 'vicarious contact' can enhance the positive outcomes of face-to-face contact and widen their impact beyond the pupils and teachers directly involved in local linking programmes. It is possible that the emergence of parents linking in five pilot areas in 2018 can be seen in these terms and that that younger pupils in schools where linking is taking place may also benefit from 'vicarious contact observing their older peers and imagining their future experiences. Fourth, digital linking can facilitate and extend contact between pupils through the sharing of work, photographs, videos and resources and as a virtual 'chat-room' for linking facilitators and linking teachers enabling shared planning. In 2017-2018 TLN introduced the use of the Edmodo online virtual learning platform to enhance the linking experience. Such 'electronic' contact has the potential to enrich the practice and experience of schools linking still further.

TLN's use of Contact Theory is tailored to the schools linking context and serves as a useful, and respected, theoretical underpinning of their work. However, as with all theoretical approaches Contact Theory is not without its challenges. In its ongoing use of Contact Theory, it will be helpful for TLN to consider four of these challenges. First, whilst the preconditions above may seemingly be met, in practice one of the schools involved in linking may feel that the relationship is an unequal one, which in turn might heighten anxieties about the link. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that local linking facilitators ensure, as far as they are able, that the Senior Leadership Teams and teachers in both schools commit to the four key contact conditions above and build them into the planning and practice of the linking relationship. During the evaluation it became clear that the TLN team are aware of the challenges that a use of Contact Theory poses and address these in teacher training sessions. Second, it is possible that a sincere commitment to developing a shared agenda and common goals can minimise the importance of difference in relation to school ethos, pupil profile or context. The four questions TLN uses are intended to encourage an equal focus on similarities and differences by pupils of all ages. As linking relationships are developed it is important that the search for common goals does not ignore the particular characteristics of either school. It became evident during

the evaluation that TLN provides teachers with the opportunities to reflect on the particularity of their own schools. Third, whilst greater understanding of pupils from different backgrounds can undermine prejudice that arises from ignorance, it may not be as successful in addressing more conscious discrimination amongst pupils. In order to address this TLN encourages teacher awareness of discrimination providing tools and age appropriate classroom resources to support teachers as part of curriculum work with their own pupils through the Linking Year. Fourth, the use of Contact Theory within schools linking needs to be conscious of the possibility that, unless contact is carefully facilitated, it can reinforce, rather than break-down discrimination.⁵ An uncritical use of Contact Theory that does not take account of the challenges noted above may fail to realise the goal of breaking down barriers and enhancing mutual understanding. TLN's use of Contact Theory does not fall into this trap but is informed by its values, philosophical stance and pedagogically informed aims. That said, three suggestions may enhance its Schools Linking further and help to make it increasingly sustainable.

1. Crenshaw (1991) developed the theory of intersectionality in her analysis of the experience of the discrimination faced by African-American women to emphasise the many different factors that impacted on them. In a schools linking context the recognition that pupils' experience and attitudes are shaped by many different factors can further enhance its exploration of it four key questions and is use of Contact Theory. TLN's emphasis on classroom identity work helps children to explore the multiple identities they hold within their own class before then exchanging work with the other class in order to explore the multiple identities of all those in the linked class – 'Before exploring diversity by meeting others it is important we explore the multiple identity and diversity in our own group' (a phrase used in TLN training).
2. In her work on identity in increasingly diverse cities Sandercock (1998, 76) argues that policy makers need to develop an 'epistemology of multiplicity' – An attitude towards knowledge and understanding that is shaped by a commitment to diversity. Whether it is in relation to social class, ethnicity, religion or the suburban/urban/rural divide such an approach needs to characterise schools linking programmes locally and

nationally. TLN Schools Linking Programmes have been explicitly designed to help children engage with all aspects of diversity. A focus on the growing complexity of life in the UK in the 21st century will be needed to retain TLN's engagement with contemporary diversity.

The use of Contact Theory as a means of supporting schools linking between children from different backgrounds rests not only on enthusiasm, commitment and teaching ability but on high levels of cultural literacy amongst teachers and local link facilitators. This implies a need for a commitment to openness and ongoing learning about different communities and cultural/religious groups on the part of the adults who are helping the children to develop greater levels of respect, empathy and understanding. It is for this reason that TLN emphasises the importance of training for adults leading linking.

4.2 Schools Linking in Practice

The TLN 'Schools Linking Process' is effectively summarised in a short video on the 'Resources' page on the network's web site ([click here to view](#)). The year-long linking relationship itself, which is summarised below, arises from extensive relationship-building and pre-linking preparation. The TLN model of schools linking reflects an action research approach that balances the national and the local. This model ensures that, whilst the core principles and approach of TLN provide a consistent foundation for schools linking across the country, it is deeply contextual and reflects local needs and opportunities. As Figure 6 below indicates the 'Schools Linking Process' is cyclical:

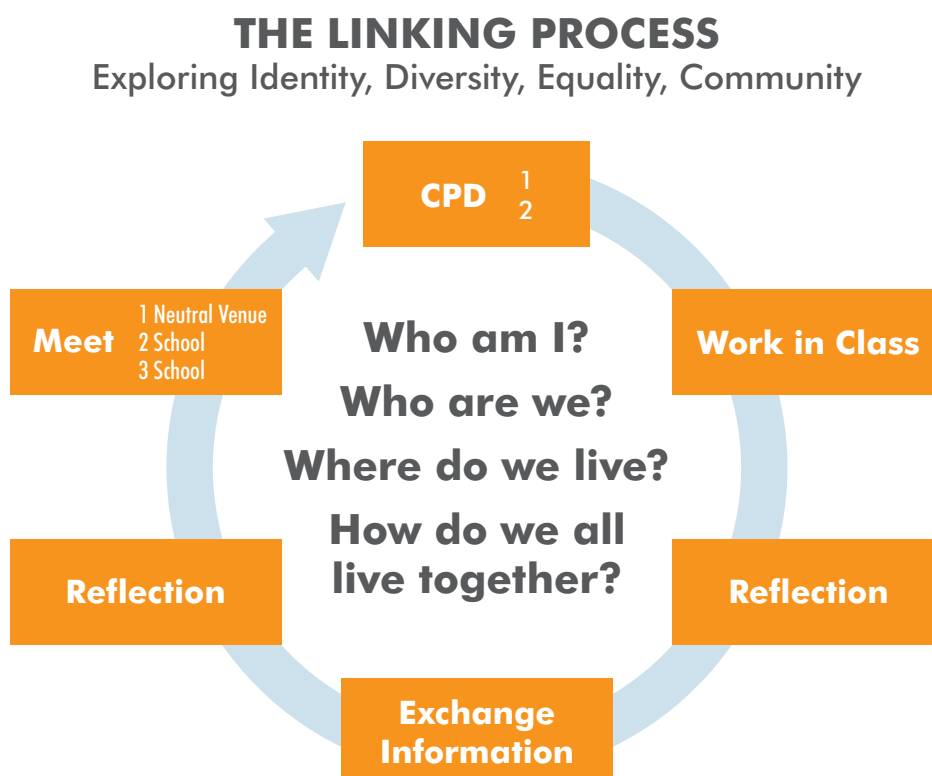


Figure 6: 'The Schools Linking Process'

The cyclical nature of TLN's Schools Linking intersperses action and ongoing development, within which practice is critiqued and sharpened by reflective analysis, which, in turn, is earthed in experience. The four key questions that underpin the entire linking process ensure that it is a purposive programme. Strictly speaking the linking cycle is more evolving spiral than repeating circle since practice and planning are critiqued and revised in light of work in the classroom. In pedagogical terms this ensures that linking is consistently informed and reinvigorated by the experience of classroom teachers, the experience of the three linking visits, CPD and ongoing classroom activities. This action-reflection model of schools linking has the potential to contribute substantially to the professional development of school teachers. However, it is important to recognise that its effectiveness depends on an openness to new insights and practice on the part of classroom teachers involved in linking relationships and on the support of the wider school community and Senior Leadership Team in particular.

4.3 Resourcing Schools Linking Practice

One of the defining features of TLN's model of schools linking is that it is thoroughly informed by practice. This experience is evident in the [resources that are available as downloads on the TLN web site](#). It is evident that the resources and handouts provided at CPD meetings have been produced by experienced teachers who have been engaged in schools linking for many years. This commitment to producing, providing and sharing accessible and downloadable resources relating to the schools linking process, practical arrangements and the embedding of linking in the school curriculum is one of the strengths of the TLN model and an example of best practice, which should be commended. The provision of 'ready-made' resources reflects an awareness of the time-pressures that classroom teachers are and has the potential to ensure consistency across the twenty local authority areas that are now involved in its Schools Linking National Programme. Resources include:

1. Linking Day plans and Evaluations, Proposal forms for new School Links, Teacher Contact Forms and Link Day Timetables.
2. Reflections on TLN's 4 key questions for Primary and Secondary schools.
3. Primary school activity and lesson plan resources.

4. Secondary school activity and lesson plan resources.
5. Resources relating to identity and 'British' values.
6. School assembly resources.
7. Video resources (many showcasing schools linking activities by link schools).

Whilst the existing TLN resources are extensive and of a high quality it may be worth considering whether it is possible to develop a system whereby local linking facilitators or linking teachers can upload and share resources that they have developed themselves. Such a development would reflect TLN's commitment to dialogue between the national and the local, provide professional development opportunities for local facilitators or teachers and an even greater public commitment to sharing best practice. Another important aspect of the TLN model that I have observed at Network Days in Bradford, London and Manchester relates to the importance of training. These sessions have combined practical, policy and pedagogical foci. A focus has been placed on practical considerations relating to the establishment and running of local linking programmes. Briefing sessions have communicated the latest Ofsted requirements, SMSC developments and guidance relating to the expectation that schools will embody and enable pupils to explore 'British' values. The participation of the Bishop of Bradford, Rt. Revd Toby Howarth, the Chair of the TLN Board of Trustees, Hilary Patel from the 'Race Equality and Faith Engagement, Integration and Faith Division' at the Ministry for Housing, Communities and local Government and Bridget McGing, the Deputy Director of the Pears Foundation in Network Days has provided local area facilitators with a deeper understanding of the vision of TLN Trustees, the commitment of a major funding supporter and the role that the British government wants schools linking to play in broader debates about social cohesion. CPD sessions have been clearly tailored to the practical needs and pedagogical questions of linking teachers and the discussion of sample resources for use in the classroom, the embedding of linking in the broader school curriculum and the sharing of activity/ learning handouts has been clearly welcomed by those who are new to schools linking. The commitment of TLN to providing resources for schools linking and to CPD for teachers and local linking facilitators is exemplary. During the evaluation, however, two suggestions shared by participants following the November 2017 Network

Day are worth consideration in the next phase of TLN's development:

1. It would be helpful for more time at Network Days/CPD to be devoted to linking focused small group activities and discussions so that participants can talk to each other in greater depth and share locally tested good practice more easily.
2. Given the dispersed nature of Network Days and CPD meetings TLN could consider how it may be possible to use these gatherings to foster a greater sense of being a community of schools linking practitioners and advocates.

It is important to note that these two reflections do not take account of the Network Day in May 2018 where more time was devoted to small group and area-based discussions.

4.4 Beyond the School Gate

TLN's Schools Linking is clearly focused on the classroom and on the potential of teaching to enable pupils to, 'explore identity, celebrate diversity, champion equality and promote community.' This is completely appropriate and must remain the central focus of TLN as it continues to develop and grow. However, it became evident during fieldwork, that TLN Directors, Trustees, MHCLG, the Pears Foundation and local area facilitators recognise that schools linking does not occur in a social vacuum. Pupils do not spend all of their time in the classroom. At the TLN Network Day in Manchester in November 2017 Bishop Toby Howarth, (17th November

2017), reminded local area facilitators that we currently live in an 'anxious age' when unity is increasingly being displaced by cultural and political narratives that demonise those whom we are told are 'not like us'. Those gathered at the Network Day in Manchester in November 2017 were reminded by Hilary Patel of the MHCLG that the TLN schools linking model has the potential to help children to critically reflect on the ways in which the understanding and celebration of diversity; the building of community and affirmation of equality that are central to schools linking can begin to foster greater levels of social cohesion in wider society.

In conversation one experienced linking facilitator in the North of England (June 2017) highlighted this challenge – 'If you're working with a particular group who are you leaving out? You can look at your parents. If the children are linking is there any reason why the parents can't link as well? This takes a lot of time and busy classroom teachers won't necessarily have the resource to do this but we want to reach outside of the school walls.' This reflection from an experienced local area linking facilitator serves as a reminder of two things. First, the linking of pupils from different schools is influenced by broader family relationships and community relations. As Figure 7 below implies the benefits that result from the linking of two classes can ripple out and inform relationships far more widely. Second, the methodology that characterises schools linking and the positive impact it gives rise to have the potential to connect parents and community groups in new ways, thereby fostering greater social cohesion.

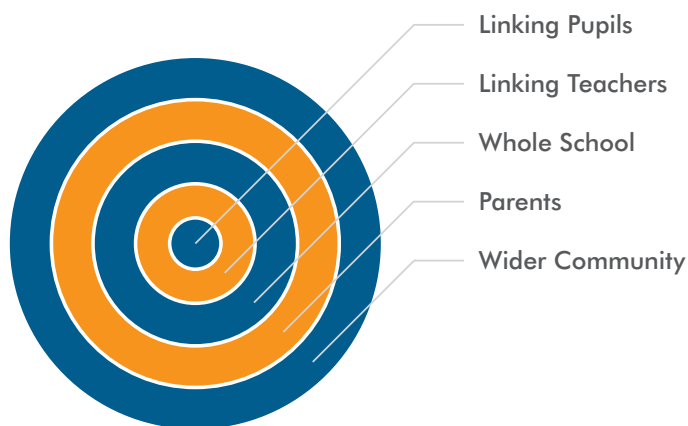


Figure 7: The Concentric Circles of Schools Linking.

A recent example of this 'beyond the school gate' approach is the 'Parents Linking' initiative that emerged in 2017-2018 on the invitation of the MHCLG. At the time of writing Bolton, Bradford, Calderdale, Kirklees, Pendle and Rochdale are involved in a short-term pilot project exploring the viability of bringing the parents of pupils involved in schools linking together in various social settings as a means of fostering greater mutual understanding, empathy and respect. Each area received a small grant to enable the development of parents linking activities. Areas have adopted different approaches, drawing on the needs, culture and linking facilitators' understanding of local communities. In Rochdale parents linking has revolved around country walks and the creation of a linking choir. In Bradford a visit to Cliffe Castle museum in Keighley and the chance to create a small stained glass window to take home was used to link parents, as were tickets to a Bradford City Football match and a community event linking children and their parents including icebreakers, litter picking, a shared meal and time for dialogue. In Pendle parents linking has been focused on workshops for families exploring culture and identity and included an innovative dialogue session. Other parents linking activities have included events during Refugee Week in June 2018 in Kirklees, which drew all linking schools and their parents together to see their children present their work and a family soft play session in Bolton. The purpose of the parents linking pilot project is to bring together parents who would otherwise rarely meet to introduce them to schools linking principles. It is hoped that such structured and purposive contact will help parents to support their children when they ask questions about identity. At the time of writing this report it is too early to assess the success of this parents linking initiative. It is likely that if such work is to grow it will need limited new extra resources and be given the time needed to take root. However, it is clear evidence of TLN's awareness of the need to take linking 'beyond the school gate' and its determination to explore viable ways of making this happen in a sustainable, bottom-up and contextually appropriate manner.

4.5 Unity in Diversity

It has become clear during this evaluation that TLN has consciously resisted the temptation to build a large top-down organisation within which power is held by a strong central secretariat and local authorities are expected to adopt a model of schools linking developed by the staff team in Bradford. Chair of the Board of Trustees, Bishop Toby Howarth made the point clearly, 'One of the things we've been strong on is to say we're not going to take all of these resources, so we can build ourselves up into a great empire' (Interview 1st June 2018). TLN's Directors are clearly committed to a relational and networked approach to schools linking. The TLN staff team act as a hub at the centre of a dispersed linking network, which exists to enable and resource the organic and contextualised growth of locally appropriate linking, rather than a head office insisting that local authorities across the country adopt the same 'TLN branded' approach. TLN represents a dispersed network that is clearly committed to the development of 'local projects with national backing' (TLN Network Day, 17th November 2017) – facilitating rather than controlling. The same core principles and methods and 4 key questions characterise TLN supported schools linking across the country. However, TLN's commitment to bottom-up linking ensures that schools linking in each Local Authority is unique. It is important to note, however, that this enabling, relational and democratic approach to schools linking challenges hierarchical models of institution building. It is more time consuming and as TLN grows, which I believe it will, the temptation to adopt a more centralised top-down approach is likely to become stronger. On the basis of this evaluation, I encourage TLN to resist this temptation, because it has become clear that its originality and success rest on its relational, democratic and networked approach. Such a model is more likely to foster the sustainable growth of the network than a top-down model where a central office directs the approach that should be taken in every local schools linking relationship across the country.

This commitment to the organic growth of local schools linking programmes and to networked practice is exemplified by the current strength of the network and the range of expertise of the practitioners leading the programmes. In Kent the programme is led by the Head of the Inclusion Service for the County Council who have found ways to mainstream the resources provided TLN into all of their work in schools as well as in schools linking. In Buckinghamshire the programme is led by the Equalities and Policy team. In Stockport Programme schools linking is led by the Head of Service for the Council Ethnic Minority Achievement Service and in Bolton the programme is led by the Achievement, Cohesion and Inclusion Service for the Council. TLN also works in partnership with the Education Team at a Museum in Calderdale who have been leading linking for five years and during the evaluation another museum partnership has emerged with the Laing Gallery in Newcastle. The Oldham schools linking programme was established in 2001 and joined the Network in Autumn 2015 bringing a different model and experience to enrich the Network.

TLN's networked approach to schools linking enables the development of partnerships with other organisations whose work has the potential to enrich the linking experience. One example of this approach is seen in TLN's partnering with Rob Unwin of the [Development Education Centre in South Yorkshire](#), with particular reference to his background as a [Philosophy for Children](#) facilitator. During the period covered by this evaluation a Philosophy for Children approach to critical thinking and collaborative learning has been used at [TLN Network Days](#), [CPD events for linking teachers in Bradford, Stockport, Rotherham, Sheffield, Derby and Manchester](#) and to resource linking [pupil activities exploring identity](#). A second example of TLN's partnership ethic is seen in an emerging piece of work the has developed during this evaluation with Mencap who approached TLN to develop further the linking of mainstream and special schools in Bradford. At the time of writing it is too early to assess the success of this initiative. However, its emergence provides further evidence of TLN's networked approach to schools linking and may signal a significant future partnership, which has the potential to resource effective link in/between/with 'special' schools. The three partnerships noted above underline the importance of TLN's networked approach to schools linking – local leadership with national support.

4.6 How Long and How Deep?

As noted above TLN schools linking is premised on the establishment of a linking relationship that lasts for one academic year. During the evaluation it has become clear that there are many understandable pragmatic reasons for this. However, in light of the comments about Contact Theory at the beginning of this chapter, it is possible that the consideration of longer-term linking relationships may be beneficial. This does not represent a critique of the existing model but, as evidenced during fieldwork, the development of longer-term linking relationships between classes is seen as an aspiration by experienced linking facilitators from the South of England and the North West. Previous evaluations have noted the strength of TLN schools linking in Years 3 and 4 and it is recognised that pupils in Year 6 are largely focused on SATs and the transition to secondary school. However, one possibility that is worth further consideration in schools where linking is well established is the development of a two year linking cycle beginning in Year 6 and continuing as pupils make the transition into Year 7; providing a bridge between Primary and Secondary education, especially where pupils from quite different Primary schools will be attending the same, but much larger Secondary school. Whilst there are clearly a number of potential challenges that such an approach may give rise to it is an area of possible development that TLN could usefully explore.

5. Schools Linking By Numbers

5.1 The Importance of Numbers

This section of the report assesses the quantitative impact of TLN schools linking, maps progress against MHCLG targets and assesses what these figures can tell us about the sustainability and scalability of schools linking. This final report builds on the interim evaluation of December 2017 and presents detailed 2017-2018 statistical data in relation to:

1. Local authority areas involved in Linking
2. Numbers and types of schools.
3. Number of pupils involved in linking.
4. Number of linking classes.
5. Detailed pupil-level demographic data.
6. Comparison between schools and local postcode area demographics.
7. Approaches to funding schools linking.

5.2 Local Authority Areas

In the 2016-2017 academic year 11 Local Authority areas were engaged in the TLN schools linking national programme – Bolton, Bradford, Buckinghamshire, Calderdale, Kent, Kirklees, London, Luton, Oldham, Pendle and Stockport. The DCLG set TLN a target for the 2017-2018 academic year of retaining 10 existing local authority areas and beginning linking in 6 new areas. As indicated in Figure 8 below TLN has surpassed this target.

MHCLG Target	Retain 10 existing areas and recruit 6 new areas
2017-2018 Actual	11 existing areas retained, and 9 new areas recruited
Existing LAs	Bolton, Bradford, Bucks, Calderdale, Kent, Kirklees, London, Luton, Oldham, Pendle, Oldham
New LAs	Birmingham, Blackburn with Darwen, Burnley, Derby, Manchester, Rochdale, Rotherham, Sheffield, Waltham Forest

Figure 8: Linking Areas 2017-2018

Since the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year 6 more local authorities have expressed their interest in beginning TLN schools linking: Bury, Leicester, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nottingham, Tower Hamlets and Walsall. As Figure 9 below illustrates, TLN schools linking now stretches from Newcastle upon Tyne in the North to Kent in the South. This map also makes it clear that schools linking is most widely practiced in industrial/post-industrial towns and cities in the North West of England. This should not be surprising, given that schools linking first emerged in Bradford following the street violence of

2001 in the city, and in nearby Burnley and Oldham. The growth of TLN in the Midlands, the South East and the North East has demonstrated that its approach to schools linking is not tied to its Bradford home, but represents a model of purposive encounter and dialogue that has the potential to enrich the educational and social experience of pupils and teachers across the UK. In light of this, there is no reason why TLN schools linking cannot now plan further growth in the South West of England and East Anglia, where opportunities arise.



The National Linking Network

- Birmingham
- Blackburn with Darwen
- Bolton
- Bradford
- Buckinghamshire
- Burnley
- Calderdale
- Derby
- Kent
- Kirklees
- London
- Luton
- Manchester
- Newcastle
- Oldham
- Pendle
- Rochdale
- Rotherham
- Sheffield
- Stockport
- Tower Hamlets
- Waltham Forest

Figure 9: A map of TLN Schools Linking 2018

5.3 School Numbers

The number of schools involved in TLN's Schools Linking National Programme has grown significantly since September 2016. In the 2016-2017 academic year a total of 258 Primary and Secondary schools were engaged in schools linking. During 2017-2018 this has grown to 453 schools, as seen in Figure 10 below:

LA Area	2016-2017	2017-2018
Birmingham	0	23
Blackburn with Darwen	0	30
Bolton	33	35
Bradford	46	57
Buckinghamshire	6	24
Burnley	0	23
Calderdale	30	30
Derby	0	12
Kent	2	16
Kirklees ###	23	14
London	39	35
Luton	11	16
Manchester	0	7
Oldham	37	40
Pendle	10	20
Rochdale	0	12
Rotherham & Sheffield ###	0	15
Stockport	21	33
Waltham Forest	0	9
Total Number of Schools	258	453

Figure 10: Linking Schools by Local Authority Area

Two brief notes may help when reading the table above. First whilst Rotherham and Sheffield are counted together in relation to school, class and pupil numbers, they are two distinct local authority areas working together with the support of one linking facilitator. Second, whilst the number of linking schools in Kirklees has decreased it is important to note that linking relationships in this area are more complex than in some other parts of the country because of the local focus on engaging faith and community groups in Kirklees in linking projects. There

are at the time of writing 17 community groups in the Kirklees region involved in linking as well as 14 schools, bringing the total number of linking institutions to 31. This approach raises interesting questions about the relationship between school and local neighbourhood and schools linking and broader social cohesion in the wider community. This is an issue that TLN is beginning to reflect upon as it begins the next phase of its development.

5.4 Types of Linking Schools

Historically TLN schools linking has been far stronger in Primary schools than it has been in Secondary Schools. At the time of writing 88% of linking programmes link pupils from different Primary Schools and 12% from different Secondary schools. TLN is aware of this challenge and appointed a new member of staff during the 2017-2018 academic year to develop schools linking in Secondary schools. Azam Ali, who is an experienced secondary school teacher, spoke to me during the evaluation (11th June 2018) about the challenges related to developing schools linking in a secondary context where there is little freedom within the curriculum and teachers feel 'under siege' because of the demands made of them. According to Ali linking in a secondary school context has the potential to enhance achievement across the curriculum, but especially in Religious Education, Citizenship and SMSC and can enable an empathetic exploration of 'British' values, as required by Ofsted. Having said this, Ali recognises the need to think creatively about secondary school linking and to interweave into existing subject areas or form, year or school events. Alternatively, the TLN schools linking model can be used in a secondary context to link different classes within a large school. Examples of secondary school linking during 2017-2018 have included a meeting of SMSC leads from schools across Bradford to share good practice in relation to challenging homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic bullying, a Maths Challenge for Year 8 pupils, navigating an assault course in the Yorkshire countryside and an 'R.E Superstar' debate. Schools linking principles were used to plan and host a conference for Religious Education teachers in Bradford, a video intended to stimulate debate ahead of the June 2018 'Great Get Together', Ryedale school from York and Bradford Academy spent a day exploring identity and community in Bradford Cathedral and two secondary schools (Grange and Buttershaw secondary schools) that are just a mile apart but set in dramatically different neighbourhoods established a link for the first time.

Most TLN schools linking takes place in Local Authority run community schools. However, linking with or between community and faith schools now represents almost 40% of school links and approximately 10% of links are with academies or multi academy trusts. Whilst the majority of faith school links are run by the Faith and Belief Forum they are present in most other linking areas as well. Given that this is a growing strand of TLN's schools linking it is important to comment briefly on the complexity of faith school linking since the development of this work raises new questions for TLN to consider as it continues to grow. The term 'faith schools' encompasses a variety of different schools. First, it is possible to speak of 'faith friendly' schools, such as Church of England schools. Such schools have clear connections with the Church of England, may be connected to a local Anglican Parish church, emphasise the importance of Religious Education and recognise the importance of the spiritual well-being of pupils. However, to all intents and purposes they are comparable to Local Authority run community schools, follow the National Curriculum, adopt non-confessional forms of Religious Education and inclusive pupil recruitment policies. Engagement with these schools is well embedded within the national linking network. Second, it is possible to speak of 'faith ethos' schools, such as many Roman Catholic schools, which are open to pupils from all faith backgrounds (and none) but which may prioritise children from particular religious backgrounds in relation to pupil recruitment and may adopt more confessional forms of Religious Education. Linking in 'Faith friendly' and 'faith ethos' schools is well embedded across the national network. Third, it is possible to speak of 'faith focused' schools, which place a greater emphasis on specific religious teaching and traditions and implicitly cater for the needs of people of faith who want their children to be educated within the family's faith tradition. The term 'minority faith' is used by the Faith and Belief Forum and TLN to refer to these schools and often refers to independent Muslim schools. However, it can also be used as a descriptor for Hindu, Jewish and Sikh schools as well as independent Greek Orthodox or evangelical Christian schools (see Figure 11 opposite).

Religious Tradition	Number of Classes
Evangelical Christian	2
Greek Orthodox	1
Hindu	2
Muslim	33
Jewish	11
Sikh	5

Figure 11: Schools Linking in 'Minority' Faith Schools

Whilst the majority of minority faith school links are run by the Faith and Belief Forum they are present in many other linking areas as well. Given the breadth of values and approaches taken to education by such a wide variety of schools it may be useful moving forward to consider replacing the term 'minority faith' schools with more specific terminology, which identifies different schools more clearly. In light of the growing number of links with and between 'minority faith' schools TLN could consider how it can best support increased levels of religious literacy amongst local area linking facilitators in the next phase of its development. TLN may wish to hold its own bespoke religious literacy CPD days in collaboration with specialists in Religious Education.

5.5 Numbers of Linking Classes

In the 2016-2017 academic year 368 classes were involved in schools linking. The MHCLG, DfE and Pears Foundation set TLN the target of maintaining this number of 368 linking classes in existing areas in 2017-2018 and of developing schools linking with 84 classes in new areas. TLN has succeeded in surpassing this target and at November 2017 had linked a total of 617 classes – 447 classes in existing areas (beating its target by 79) and 170 classes in new areas (beating its target by 86). A minimum of 14 classes have begun schools linking in all new Local Authority areas. The number of linking classes in different schools breaks down in the following way:

Total Classes	617
Primary classes	549
Secondary classes	68
Church of England classes	117
Roman Catholic classes	40
Minority faith classes	53

Figure 12: Number of Linking Classes

5.6 Pupils involved in Schools Linking

In the 2016-2017 academic year 10,993 children were involved in TLN's Schools Linking National Programme. At the time of writing 17,575 children are participating in linking programmes in 2017-2018; an increase of 6,582 children. Figure 13 below breaks this figure down by area.

LA Area	Pupil numbers
Birmingham	910
Blackburn with Darwen	1,000
Bolton	1,701
Bradford	2,503
Buckinghamshire	591
Burnley	780
Calderdale	1,086
Derby	437
Kent	540
Kirklees	420
London	1,095
Luton	1,080
Manchester	363
Oldham	1,890
Pendle	779
Rochdale	419
Rotherham & Sheffield	578
Stockport	1,056
Waltham Forest	347
Total Number of Children	17,575

Figure 13: Numbers of Children Schools Linking 2017-2018

Every school pupil has a Unique Pupil Number. Access to these anonymised data sets provides non-sensitive demographic information about pupils attending schools in England. In order to provide the level of analysis required by MHCLG and DfE we asked the Department for Education to grant access to the UPNs of pupils involved in schools linking. This request was made in July 2017 but was rejected in November 2017. Whilst this was disappointing, given the DfE's support for the evaluation, it enabled us to design a bespoke and user-friendly survey, which only addressed the criteria needed for the evaluation.

Careful attention was paid during the ethics application at Coventry University to ensuring that data collection was GDPR compliant. In December 2017 all local area linking facilitators were asked to encourage linking schools in their area to complete and return a password protected schools linking spreadsheet. This asked for the following information – school type, numbers and school year[s] of pupils involved in linking, the gender of pupils, their ethnicity, their religious affiliation (where schools collected this) and the number of linking pupils who receive the Pupil Premium. Schools were asked to return their linking spreadsheets by 31st March 2018 to allow time for detailed statistical analysis. However, this deadline was extended to 30th June 2018 to enable as many schools as possible to return their data. By the beginning of July 2018, a total of 130 (out of 453) schools had returned their completed schools linking data spreadsheets, representing a response rate of 29%.

Whilst a higher response was hoped for, two factors partially explain why this was not achieved. First, several local area facilitators reported that schools became more nervous about sharing data following the introduction of the new General Data Protection Regulations in May 2018. Second, several local authorities with large numbers of linking schools returned very low numbers of spreadsheets. In spite of this it is important to note two factors. First, within similar social research projects, it is widely recognised that response rates of over 20% are common and considered statistically significant. A return rate of 29%, therefore represents a large enough response to enable viable analysis. Second, the data gathered during this project represents the most detailed

picture of schools linking in the UK to date and provides information about 5,476 pupils. The data received paints a clear picture of TLN schools linking in 2017-2018, but it should be noted that higher returns from several large and diverse local authorities would have provided a fuller picture of linking in faith ethos schools and of the religious affiliation of pupils involved in schools linking. With this caveat in mind the data received gives us a clear picture of the reach and impact of schools linking

Schools Linking by Age

Linking by School Years

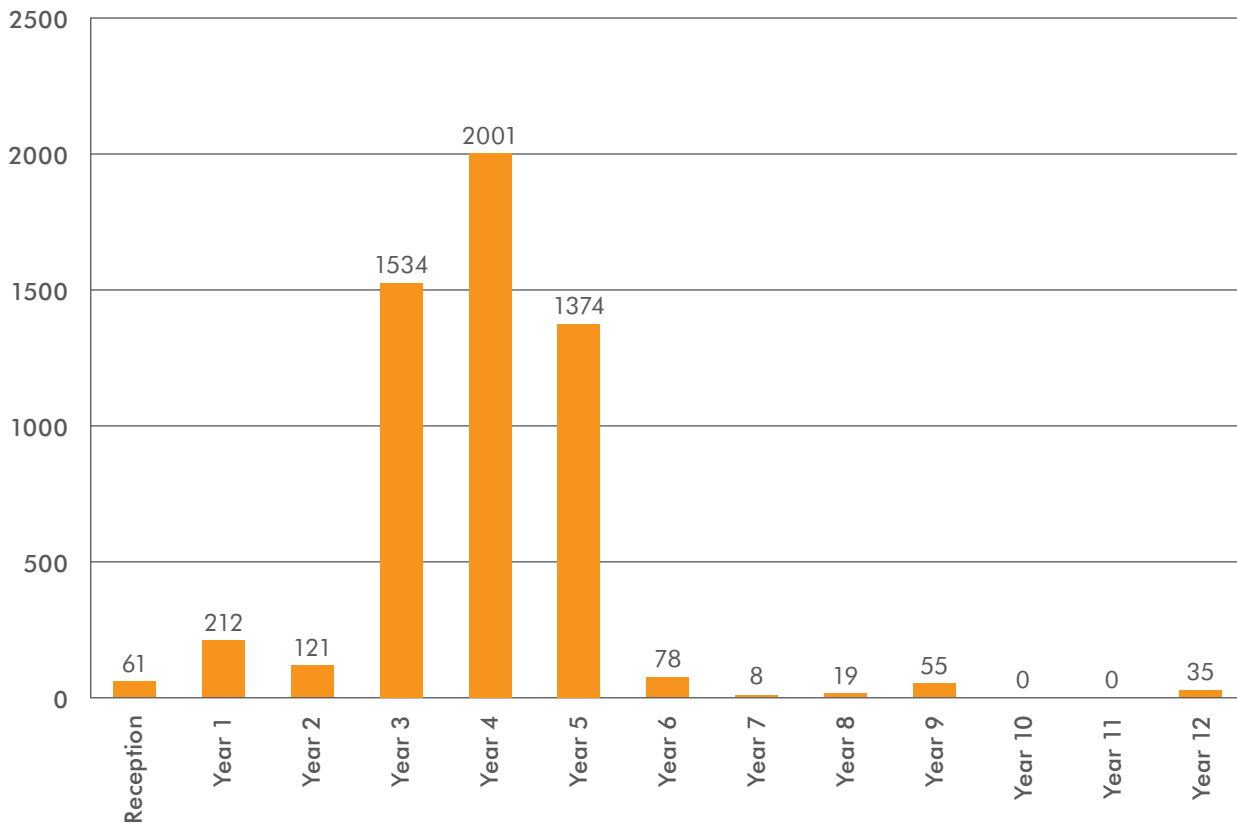


Figure 14: Linking by School Year

This visual representation of the spread of schools linking across Key Stages and school years in the pupil level data highlights a strength and a challenge. Clearly schools linking is currently far more widely practiced in Key Stage 2 than in any other Key Stage. Previous evaluations have shown the value of linking for Key Stage 2 pupils and so TLN recommends Year 3, 4 and 5 to Primary Schools knowing from experience that Year 6 is a full year due to external tests and transition to secondary school. The returns indicate a significant decline in numbers in Year 6 when pupils are preparing to take their S.A.Ts and move to Secondary School. As noted above, however, local area facilitators in the South East and the North West of England indicated during the evaluation that they are keen to develop links that begin in Year 6 and continue in Year 7, enabling a smoother transition from Primary

to Secondary school. One experienced teacher from the South of England who has been involved in schools linking for almost ten years argued that establishing a two-year link between pupils in Year 6 would help their transition into Year 7.

Gender Balance

It is important to recognise that a number of linking schools across England are single sex. Given that 2/3 of linking schools did not provide any pupil level data it is not possible to make a definitive statement about the gender balance of schools linking nationwide. However, of the 130 schools that provided data 126 are co-educational. The school returns received suggest that the gender balance of TLN schools linking projects is relatively even. Of 5,476 pupils 52% (2,869) are female and 48% (2,741) are male.

Ethnicity and Schools Linking

As noted in earlier chapters of this report, the social policy of successive UK governments has sought to foster improved social cohesion in an increasingly diverse society. Figure 15 below depicts the ethnicity of the 5,476 pupils whose anonymised data was provided.

Ethnicity & Schools Linking

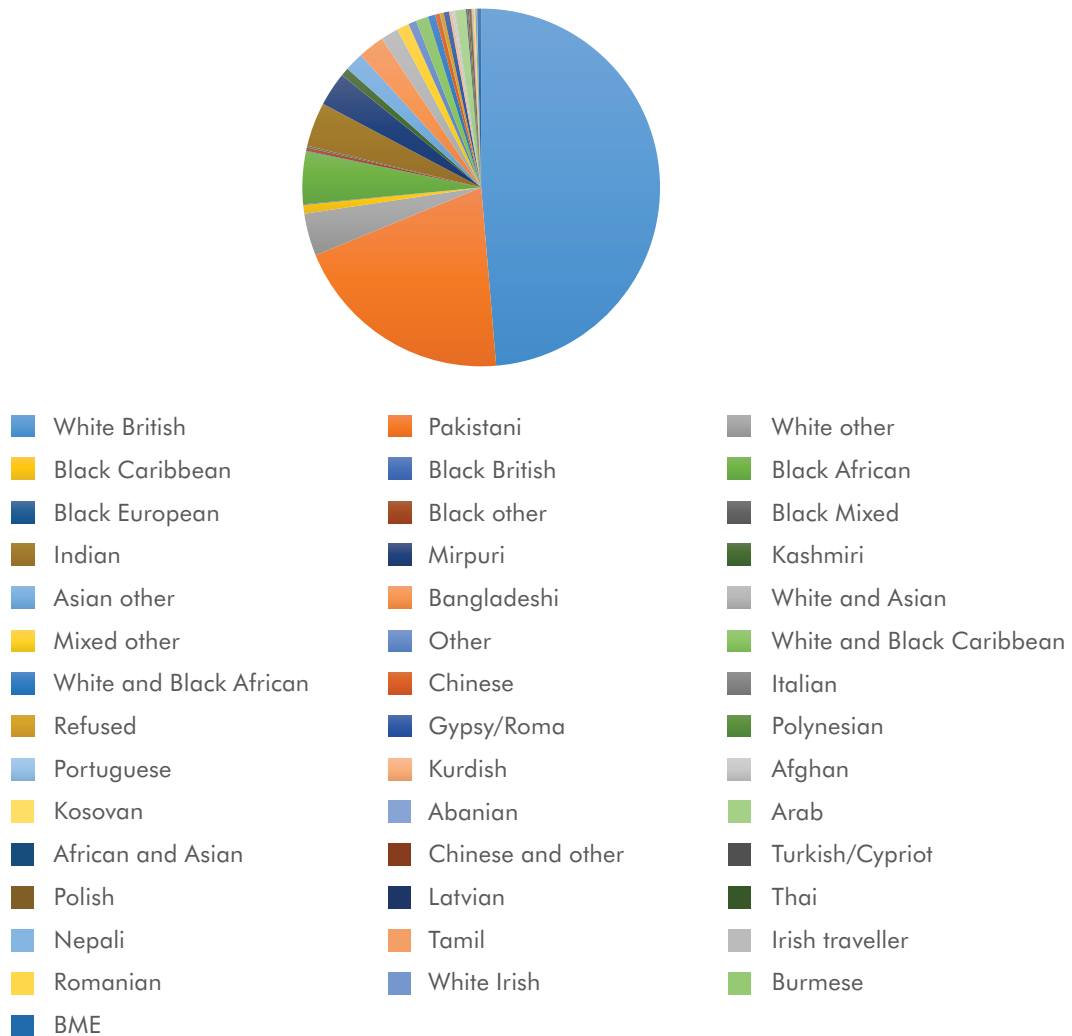


Figure 15: Ethnicity and Schools Linking

When reading this pie chart it is important to note that several schools in one Local Authority listed the ethnicity of their pupils as 'BME' [Black and Minority Ethnic] rather than identifying the specific ethnic origins of their students. Furthermore, several schools did not provide any detail in relation to ethnicity. This skews the data slightly but represents only a very small number of pupils so does not have any statistically significant impact on their analysis.

The evaluation has highlighted the partial truth of two widely held assertions within political academic debate. Steven Vertovec (2007) points to the increasing complexity of diversity in the UK, suggesting that Britain has become a 'superdiverse' society. Vertovec argues that since the Second World War ethnic identity has been shaped around large and relatively homogeneous identities. However, Vertovec argues that many towns and cities are now home to people from a vastly greater number of ethnic backgrounds. This plurality is reflected in a graphic manner in Figure 15 previously. Hence, whilst young people of White British and Pakistani heritage represent 69% of pupils involved in schools linking children from another 37 ethnic groups are also participating in the programme. Such diversity should caution educationalists, policy-makers and theorists against making uncritical assertions about growing residential segregation in the UK. Moreover, schools' data highlights the growing significance of three expressions of diversity – a significant number of White pupils of Eastern European heritage, the numbers of students of Black African heritage (now outnumbering Black pupils of Black Caribbean heritage) and the significant numbers of pupils of dual heritage who numbered 256 (White and Black Caribbean – 60, White and Black African – 36, White and Asian – 85, Chinese and 'other' – 3, African and Asian – 5, Black 'mixed' – 8 and 'mixed' other – 59). The size of these three forms of ethnic identity further illustrates the growing diversity of English schools since each 'meta'-category can itself be broken down into Nigerian, Ghanaian, Somali, Libyan, Congolese, Latvian,

Russian, Polish, Albanian, Romanian, Kosovan and Roma/Gypsy, for example. Second, in contrast, the returns from certain local authorities, largely in Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and South and West Yorkshire present a far less cosmopolitan picture of largely monocultural schools.

The ethnic complexity revealed in school returns presents a challenge to policymakers and critiques an over-reliance on the questionable narratives that have characterised government reports on social cohesion over the last twenty years – from Ted Cante in 2001 to the Casey Review, of 2016. Furthermore, it is possible to question some of the assertions of senior Ofsted officials who have implied that the segregation of Primary School children based on religious faith is a growing social problem. This evaluation has not found any significant evidence to substantiate such claims.

Schools Linking and Religion

Schools are not legally required to collect data on the religious affiliation of their pupils and so it is not surprising that 28 of the schools that provided pupil level data as part of this evaluation did not list the faith of their students. Figure 16 below displays the religious affiliation of pupils from 121 of the linking schools that provided data as part of the evaluation.

Any reflection on the religious affiliation of pupils involved in schools linking needs to be mindful of several factors. First, the figures above probably underestimate the numbers of self-identifying Christian, Muslim, Jewish and Sikh linking pupils because two local authority areas which include

many links between faith-ethos schools (Birmingham and London) only provided pupil data from a very small number of schools. Second, a significant minority of returns appeared to confuse Roman Catholic, Church of England and, in one case Methodist, with Christian. All three are Christian denominations but some returns have listed all three separately from Christian. It is not possible to infer what this might indicate but it does, perhaps, illustrate low levels of religious literacy amongst some teachers and school managers, as well as pupils. Third, the term 'no religion' is a vague term. This could imply conscious atheism, agnosticism or, perhaps more likely a disengagement from any form of organised religion (which may not mean a lack of individualised religious faith).

Schools Linking and Religious Faith

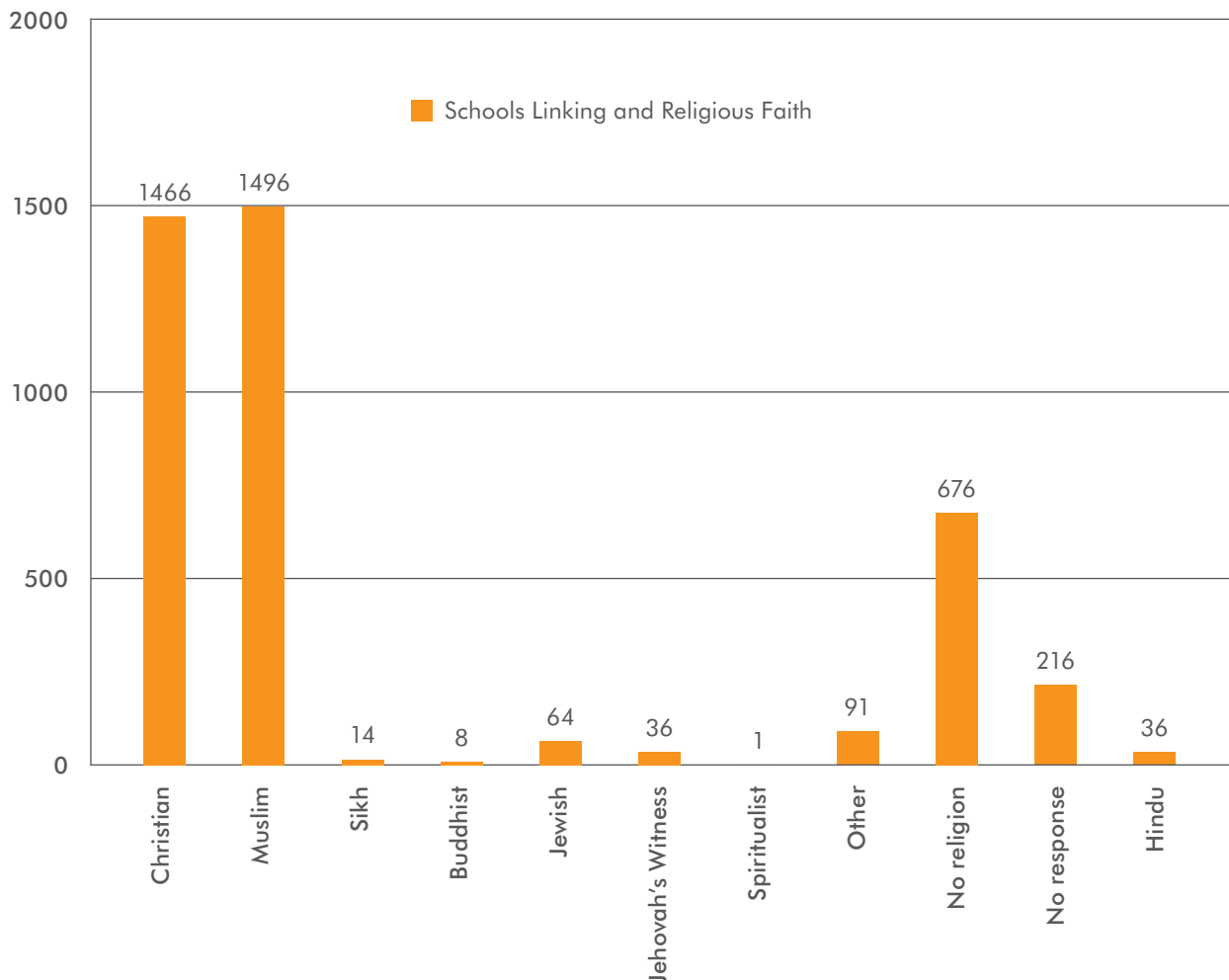


Figure 16: Schools Linking and Religion

5.6 Schools Linking and Social Deprivation

It would be inaccurate to suggest that TLN schools linking focuses exclusively on enabling children from different ethnic or religious backgrounds to meet each other, learn from one another and develop a fuller understanding of life in multicultural Britain. The fundamental commitment of TLN is to create structured opportunities for children from different backgrounds to meet and learn from each other. The TLN model of schools linking therefore is designed to bring children and young people together across a range of social divides, as well as building understanding between pupils from different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Consequently, TLN schools linking brings pupils from city centres and rural communities, from inner city communities and the suburbs and from affluent and socially excluded neighbourhoods.

It is difficult to accurately assess the extent to which TLN schools linking provides children and young people living in poverty with new opportunities because of the complexity of social exclusion and the limited usefulness of the data collected by schools. Within the evaluation the number of children and young people receiving the 'Pupil Premium' was used as a means of measuring the socio-economic status of pupils involved in schools linking. The provision of 'free school meals' is often used by researchers as a proxy for the socio-economic status of children (Taylor, 2018). However, the extent to which the receipt of free school meals (or Pupil Premium) provides an accurate assessment of pupil poverty is questionable, especially in view of the February 2018 announcement by the UK Education Minister that only pupils whose family income is less than £7,400.00 p/a would be eligible for Pupil Premium from 1st April 2018. Consequently, children and young people who receive Pupil Premium represent the most, and not the only, socially excluded pupils in English schools. Levels of engagement with such pupils, therefore, does provide us with an assessment of the extent to which TLN schools linking works alongside the most socially excluded children and young people. The returns received during this evaluation indicate that 30% of pupils involved in schools linking receive Pupil Premium. Despite the limited usefulness of Pupil Premium figures as an accurate synonym for poverty, it is clear that TLN schools linking works alongside some of the poorest children in England.

The relationship between local schools and the neighbourhoods within which they are set is varied. Some are what could be called 'commuter' schools, which attract pupils from a wide geographical area. Grammar schools, Academies and some faith-ethos schools can fall into this category. It is also the case, however that many have a closer relationship with the local neighbourhood and are 'community' schools. With this in mind a comparison between the socio-economic data received from linking schools in relation to the receipt of Pupil Premium and the level of multiple deprivation in local neighbourhoods can help us to assess the extent to which TLN schools linking mirrors the demographic profile of the communities in which pupils live. The UK government uses Index of Multiple Deprivation to measure the level of deprivation in relation to income, employment, education, housing, health, crime, barriers to services and living environment in all 32,844 local neighbourhoods in England. During the evaluation findings from the Index and the UK Local Area data sets were compared with the pupil level data provided by the linking schools that sent their returns to me. *Figures 14-19* compare local neighbourhood data with schools linking statistics from 6 Local Authorities – Bolton (51%), Kent (84%), Kirklees (53%), Luton (56%), Manchester (87%) and Rochdale (69%). These areas have been selected to serve as illustrative case studies because their pupil data return rate was over 50%. A more substantial return from other Local Authority areas would enable a similar comparative exercise for all linking areas in the future. The figures in the second column refer to the level of multiple deprivation in the postcode area in which a linking school is set (e.g. A rank of 25th means that the neighbourhood is the 25th most multiply deprived neighbourhood in England). The figures in the third column indicate the percentage of pupils in the linking school that receive Pupil Premium and the percentage of the whole linking group that this represents.

KIRKLEES

School Name	Neighbourhood deprivation	Linking School Pupil Premium Percentage
Old Bank	4,880th	Partially completed – 9%
Cowlersley	8,941st	36%
Batley Girls High School	27,414th	23%
Dalton	13,488th	39%
Fieldhead	2,603rd	62%
Windmill [CofE]	27,414th	0%
Carlinghow	3,716th	55%
Batley Parish [CofE]	1,434th	18%

BOLTON

School Name	Neighbourhood deprivation	Linking School Pupil Premium Percentage
Brownlow Ford	969th	35%
Kearsley West	5,200th	50%
Hardy Mill	27,461st	11%
St Theresa's [RC]	19,221st	10%
Mytham	8,950th	15%
Prestolee	17,808th	23%
The Valley	985th	20%
Moorgate	2,462nd	33%
St Mary's [CofE]	22,880th	58%
Haslam Park	3,636th	61%
High Lawn	29,855th	13%
Brandwood	3,913th	24%
St Andrews [CofE]	17,039th	1.6%
St Gregory's [RC]	1,365th	27%
St Peter's [CofE]	7,304th	31%
St Brendan's [RC]	27,461st	10%
St Thomas of Canterbury [RC]	27,107th	23%
St Thomas Haliwell [CofE]	6,819th	32%

KENT

School Name	Neighbourhood Deprivation	Linking School Pupil Premium Percentage
Great Chart	25,511th	26%
Boughton Under Blean & Dunkirk	17,148th	19%
Dartford Primary Academy	21,621st	37%
Stocks Green Primary School	32,275th	0%
Aylesford VIAT Primary	31,801st	43%
Laddingford	13,239th	26%
Boughton Monchesea	27,846th	14%
Our Lady's Dartford [RC]	25,137th	9%
Madinford	30,407th	13%

LUTON

School Name	Neighbourhood Deprivation	Linking School Pupil Premium Percentage
Leagrave	9378th	17%
Downside	7389th	27%
Hillsborough	4832nd	49%
St Martin de Porrers [RC]	3,612th	12%
Eaton Bray	30,429th	30%
Ferrars	16,305th	88%
Southfield	3,612th	57%
Foxdell Juniors	9,027th	29%
Maidenhall	6,949th	11%

MANCHESTER

School Name	Neighbourhood Deprivation	Linking School Pupil Premium Percentage
Armitage [CofE]	750th	49%
Hazel Grove	13,666th	25%
Heald Place	8,816th	44%
North Cheshire Jewish Primary	21,264th	9%
St Marks [CofE]	21,298th	42%
Ashbury Meadow	4,157th	23%
Benchill	1,580th	68%

ROCHDALE

School Name	Neighbourhood Deprivation	Linking School Pupil Premium Percentage
St Thomas [CofE]	11,019th	13%
Castleton	3,412th	28%
Alkington	26,074th	59%
Caldershaw	8,090th	20%
Elm Wood	5,201st	28%
Healey Foundation	17,295th	30%
Marland	10,943rd	37%
Brimrod	2,460th	23%
St Gabriels	9,584th	41%

Figures 17-22: Neighbourhood Deprivation and Schools Linking

The previous tables capture several important features of schools linking in these 6 Local Authority areas. First schools linking engages with almost the entire breadth of social class and with neighbourhoods at opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum – areas that are amongst the 1% most and 1% least multiply deprived local communities in England. Second, in most of the featured linking schools a significant percentage of pupils receive Pupil Premium, even in some of the most affluent neighbourhoods in England. For example, Eaton Bray School in Luton and Aylesford VIAT Primary school in Kent are both located in neighbourhoods that are amongst the most affluent 1% in England but 30% and 43% of linking pupils in these two schools receive Pupil Premium. Given that this is now only available where a family income is £7,400 p/a or less, the fact that significant numbers of linking pupils receive it implies the existence of stark levels of inequality in some parts England and pockets of significant poverty in seemingly affluent communities. As noted above the featured Local Authorities have been selected as illustrative case studies because more than 50% of linking schools in these areas returned their pupil level data. This exercise has highlighted the spread of TLN schools linking

across the socio-economic spectrum and possibility that pockets of deep poverty exist in some of the linking schools situated in the most affluent neighbourhoods in England. In the future a fuller return from all of the Local Authorities that are working with TLN would enable a comprehensive analysis of the connection between schools linking and social deprivation. Furthermore, a deeper classroom-based evaluation could consider that impact, if any, inequality in local communities or high levels of social deprivation amongst pupils has on the form that linking takes and its impact on students, classes and schools. This, however, is beyond the scope of this macro-evaluation which was tasked to analyse the nature, sustainability and scalability of the TLN schools linking programme.



Figure 23: Rocks with a Message – Schools Linking in Rochdale

6. The Positive Impact of Schools Linking

6.1 Mapping Impact and Theories of Change

The measurement of impact can be challenging for two reasons. First, whilst it is relatively straightforward to demonstrate quantitative impact it is far more difficult to measure attitudinal or qualitative impact. Within this evaluation it has been relatively easy to demonstrate the growth of TLN schools linking in relation to the increasing numbers of children, classes, schools and Local Authority areas that are involved in the programme. The positive attitudinal impact of TLN schools linking is more difficult to capture because of its qualitative nature and because the change in attitude, school culture, a pupil's development, community relations or social cohesion can take years to become deeply rooted and visibly evident. Second, it is difficult to conclude with any degree of certainty a direct line between particular activities and specific examples of positive change. When assessing qualitative impact, a key tool for evaluators is the 'theory of change' used by the organisation that is being evaluated.

The term 'theory of change' was popularised by Weiss (1995) and refers to a stepped assessment of the actions that need to be taken and the resources that need to be in place to generate specific measurable outcomes. The development of a theory of change can sharpen planning, facilitate greater accountability and enable critical self-reflection. It is important to caution against an uncritical use of theories of change, which assumes that there is a clear-cut and unproblematic link between the specific actions we take and particular changes. That said, the adoption of a theory of change that is plausible, practical and testable can help to identify the milestones (decisions, actions and resources) and map the route we need to take if we are to reach our chosen destination.

The development of the TLN Schools Linking National Programme into 20 Local Authority areas in 2017-2018 has been deliberative, rather than haphazard; planned, rather than coincidental. As shown in previous chapters it emerged from specific social and educational needs, was shaped by a clear ethical and pedagogical vision and was developed by experienced teachers who understood the nature and needs of schools. It is based this solid foundation that TLN developed its own plausible, practical and testable 'theory of change', which is depicted overleaf in Figure 24.

School communities at ease with themselves and others.

'showing an interest in exploring, improving understanding of and strong respect for different faiths and cultural diversity as shown by their tolerance and attitudes towards different religious, ethnic and socioeconomic groups within the local, national and global communities.'
Ofsted Inspection Handbook 2017

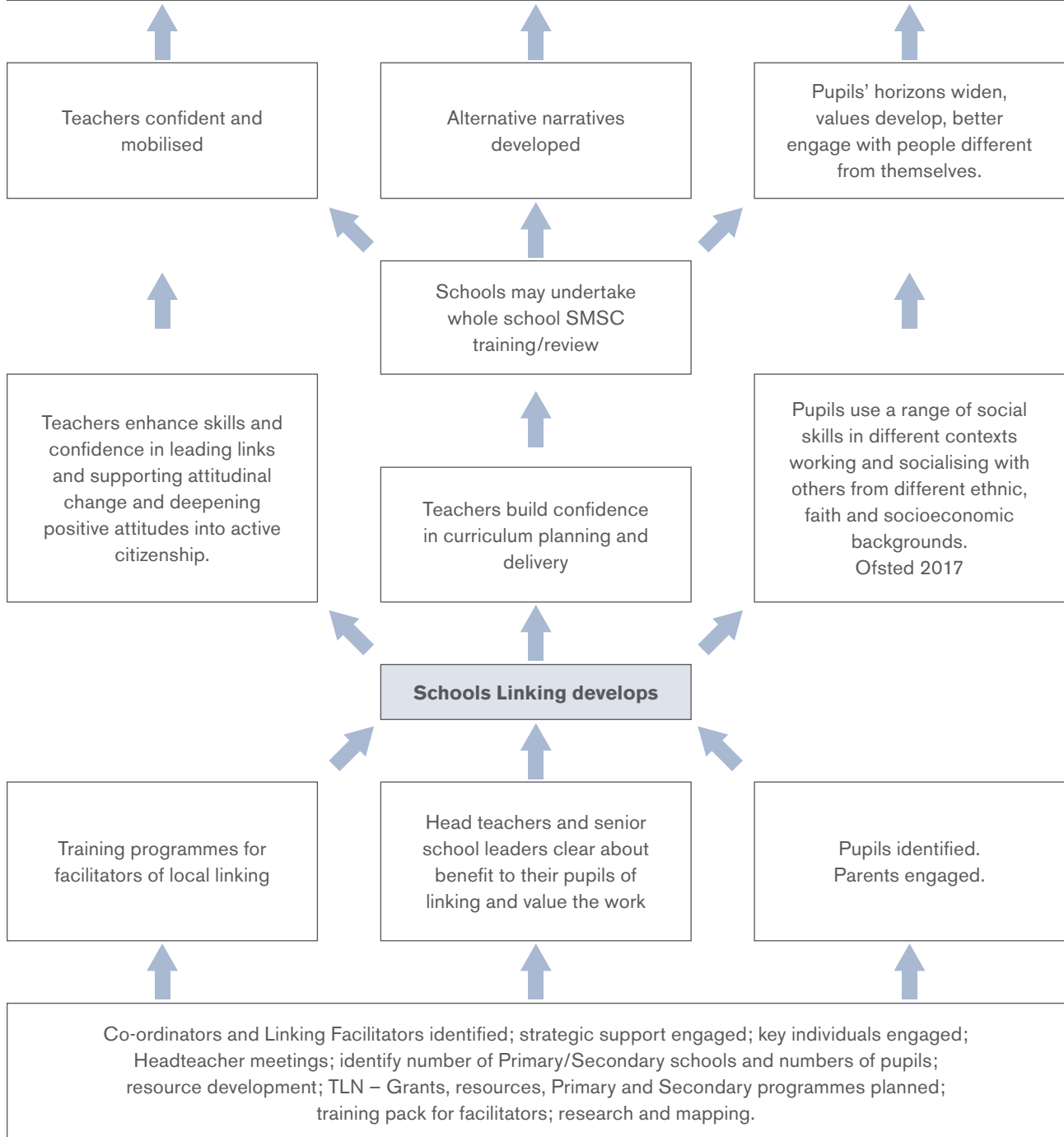


Figure 24: TLN's 'Theory of Change'

6.2 Influencing National Debates

It has become apparent during the evaluation that TLN is an increasingly respected partner in current debates about diversity, integration and social cohesion amongst policy-makers and academics. This bridging of the divide between practice, theory and policy has not diluted the positive impact of TLN schools linking at grass-roots level. Rather, it appears to have amplified TLN's voice, brought the perspective of experienced teachers to the debate and further disseminated the practice of schools linking and the pedagogical and philosophical principles that underpin it. Three examples, which have all arisen during the period of this evaluation, illustrate this growing area of impact.

First, in relation to academic debates about social cohesion and integration, TLN was recently invited to contribute a paper to a 2017 British Academy collection of essays entitled *If You Could Do One Thing*. Meg Henry (TLN Director), Stephanie Longson (linking facilitator in Stockport) and Yasmeen Akhtar (a faith schools linking specialist at the Faith and Belief Forum) argued that, 'There is a compelling need to create opportunities for children to have meaningful contact with others' (2017, 40). In this short essay Akhtar, Henry and Longson make seven telling points, each of which emphasises the important contribution schools linking is making to social cohesion beyond the school gate. First, the effectiveness of an enabling rather than a controlling approach is stressed in the description of TLN as a 'network of facilitators...[that]...support[s] schools linking to promote cohesion' (2017, 41). Second, the essay recognises the impact that socio-economic inequality can have, not just on broader social cohesion, but on the sense of self-worth and attitudes of children and adults. The 'feeling of having equal status begins in the classroom and must be maintained in all exchanges and interactions between the two classes' (2017, 42). Third, Akhtar, Henry and Longson (2017, 43) stress the importance of collaboration and shared commitment to effective schools linking. The dedication of classroom teachers to linking is of fundamental importance, but so is the commitment of Headteachers, SLTs and Local Authorities. The essay recognises the value of schools linking that is led by charitable or faith-based organisations. However, the paper clearly argues that schools linking can have the greatest impact on building inclusive social cohesion when programmes are rooted in the practice, strategic planning and funding priorities of local authorities. Such structural support is vital if schools linking is to be sustainable in

the long-term – 'In most sustainable projects, some core local funding has been sourced for a facilitator who has allocated time to maintain and expand the programme' (2017, 43). Fourth, the essay warns against the dangers of isolationist approaches to fostering social cohesion. Schools linking is most effective when it is 'centrally located in communities to avoid an isolated existence' (2012, 43). Collaboration is key, not just to effective schools linking but to social cohesion more widely, 'TLN should not exist in a silo, but must be an integral part of a wider strategic plan to strengthen community cohesion' (2017, 43). Fifth, Akhtar, Henry and Longson point to the power of education and purposive dialogue to transform not only children and young people but wider society as well, 'aiding children and young people to enquire, think critically, reflect and mix with others often leads to attitudinal change, not just in themselves but in others around them. A change in one individual has the potential to change a whole community' (2017, 44). Sixth, the essay highlights the importance of a collaborative, locally-rooted bottom-up approach to schools linking. Implicitly critiquing some disengaged top-down approaches to building social cohesion Akhtar, Henry and Longson (2017, 44) suggest that, 'involving a range of partners brings interest and investment into the programme, which is important for sustainability, provides a sense of the project being locally owned, and focusses collective energy into a shared vision and common purpose.' Seventh, the essay stresses that the work of TLN, 'goes beyond the children whom it impacts: it challenges parents, connects communities and raises standards for integrating success, not merely to avoid conflict' (2017, 46). Akhtar, Henry and Longson (2017, 46) invite us to, 'see the change in an individual as change in the whole community'. Such an approach to schools linking sets TLN apart and has important implications for the approach that policy-makers take to wider social cohesion.

Second, the track-record of TLN as a pioneering approach to building social cohesion through schools linking has been recognised by national think-tanks and policy institutes. The think-tank [British Future](#), for example, cites The Linking Network's schools linking in its [June 2018 submission to the Integrated Communities MHCLG consultative group](#) as a model for fostering integration and greater social cohesion and, as far back as 2011, the UK's leading 'race' and racial justice think-tank, the [Runnymede Trust](#), identified schools linking as an example of effective school-based social cohesion initiatives.

Third, the exemplary work of TLN has been increasingly widely recognised by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Education as an effective vehicle for fostering integration and greater social cohesion. Furthermore, the value of schools linking is recognised in the *Casey Review* (2016, 58) and The Linking Network is cited in the *Integrated Communities* Green Paper for building, ‘strong and positive links between schools and communities’ (2018, 30). Furthermore, the Green Paper (2018, 30) recognises the value of TLN, noting that the government, ‘will continue to fund the Schools Linking programme and expand twinning of schools of different backgrounds.’

6.2 ‘Good news’ Stories that are more than Anecdotes

The previous chapter mapped the quantitative impact of TLN’s Schools Linking. Such statistical analysis provides clear quantifiable evidence of the effectiveness the TLN model of schools linking, its growing impact and scalability. However quantitative evidence alone cannot capture the holistic impact of schools linking on pupils, schools, families and communities. Such richness can only be captured by a qualitative approach. Because it is important to move beyond anecdotes to evidenced narratives the testimonies and examples of the positive impact of TLN schools linking below are drawn from participant observation, base-line and ‘state of play’ survey responses, semi-structured interviews and focus groups that took place between March 2017 and June 2018.



Figure 25: The Positive Impact of Schools Linking 2017 – 2018

The word cloud in Figure 25 is drawn from the 2017-2018 linking reports from all 20 Local Authorities. The key words are taken from the reflections of local linking facilitators, classroom teachers and pupils. Whilst not a scientific survey the word cloud does give a clear sense of the most common themes found in the feedback, which closely reflect TLN's 4 key questions (Who am I? Who are we? Where do we live? How do we all live together?), exploring identity, celebrating diversity, building community and working for equality.

6.3 Testimonies and Key Themes 2017-2018

The quotations below reflect a selection of the 'testimonies' of Local Authority officials, NGOs, linking teachers, pupils, and local area linking facilitators that have been shared with me since February 2017. Each sub-section relates to one of these core groups and reflects the examples of the positive impact that schools linking is making that have been shared with me during the evaluation.

6.3.1 Pupils

The selected quotations from Primary and Secondary school pupils involved in TLN schools linking in Blackburn, Kent and Kirklees highlight the multidimensional impact that their involvement in the programme has had on them – their sense of identity and self-confidence, the overcoming of prejudice, their levels of empathy, appreciation of diversity, ability to collaborate, enhanced sense of self-worth and having fun with new friends from different ethnic, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. The positive impact of schools linking on pupils' sense of identity, their openness, sense of possibility, appreciation of diversity and resistance to discrimination is reflected in their own words below:

"If you change yourself for someone else, they'll never know who you really are."

"Be open minded and don't be shy."

"Always follow your dreams because one day they might come true."

"Not to judge people on how they look."

"We have learned about diversity and team work and we have created amazing things and it has helped to be better people."

Pupils also spoke about the ways in which schools linking has enhanced their self-confidence and helped them to make new friends:

"I was proud showing people around our school."

"I'm better at making friends and meeting new people."

"I'm better at working with people I don't know."

"I liked getting to know each other and playing with new friends."

"I loved going to St Michael with St John because everyone was so friendly and I loved it! I can't wait for them to come and visit our school."

"I really enjoyed all of the games we did and getting to know our partners a lot more."

"My partner was very friendly and kind and I enjoyed making friends with her."

In Kirklees 2017-2018 schools linking projects were all united around the same theme – ‘Carry My Story’ – which focused on the experience and the stories of refugees as a means of exploring the stories found within all communities. The project clearly had a positive impact on pupils as illustrated by their own words below:

“I think this was a really fun project and I really enjoyed meeting different people and hearing their courageous stories. It has been about different cultures and beliefs which were so interesting to learn about. This Carry My Story project is important because it has given me a wider understanding of the world.”

“I loved the stories even though they were sometimes sad. Now I know there are good refugees and we need to understand them.”

“I enjoyed listening to the stories. I learned that one of our partner’s religion is shamanism. It is important because if you had a family member or friend who was a refugee and you didn’t know how to help, now you can.”

Commenting on the positive impact that schools linking has had on pupils and teachers across The Linking Network spoke of the effect on achievement, ‘We’ve had schools where one class one linking and the other wasn’t and levels of achievement in literacy in the linking class were higher than those in the one that wasn’t.’ Teachers also noted the way in which linking enabled children to develop as ‘human beings and the kind of citizens we want in the world – tolerant, respectful and interested in the needs of others.’

6.3.2 Teachers

In 2017-2018 annual school linking reports from across England teachers made it clear that they felt that the work of TLN has a positive impact on their classroom practice. The quotations below from teachers in Bradford, Manchester, Kent, Derby, Blackburn, Calderdale and Kirklees touch on the breaking down of cultural barriers and misunderstanding, collaboration with colleagues from other areas, improved communication skills, higher levels of achievement in the classroom, the sharing of best-practice. One Derby Headteacher suggested that a member of staff in his school said of their linking experience – ‘This is the best thing we have ever done!’

“What I’ve seen linking do for my class is create opportunities to meet and converse. As a Muslim girl growing up in Bradford it was when I went to University in York I realised that many people had not conversed outside their group, so they had little mutual understanding. As people grow older misconceptions can grow and can grow into hatred. The Schools Linking Project addresses misconceptions – you are building the ability to respect.”
(Bradford Teacher)



Figure 26: Blackburn and Darwen pupils on a Schools Linking visit (2017-2018)

“my teaching is more effective courtesy of Schools Linking. I have been introduced to so many high quality resources, ideas and particularly books.”
(Manchester teacher)

“Linking Schools allows children linking to communicate, understand and support each other in discussing, building on and promoting equality, diversity and individuality.”
(Bradford Teacher)

“The training sessions gave us lots of ideas and it was great to be given the time to work collaboratively with my partner teacher to plan our linking project.”
(Kent teacher)

“It was lovely to see all the children from my class making new friends within an hour of being at the linking school.”
(Blackburn teacher)

“Children gained confidence when meeting new people who are not from the same background.”
(Derby teacher)

“Schools linking has allowed our children exposure to children they wouldn’t normally mix with – this has broken down barriers in both of our schools.”
(Kent teacher)

“Linking schools is a fantastic project. The diversity between the 2 schools was huge but the children didn’t care and just got on with it – super!”
(Calderdale Teacher).

‘Being part of 3FF has really opened up my mind and I’m really grateful for the opportunity’
(London Teacher)

Survey returns from linking facilitators received during the evaluation have commented further on the positive impact that schools linking has had on classroom teaching (providing themed teaching plans and SMSC and ‘British’ values resources), collaboration (between Headteachers, ‘teacher swaps’, joint staff meetings and new connections between rural schools), training and CPD (enthusing and resourcing teachers and training targeted at teachers’ practical questions), the attitudes and preconceptions of classroom teachers and, in relation to the Faith and Belief Forum’s faith school linking, equipping teachers an interfaith skills-base and enabling teachers from different faith backgrounds to address their own preconceptions and learn from each other.

6.3.3 Linking Facilitators

During the evaluation linking facilitators in all 20 existing TLN local authorities have completed baseline surveys, participated in focus group activities [see Appendix] and participated in semi-structured interviews. The 'joys' and the 'sorrows' of these linking facilitators form a central part of this evaluation and provide TLN staff and Trustees with insights and questions that need to inform the ongoing development of the Schools Linking National Programme. The next chapter addresses the barriers to development and the challenging facing linking facilitators in different parts of the country. Here I focus on the examples of the positive impact of schools linking that they have identified during the evaluation.

“The opportunity to seek advice is essential in having the confidence to deliver the programme effectively. Meg and Linda have provided quality CPD for schools but also for myself as a coordinator.” (Rochdale)

“The support from TLN was invaluable. Throughout the process always on hand to offer advice and guidance. Additionally the resources were second to none. Could be improved by cutting down on reports and data!!” (Burnley)

“It’s a fantastic way of joining together communities and building friendships. I have really enjoyed being involved in the project and working alongside another teacher.” (Blackburn)

“I just breathe it, I’m really passionate about it. It’s the most consistent thing in my teaching career. I’ve seen the impact it has on the children and I think it’s very hard to measure in terms of academic progress but being with the children I’ve seen how it’s opened their minds. It’s such a joy to see

how much pleasure they get from being with other children who are different from them.” (Luton)

“It’s provided children with opportunities to meet others from different backgrounds, to break down barriers and create memories that will last forever.” (Pendle)

“Last year the children decorated planters with symbols that spoke about their understanding of identity. We created garden projects at the time when Jo Cox was murdered. We had a symbolic, prayer or thought tree at the centre to which people could add their thoughts. And so many members of the public stopped us or came back and said, ‘Thank you, this is really important what you’re doing.’” (Kirklees)

“Linking has a massively positive impact on children. It helps relationships going into secondary and that’s a huge positive. The barriers it breaks down and the confidence it builds. A lot of schools feed-back to me that the children can’t wait to meet again and that says it all.” (Oldham)

The quotations above from linking facilitators in Blackburn, Kent, Pendle, Burnley, Rochdale, Luton, Kirklees, Oldham and the Faith and Belief Forum illustrate the themes highlighted across TLN – These snapshots demonstrate the breadth of issues that local area linking facilitators engage with and the value of the formal CPD and informal advice and support from TLN. These short ‘testimonies’ also illustrate the passion and commitment of local facilitators and the potential of schools linking to break down barriers, challenge prejudice and foster greater social cohesion. Speaking about a faith schools link in London, a Faith and Belief Forum linking facilitator illustrates this point well:

“A link I really enjoyed was between a Muslim boys’ school and a mixed Jewish secondary. They were about 13 and touched on questions they wanted to ask. They talked about the representation of Islam in the media and about conflict between the two faiths. It was a really useful session because many of the students hadn’t met someone from the other faith before and the session helped to dispel some of their stereotypes. They wouldn’t necessarily have that space in their day even if they were studying R.E to talk on that level.”

Linking facilitators also emphasised progress in a further eight areas:

1. Being part of TLN makes us feel like we are part of a wider community.
2. Increasing numbers of institutions or organisations in local areas making an ‘in-kind’ contribution to schools linking by offering space free of charge for linking events (e.g. West Bromwich Albion football club, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, M6 Theatre in Rochdale, the Museum of London and the RAF Museum)
3. The development of close relationships with Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACRE) have strengthened relationships with ‘minority’ faith schools and faith ethos schools.
4. Recognition from the DfE has elevated the status of schools linking with schools and the local authority.
5. Retaining link schools has provided a pool of experienced linking enthusiasts and advocates – a resource for further sustainable development.
6. The development of partnerships with local businesses has provided us a more diverse range of relationships in the local community and new local champions
7. Increasing collaboration with all local stakeholders – schools, Local Authority, police, local businesses

and civil society organisations has enhanced linking sustainability.

8. Gaining administrative support has made linking more effective, increased capacity and enabled the development of a more affordable model of schools linking.

Gillie Heath, the Manager of the Inclusion Support Service for Kent County Council summarises the positive impact of schools linking on individual pupils, community relations, social cohesion and an ability to challenge injustice more effectively in the two quotations below:

“Our work this year has evidenced that The Linking Network programme positively impacts on the pupils understanding of individual identity and the importance of not making assumptions about people they don't know. One example is where two parallel classes within a school were involved in a lesson on stereotypes. The class that was participating in the linking programme confidently discussed how you could not make judgements about someone based on appearances alone. Their peers in the other class had not reached this level of understanding.”

“The long-term impact of this learning will undoubtedly lead to the development of self and mutual respect and inculcate a better understanding of one’s own culture, beliefs and lifestyles and that of others. We believe that if these essential attributes are developed alongside self-worth this will contribute to social integration, promote community cohesion, enable young people to develop a voice to fight against sexual exploitation, FGM and forced marriage and minimise the risk of our children and young people becoming susceptible to radicalisation.”

6.3.4 Local Authorities

The level of Local Authority involvement in and support for schools linking varies across the country. In many areas TLN schools linking is organised and run by Local Authority officers (Blackburn with Darwen, Buckinghamshire, Bolton, Calderdale, Kent, Luton, Manchester, Stockport, Oldham and Rochdale). Schools linking in the remaining local authority areas is run by community projects, charitable trusts or third sector organisations (Bradford – TLN, Derby, Rotherham and Sheffield – the Development Education Centre, Pendle – Building Bridges, Burnley – Pendle and Burnley Faith Centre, Kirklees – Yorkshire Spirit CIC, Birmingham, London and Waltham Forest – the Faith and Belief Forum).

I return in the next chapter to the challenges that schools linking advocates are facing in relation to Local Authorities and to the relative strengths and weaknesses in linking that arises from Local Authority control or community projects or charitable trusts. At this point, however, it is important to stress the positive impact that active Local Authority support has on schools linking. In Oldham, for example, schools linking is written into the town's social cohesion strategy, which provides greater sustainability and security. In Blackburn the local council covers linking transport costs for schools. In Luton the Local Authority part-funds the linking facilitators position and in Bolton the linking facilitators are part of the town council's Achievement, Cohesion and Integration Service. In Buckinghamshire schools linking is run as part of the work of diversity officers within the county council's Community Cohesion and Equalities team but is not a formalised part of anybody's post and in Bradford, the city council is supporting the expansion of Secondary Schools' linking through its Controlling Migration Funding stream and provides the TLN staff team with free work-space in the city-centre. The value of these practical examples of local authority support captures the importance and variety of support from local government for schools linking. Its value is clearly recognised at local, regional and national level as the two endorsements below from Calderdale and Kent illustrate:

“I can't think of a time in our cultural history when the Schools Linking Programme could be more important or more valuable. It seems to me that an enormous effort through social media is focussed on negative aspects of the differences between peoples'... My experience is that when

given the opportunity children more readily identify the things they have in common first and then enjoy noticing their differences... we somehow teach them prejudice at a later stage. I welcome the work of the Calderdale Schools Linking Programme, it is something every educator should become involved in.”

Stuart Smith, Director of Children of Young People's Services, Calderdale Council, September 2017

“Many thanks to The Linking Network for their dedication, commitment and continuing hard work and to the Pears Foundation, the DfE and DCLG for recognising the need for this project in the present climate and enabling our service and others across the country to make a real difference to the lives of so many children and young people.”

Gillie Heath, Manager, Inclusion Support Service, Kent Local Authority, 2018

“I have repeatedly seen the power of the schools linking project to build understanding and positive relationships between children of very differing backgrounds. Schools linking delivers critical life skills that will equip students to live confidently in the wonderfully diverse place that is 21st century Britain. I believe the experience of schools linking expands children's horizons, builds confidence and self-esteem, interest in and respect for 'the other' and strengthens delivery of key aspects of the curriculum. Schools linking will remain an important part of our work developing the next generation of proud Bradfordians.”

Kersten England, Chief Executive, Bradford Council

6.3.5 The Linking Network

Whilst schools linking goes back to 2001 The Linking Network as it is currently constituted is a young organisation, dating back to just 2016. As with all emerging organisations, TLN faces challenges as it grows and seeks to become sustainable in an increasingly large number of Local Authorities. These will be summarised in the next chapter. Here it is important to stress the strengths of TLN that have become apparent during fieldwork. The most widely commented upon during the evaluation are noted below:

1. The funding support that TLN provides to local areas involved in schools linking. Without such support most schools linking would not be viable, sustainable or scalable.
2. The variety of the online teaching and linking resources available on the TLN web-site.

3. The sense of community and the training provided at Network and CPD days and the emphasis on the sharing of best practice by TLN.
4. The supportive and responsive approach of the TLN Directors.
5. That TLN schools linking is informed by many years' experience as classroom teachers.

The word cloud below provides a visual impression of the value that classroom teachers, linking facilitators and Local Authorities place on the work of TLN. The key words highlighted were those that appeared most frequently in interviews, focus groups at Network Days, survey returns and local area reports.



Figure 27: The Strengths of The Linking Network

6.4 Summary

It has become clear during the evaluation that TLN schools linking has had a significant positive impact on pupils, teachers, schools, local linking programmes, the development of new partnerships, community relations and local authorities since its establishment in 2016. It has enabled schools to improve achievement levels and meet their Ofsted responsibilities in relation to SMSC, 'British' values and Prevent obligations. However, it is important to recognise that statutory requirements do not appear to form the core reason for the growth of TLN schools linking across England. The commitment to schools linking is deeper and less instrumental than that. It emerges from experience in the classroom and is embedded in an ethical and pedagogical commitment to holistic education that meets the spiritual and emotional needs of children and young people, as well to enabling their academic success. It has become apparent that, as well as being experienced classroom teachers, the TLN Directors (Meg Henry and Linda Cowie) are passionately committed to schools linking at a personal and professional level. Such commitment, or what Bishop Toby Howarth calls a sense of 'vocation', as well as classroom experience, the embedding of linking in the curriculum, a commitment to inclusivity and contextualised schools linking are central to TLN's demonstrable, and growing success. One experienced local area facilitator put it like this when speaking to me, 'Schools become involved in linking because they see it as part of their moral compass. I believe that it is an ethical imperative.' Given the relatively low cost of TLN schools linking it has become clear that it provides excellent value for money and a highly effective means of building cross-cultural understanding, ethical citizenship and inclusive models of social cohesion. Ongoing, secure and slightly increased funding from the MHCLG and the DfE is vital if schools linking is to become sustainable in the long-term and is to become established in other local authorities across England the Wales. Such investment would be re-paid many times over in the creation of empathetic, tolerant, caring and active future citizens and greater levels of social cohesion through TLN's Schools Linking National Programme. There are however a number of factors that limit the sustainability and scalability of TLN schools linking that need to be addressed. It is to these challenges that I now turn.

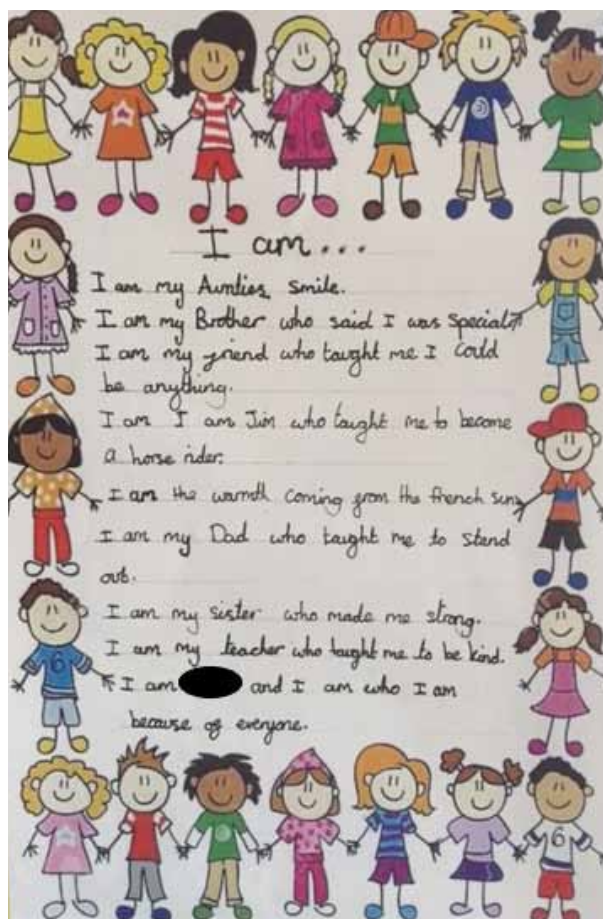


Figure 28: A Schools Linking poem about identity from Kent

7. Barriers and Challenges

7.1 Addressing Barriers and Overcoming Challenges

As noted in the previous chapter it has become clear during fieldwork that TLN schools linking has had significant and wide-ranging positive impact in a number of ways. It has also become evident that there are a range of challenges that can limit its sustainability and scalability, unless they are addressed and overcome. It is evident that the TLN model of schools linking is effective, rooted in experience, enables schools to address Ofsted requirements and fosters greater understanding, mutual respect and an affirmation of the value of diversity. Addressing the challenges summarised below will enable TLN to continue to grow in new local authority areas and become sustainable in the long-term, thereby fulfilling its potential to become an even more important vehicle for building social cohesion from the classroom up. The challenges noted below have all been identified during fieldwork since March 2017.

In interview Bishop Toby Howarth recognised that TLN faces challenges as it continues to develop and grow (1st June 2018). First, he noted that challenge of growing 'appropriately without growing too fast and losing our DNA.' Second, he commented on the need for TLN staff and local area linking facilitators to be passionately committed to schools linking – 'You need people for whom this is a vocation rather than just a job if you're going to achieve the result you need to.' 'Where this commitment is not shared by partners', suggested Bishop Toby, 'this can be problematic.' However, such a need for

commitment needs to be balanced against ensuring the health and well-being of TLN staff – possibly doing less and training local people to do more to avoid the danger of burning out through over-work. Third, Bishop Toby noted the challenge of engaging two types of schools more fully in schools linking and TLN. First, he noted, 'Schools with poor Ofsted reports are under-represented because they are concentrating full-on on the absolute core of what Ofsted has asked of them' (1st June 2018). Second, he suggested that, 'White majority schools in challenging circumstances are less likely to connect with us. The only way through that is getting in there and spending time' (1st June 2018).

7.2.1 Summarising the Barriers to Development

As in the previous chapter, the barriers to schools linking development and the challenges faced are summarised under themed sub-headings: administration, finance/funding, communication and dissemination, the development of linking teams, the Local Authority, communication and dissemination, linking in Secondary schools, linking different types of schools and persuading schools of the value of linking. The specific challenges noted and the strategies that are being adopted to overcome them are drawn from interviews, local area reports, focus groups and participant observation undertaken between February 2017 and June 2018. The spider-graph below provides a visual representation of the key challenges identified:



Figure 29: Overcoming Challenges

7.2.2 Local Authorities

As implied in the previous chapter the evaluation has uncovered an ambivalent relationship between schools linking and Local Authorities. Whilst a number of Local Authorities provide valuable financial or 'in-kind' support linking facilitators in other parts of the country expressed a frustration at a lack of meaningful engagement and support. One linking facilitator put it this way, 'We've had very positive feedback from individual teachers but not enough recognition from senior management at Local Authority level.' A linking facilitator from Northern England said in interview, 'Our local authority colleague champions schools linking but only on an ad hoc basis. A more structured and formal relationship would benefit schools linking in terms of its sustainability and scalability.' (June 2017) In the same interview the facilitator concluded that, 'Whilst local linking facilitators can advocate schools linking, it will only become sustainable if the local authority provides more sustained and proactive support.' It should also be borne in mind that in some areas where schools linking is clearly supported by the Local Authority, support can feel fragile and under threat due to local government spending cuts. The challenge was articulated by the coordinator of schools linking in Buckinghamshire who suggested that staffing insecurity and council re-organisation inhibit the further growth of schools linking in the country, 'We would have more schools involved and be able to support a sustainable approach to linking with a dedicated officer. Even if it was only 0.5 of a role.'

7.2.3 Finance and Funding Decisions

The ongoing financial support of the [Pears Foundation](#) has provided TLN with a vitally important sense of security for more than a decade. Such support has been of immeasurable value. The financial commitment of the MHCLG has also been of pivotal importance in recent years in enabling the increasing sustainability and scalability of schools linking across England. The 2018 decision, following the publication my earlier interim evaluation report in December 2017 to extend MHCLG funding to TLN for two more academic years has provided an important level of security, which will enable the deepening and expansion of schools linking.

In spite of this much needed support it became clear during the evaluation that the development of secure funding streams capable of rooting secure and sustainable linking in local communities remains one of the major challenges facing TLN. Four financial challenges were mentioned most frequently during the evaluation. First, the lack of secure funding streams makes long-term schools linking planning difficult. Second, the destabilising effects of local authority spending cuts have increased demands on school budgets, making a commitment to schools linking fragile. One linking facilitator from the North West of England summarised the problem, 'Schools linking needs to be given a higher priority in schools because if there is a choice between making a teaching assistant redundant or keeping schools linking it is always linking that is cut.' Third, match-funding a number of small sources of financial support, 'leaves linking insecure and is very time consuming'. Fourth, several local linking facilitators suggested that in light of Local Authority spending cuts, funding schools linking through voluntary or charitable organisations may provide a route to a sustainable future for linking. This could run the risk of losing a formal relationship with Local Authorities and linking in many areas across the Network is sustained by local authorities. Partnering with both the Local Authority and charitable trusts in Bradford and Pendle exemplifies such a creative approach to developing sustainable funding frameworks. TLN Directors and Trustees are aware of these financial challenges and have begun to think about the possible means of diversifying funding and financing schools linking in a fair but economic and sustainable manner as indicated in the bar chart in Figure 30.

Examples Illustrating Diversified Funding for Schools Linking Programmes

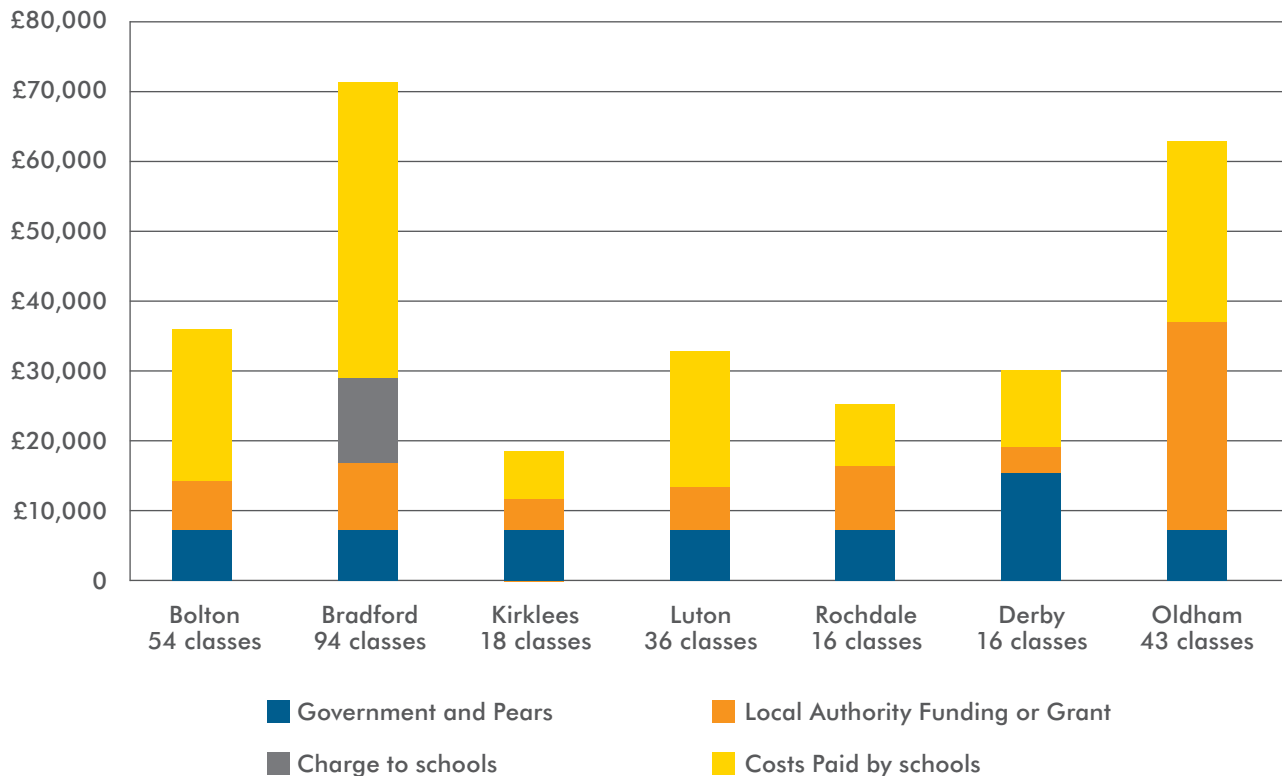


Figure 30: Diversifying Schools Linking Funding

In my interview with her on 25th June 2018 Bridget McGing, the Deputy Director of the Pears Foundation, emphasised their ongoing commitment to TLN. McGing spoke of Pears' focus on work with young people that facilitates dialogue and change, suggesting that the foundation's support for schools linking reflected this deeper commitment. It has become clear during this evaluation that Pears' commitment moves beyond a transactional financial investment. Bridget McGing has regularly attended TLN Board meetings, a point stressed by Bishop Toby Howarth in my interview with him on 1st June 2018. McGing, did, however, make further telling points about the funding of schools linking, which TLN is seeking to address. She noted, that whilst the financial support of Pears is secure, this needs to be supplemented by other sources of funding as TLN seeks to grow and become more financially sustainable.

McGing, noted that schools linking can only become sustainable and scalable in the long-term with structural, long-term financial support from government. Such support will provide the security needed to expand schools linking into new parts of England, to make long-term plans and to root it in local schools and communities. McGing noted that, valuable as it is, support from Pears and from local communities must stimulate secure funding from the MHCLG. Figure 30 above illustrates the attempts that 7 areas currently involved in schools are making to diversify schools linking funding. The bar chart depicts four key sources of funding – Pears, the MHCLG (although these are bracketed as one source), Local Authority funding and the costs that are paid by schools. The school costs in Bradford and Oldham are higher than in Bolton, Kirklees, Luton, Rochdale and Derby, but this is because linking is much more widely spread in these Local Authorities, where

many more schools and classes are involved and so the contributions made by schools is multiplied by the numbers of schools and classes involved. The bar chart makes it clear that core funding from Pears and the MHCLG is of fundamental importance. It provides the basis for secure schools linking and makes match-funding easier. Where core funding already exists, albeit at a relatively low level, it becomes easier to persuade other potential funders that they are investing in success. The chart also reveals TLN's recognition that there is a need to diversify the funding of schools linking if it is to become sustainable in the long term. The chart also points to two other funding factors that merit further comment – Local Authority funding and the cost paid by schools. Local Authority support for schools linking is of fundamental importance financially, but also in relation to strategy and commitment. There is Local Authority support for schools linking in all of the seven featured areas, which is to be welcomed. However, as the chart clearly illustrates the extent of Local Authority financial support varies quite significantly across the areas. The case of Oldham is important to note, because in this area the Local Authority has built schools linking into its social cohesion strategy and linking is, therefore, viewed as part of the work of the Council. It is recognised that Local Authorities face different pressures and demands on their funds, especially in an era characterised by cuts in local government funding. It is not appropriate to question the funding priorities in this evaluation of TLN's schools linking. However, it is important to make a more general point. Strategic and secure long-term Local Authority support is vital if schools linking is to fulfil its immense potential as a means of building social cohesion from the classroom-up in communities across the country. Where such support is absent or under threat it becomes more difficult to build sustainable models of schools linking.

Second, the bar chart highlights the significant costs that schools pay in relation to schools linking. In some areas schools are charged and in other areas these costs are met more informally out of the school budget. This raises an important question – Should local schools be required to cover the costs of schools linking? Across TLN different responses have been shared with me during this evaluation. There are some who suggest that schools should make a financial contribution to linking as a sign of their commitment. There are others who have suggested that in an era of public spending cuts when school budgets are already stretched that the financial commitment required leads some schools to decide not to become involved in schools linking. In interview Bishop Toby Howarth (1st June 2018) indicated

that the Board of Trustees are already discussing the tension between covering costs and schools whose budgets are so stretched that they cannot afford to participate in linking. This conversation is vital as TLN continues to grow.

The bar chart raises one further question. There is clearly a growing emphasis on ways of being more creative in terms of funding schools linking in local areas. Given that local area linking facilitators know the communities in which they work it will be important for them to draw on their local knowledge to attract more localised funding support from institutions and key figures in their neighbourhoods. There are clear signs of the diversification of linking funding across TLN. The Police Service provide some funding in Kirklees. Bradford, Stockport and Manchester draw on Controlling Migration funds. Derby has secured some financial support from Google and Stockport Homes Housing Association supporting the Stockport linking programme. In the new linking area of Newcastle on Tyne receives government support through the Building a Stronger Britain together fund. It may also be helpful to explore whether there is a means whereby supporters of local schools linking can make an 'in-kind' contribution. In some areas linking facilitators have benefited from local authority officer time, the provision of refreshments, materials or the use of local authority, school and community buildings provided free of charge.

The grants awarded towards the cost of schools linking in different parts of England ranges from c£5,000 (the amount that TLN grants to each local linking area) to more than £15,000 p/a for establishing new programmes. As noted above the financial cost is partially mitigated where Local Authorities fund part of a linking facilitator's post or provide local council services or facilities free of charge. The 2017-2018 linking report from Kirklees invites TLN to consider distinguishing between areas where schools linking receives substantial financial support from the Local Authority and those areas where linking relies exclusively on funding from charitable trusts. It has become clear that this is a challenge that the TLN Directors and Trustees are considering, especially as the network grows by at least three more local authority areas in 2018-2019. It is possible that new linking areas may need greater initial financial support than areas where linking is already well established. With this in mind I would suggest that TLN considers whether there may be a need for a creative shift in its funding formula with regards to the financial support for linking in local areas. Instead of distributing the funding provided by the MHCLG equally it may be wise to consider providing financial support on the basis of need.

7.2.4 Communication and Dissemination

A further challenge facing TLN as it continues to expand relates to communication. It has become clear during the evaluation that poor communication can inhibit the growth of linking relationships. Local area linking facilitators have expressed the concern that some schools don't respond when asked for their evaluations and that, on occasions Senior Leadership Teams in schools are not as engaged as they could be because a link teacher who has attended a TLN CPD day did not feed-back to her/his Senior Leadership Team. A solution may be to send Headteachers copies of CPD PowerPoint slides to summarise the value of linking to their school. Effective communication and the dissemination of good practice and 'good news' stories can root linking in local communities and enhance its positive impact as the stories of success ripple out across the Network. One creative suggestion from the schools linking team in Rochdale that could help to address this is the development of a TLN blog. Whilst TLN is active on Twitter and hosts a highly effective web-site the development of a more informal blog to which each linking area could be invited to contribute once a year may help to overcome the challenge of dissemination.

7.2.5 Developing Schools Linking Teams

The model of schools linking that motivates TLN is that of a dispersed network, as discussed above. The power of the network is found in its hub-spokes configuration, whereby the hub-like TLN team resource, train and stimulate the schools linking spokes in Local Authorities up and down England. This dispersed model of localised linking, which is animated by the vision, experience and training provided by the hub in Bradford is original and the feature of the TLN approach that is most likely to enable schools linking to emerge and grow and become sustainable in local communities. This location of power in the hands of local facilitators, schools and communities localises authority and devolves responsibility. Ironically, perhaps, the networked character of TLN, which is one of its key strengths can also be a source of fragility. The local matters and the level of commitment to the value of schools linking locally has a major impact on its likely success.

One of the key challenges identified during the evaluation was the need to embed schools linking not just in the curriculum but the culture of schools and the strategic planning of Local Authorities. Where this is absent or is threatened it becomes difficult to make long-term plans that can make linking sustainable in an area. Local linking facilitators from Derby, Luton and Buckinghamshire pinpointed this as a key barrier to the development of sustainable schools linking and its scalability in an area. In some Local Authority areas previous growth in schools linking was threatened when the priorities of the local council changed, and staff were re-deployed or moved to another job. One experienced linking facilitator in the South East of England summarised the challenge when interviewed – 'What happens if I move?' Two challenges were identified during the evaluation in this area. First, where schools linking is tied to an individual rather than a role its presence in an area is fragile unless other colleagues are trained so that they can continue to develop linking should the local linking facilitator move. Second, a lack of succession planning or the development of schools linking teams within the education authority or local council makes long-term planning difficult and linking programmes fragile. A linking facilitator from Derby summarised this challenge clearly as her words below demonstrate:

'We need school linking to become so embedded into the ethos of the schools that taking part is a "no brainer". I would like understanding of what is involved to become more widely understood across school staff. If the coordinator leaves or is ill and another teacher takes their place they can be highly competent, or they can start throwing up obstacles to derail the linking. Building up a bank of venues and facilitators who are able to offer linking workshops/days underpinned by sound understanding would help us to keep the programme fresh and offer an element of choice in the future.'

(Linking Facilitator from Derby)

7.2.6 Persuading Schools of the value of Schools Linking

The text-box above touches on the final challenge that advocates of schools linking need to overcome if it is to become sustainable and scalable. During the evaluation responses to surveys, in focus groups and interviews it became clear that schools linking advocates need to find effective and persuasive ways of enabling classroom teachers and Senior Leadership Teams in local schools to see, not only the innate pedagogical value of schools linking but its capacity to help schools to meet their obligations as laid down in the National Curriculum and by Ofsted. One linking facilitator from the North of England made his views clear in interview – ‘We shouldn’t have to convince people to do this – it should be compulsory. It should be an automatic part of learning for all schools because it’s as important as Maths, Science and English.’ Whilst this seems to be a reasonable assessment that reflects the value and importance that the MHCLG and the DfE place on TLN’s schools linking, the task of enabling schools to understand that it can enhance their teaching, does not need to place an extra burden on stretched classroom teachers and can help them to fulfil their obligations in relation to SMSC, the teaching of ‘British’ values, Prevent and Ofsted remains a key task for local linking facilitators and TLN. This evaluation has identified many examples of this challenge being overcome across TLN. However, two suggestions that arose during the evaluation may help to roots schools linking more deeply in a greater number of schools as TLN continues to grow and enable greater sustainability and more effective scalability. First, whilst Ofsted leaves strategy to local school leadership, it would be helpful to signpost TLN schools linking as one effective approach. Secondly, it was suggested that if the DfE provided teachers with accreditation if they are involved in schools linking this could persuade more to become involved.

7.3 Summary

During this evaluation it has become apparent that the TLN Schools Linking model is highly effective for the reasons outlined in the previous chapter. It’s experience-led model of linking pupils from different class, ethnic, religious or residential backgrounds provides an exemplary vehicle for:

1. Enhancing pupil achievement
2. Enabling pupils to explore their own identity and that of other children in a critical but empathetic manner
3. Helping pupils to affirm the value of diversity, whilst also recognising the need to build cohesive and inclusive communities
4. Meeting Ofsted, SMSC, ‘British’ values and Prevent requirements and obligations

The network has grown significantly since 2016-2017 and has the potential to grow further still in the 2018-2019. Since the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year at least 5 new Local Authorities have begun or expressed an interest in beginning TLN schools linking – Newcastle upon Tyne, the London borough of Tower Hamlets, Walsall, Leicester and Nottingham. On the basis of what I have seen it is likely that TLN schools linking will continue to grow and expand into new areas in the 2018-2019 academic year and beyond. The confidence that Pears has shown in TLN for more than a decade, the extended and secure funding from MHCLG and the schools linking I have seen on the ground during this evaluation all persuade me that TLN’s model of schools linking is sustainable and scalable.

However, if the success of TLN schools linking to date is to be safeguarded and replicated in the next stage of its development it is vital that the barriers to development and challenges identified by local area facilitators during fieldwork and summarised in this chapter are addressed and that a phased strategic plan is put in place to address them. It should be noted, however, that many of the challenges identified are, arguably, beyond the scope of TLN to redress because they relate to external factors over which they have little control such as national government spending decisions, MHCLG and DfE priorities, the secure funding available to sustain local linking programmes and enable growth in existing and new areas and local authority spending cuts, social cohesion

strategies and the deployment of staff. If these challenges are addressed I have little doubt that TLN schools linking can become increasingly sustainable in existing areas and expanded into new areas of the country. This expansion is likely to have wide-ranging positive impacts, not just in the field of education but in relation to the forging of social cohesion in communities across England and Wales. If these challenges are not addressed then it is likely that the TLN Schools Linking National Programme, whilst still valuable, will not fulfil its immense potential. With this in mind the final two chapters of this report begin to identify the criteria that need to be put in place in order to ensure the sustainability of TLN schools linking and to pave the way for its expansion into new local authority areas across the country.



Figure 31: Making Sense of the World in Kent

8. Building Sustainability

8.1 The Importance of Sustainability

This evaluation has demonstrated the positive impact that TLN schools linking is having on pupils, teachers, schools and communities from Kent in the south to Kirklees in the north. It has become clear that the TLN model has great strengths – rooted in classroom experience, pedagogically sound, theoretically strong, creative and context-specific, enabling greater achievement and building bridge between children who would rarely meet if not for schools linking. I have identified key challenges to TLN's further development and the strategies that staff and Trustees have begun to develop to address them. If the TLN schools linking national programme is to fulfil its clear potential to enable teachers across England to

help their pupils to talk in a self-reflective and empathetic way about their own identity and that of other pupils, to develop a critical openness to life experiences, cultures and religious traditions that are different from their own, to develop greater self-awareness and mutual respect and to value diversity it is vital that it becomes sustainable in the long-term. On the basis of what I have encountered during this evaluation I am confident that local area linking facilitators, the TLN staff team and Board of Trustees recognise the vital importance of sustainability and understand how this can be achieved. During the evaluation it has become clear that secure sustainability is dependent on building a secure linking foundation, as shown below:

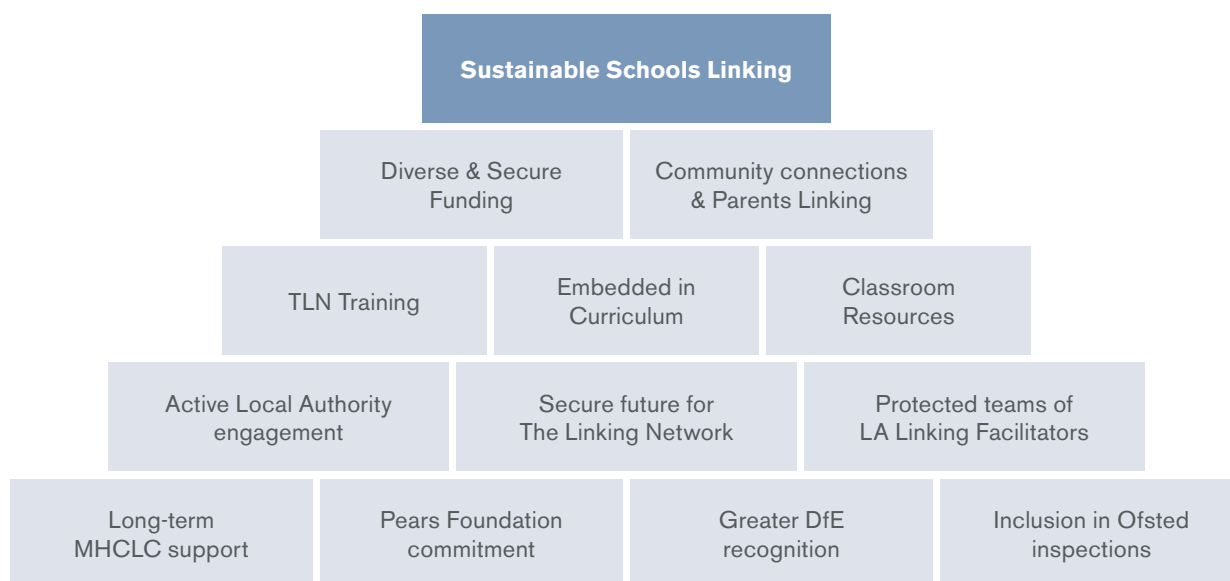


Figure 32: The Foundations of Sustainable Schools Linking

The sustainability building blocks summarised above in Figure 32 represent the key indicators of sustainable schools linking that were identified during the evaluation. If TLN schools linking is to become sustainable in the long-term it is important that these indicators are addressed. Below I comment in more detail on each sustainability indicator and on the progress made, based on what has been shared with me during the evaluation period.

8.2 Sustainability Indicator 1: MHCLG Support

Prior to the period covered by this evaluation the MHCLG identified TLN schools linking as an effective vehicle for building inclusive social cohesion from the 'classroom-up'. The support of Hilary Patel from the 'Integration and Faith Division' of MHCLG for schools linking was apparent. During the evaluation it became clear that the financial support that MHCLG provides for TLN schools linking work is of fundamental importance. Whilst the MHCLG funding that TLN disperses around the local authorities where schools linking is established and in areas where it is just beginning to grow does not, in many areas, cover all costs TLN directors, Trustees and local area linking facilitators clearly indicated how vital this financial support is. Such support is of pragmatic and psychological importance. Every local area facilitator with whom I spoke during the evaluation noted that without the MHCLG grant that TLN provides them with it would not be possible to run schools linking programmes at all. Furthermore, it has become clear that the grant is seen as a vote of confidence in schools linking locally and TLN nationally. The importance of this psychological boost should not be underestimated.

During evaluation interviews local linking facilitators have suggested that alongside the importance of such financial support a more proactive approach to publicly emphasising the effectiveness of schools linking as a means of fostering better community relations, intercultural and interfaith dialogue and social cohesion would further enhance its sustainability and security. Since the beginning of the evaluation excellent progress has been made in relation to this sustainability indicator. Following the production of my interim report in December 2017, the MHCLG confirmed that its funding of TLN would be extended for two more years to 2019-2020. This is excellent news, but it is important to continue to advocate for TLN at government level in view of the likelihood that there will be a UK General Election in 2020 so that an incoming government is made fully aware of the value of schools linking. Furthermore, the influence of TLN in policy debates around social cohesion is growing as seen in its citation in the 2018 *Integrated Communities* Green Paper and contribution to the 2017 British Academy essay collection. It is clear, however, that a more proactive foregrounding of the benefits of schools linking at government level by MHCLG officers could strengthen and add to its sustainability still further.

8.3 Sustainability Indicator 2: The Pears Foundation

Bishop Toby Howarth stresses the vital importance of the support of the Pears Foundation to the emergence and growth of TLN, 'Pears have really believed in us. We couldn't have done this without them' (1st June 2018). In an interview on 25th June 2018, Bridget McGing, the Deputy Director of the Pears Foundation spoke of Pears involvement in schools linking and identified what she suggested were central questions to be addressed as TLN aims to become increasingly sustainable across England. Stressing Pears commitment to funding 'programmes that enable sustainable encounters between young people, especially when they involve crossing socio-economic, faith, ethnicity or geographical divides.' McGing suggested that the number of schools-based programmes that do this is very limited but that 'The Linking Network provides a way of doing this in a very careful and considered way that achieves scale and sustainability by empowering local facilitation.' McGing acknowledged that achieving the long-term sustainable growth of schools linking will be a challenge but stressed that TLN gives us 'the best shot we've had so far.'

In interview McGing highlighted two interrelated sources of sustainable growth, each of which presents a challenge to TLN. She stressed, however, that Pears believe that TLN are 'well placed to respond these challenges.' The first sustainability challenges relates to the hub-and-spoke networked model to schools linking developed by TLN, described by McGing in the following way – 'The model they have created of empowering and funding local facilitation is a very clever one because they [TLN] have to plan for a time when the MHCLG and DfE may lose interest' and the relationship between education and social cohesion goes 'off the agenda'. For McGing, the empowering model adopted by TLN has a greater chance of enabling sustainable schools linking than 'the dominant narrative of big is best.' From Pears perspective – 'In terms of sustainability versus scalability they've got a model that is the best that they can have in the current climate.' Like Bishop Toby, Bridget McGing recognises the challenge in demonstrating the role and ongoing importance of a facilitating model whereby the TLN hub acts as facilitator and trainer, enabling organic locally appropriate forms of schools linking to emerge and grow. As the network grows the task of demonstrating the function, value and purpose of the TLN hub will become increasingly important. The second, related sustainability

indicator, according to McGing relates to the reviewing and assessing of linking relationships and practice in each of the linking Local Authority areas. Such quality control is an important function of the hub at the centre of a network. McGing suggests that TLN will need to constantly ask if its schools linking is best facilitated and practiced by Local Authorities or charitable trusts. McGing did not make a judgement on this but did stress that it will be an important area of discussion at TLN and amongst the Board of Trustees.

8.4 Sustainability Indicator 3: DfE Recognition

The Department for Education has supported this evaluation and recognises the value of schools linking and co-funds the grants with the MHCLG and Pears. During the evaluation the importance of DfE recognition became clear and it was suggested that this can play an important role in the scalability of TLN's work, influencing the attitude of Headteachers and Senior Leadership Teams and the building of a sustainable linking programme in an increasing number of schools. One local area linking facilitator alluded to the importance of DfE support for schools linking when suggesting that, whilst SLT's and classroom teachers support linking in principle there can sometimes be a reluctance to commit – 'do schools have the autonomy to do this without thinking we're going to get clobbered?' Based on this 18-month evaluation, which has focused on the effectiveness of the TLN model of schools linking, it is difficult to know whether this fear of stepping outside of the norm is widespread. However, what has become clear is a desire for the DfE to be more proactive in its highlighting of the positive impact of TLN schools linking in relation to SMSC, pupil attainment, citizenship education, PSHE, Religious Education, the teaching of 'British' values and the fulfilment of Prevent obligations. One specific suggestion that arose from focus groups during the evaluation is that the DfE 'badging' schools linking as a clear vehicle for delivering in the areas noted above would send out a clear signal of its support and encourage more schools to become involved in TLN schools linking as it expands to new Local Authority areas in the future.

8.5 Sustainability Indicator 4: Ofsted

Drawing on the National Curriculum in England framework for key stages 1-4, which requires schools to promote the 'spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils', the July 2018 edition of the Ofsted inspection handbook specifies the criteria against which inspectors should judge the effectiveness of SMSC teaching (2018: 40-41). Ofsted guidelines stress the importance of SMSC, noting that a 'school's thoughtful and wide-ranging promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their physical wellbeing enables pupils to thrive' (2018: 41). In survey returns received from local area linking facilitators during the evaluation 25% of respondents argued that TLN schools linking provides classroom teachers to meet their obligations to meet the National Curriculum requirements regarding SMSC, Prevent and 'British' values.

TLN recognises the vital role that Ofsted plays in the education of pupils in English schools and has provided clear evidence of the ways in which linking can help schools to meet Ofsted's assessment of high quality SMSC. The TLN SMSC and Schools Linking summary produced in April 2018 provides a tool for use with Headteachers, SLTs and SMSC leads in local schools, which identifies the ways in which schools linking can help them to meet their National Curriculum obligations and satisfy Ofsted inspection criteria.

8.6 Sustainability Indicator 5: The Linking Network

It has become clear during this evaluation that The Linking Network's schools linking programme is exceeding the objectives set by the MHCLG in terms of its sustainability and scalability as demonstrated in chapter 6 of this report. As the network continues to grow the strength and sustainability of the TLN central team is vital, given its commitment to networked practice and contextualised schools linking. During the evaluation 7 factors have emerged as the most significant areas of practice that will help the wider schools linking network to become increasingly sustainable in the next phase of its development:

1. Engaging in national political debates about education and social cohesion.
2. Gathering, writing and disseminating case studies that demonstrate the positive social impact of TLN linking and best practice.
3. Continued development of targeted CPD focusing on schools linking best practice.
4. The further development of digital schools linking as it relates to classroom teaching.
5. Increased use of social media (such as [The Linking Network Twitter feed](#)) and YouTube/Vimeo video shorts to raise greater awareness about TLN schools linking.
6. The further development of pastoral support systems for local area linking facilitators.
7. Providing linking training sessions and resources aimed at school governors.

The sustainability of the TLN team and its work has been enhanced during 2017-2018 in several ways, which are likely to strengthen its work moving forward. First the TLN team has grown and now has a new staff member who is an experienced Secondary School teacher and is developing schools linking in this area as shown above. Second the social media presence of TLN has been heightened, adding to the dissemination of its work. Third, the Edmodo virtual learning platform was introduced at the beginning of the 2017-2018 academic year. There are signs that this is having a positive impact on some local schools linking initiatives, although this is possibly an area where further CPD and development is needed in the 2018-2019 academic year.

One experienced linking facilitator from the North of England suggested that this evaluation and the local area reports from the existing 20 linking Local Authorities form the basis for the development of a long-term TLN schools linking sustainability plan.

8.7 Sustainability Indicator 6: Local Authority Engagement

Local authority support appears to be uneven across the country. In most areas local facilitators suggested that the local authority support linking and, as noted above, in some areas facilitators are council employees, a part-paid by the council or receive in-kind support. However major concerns exist in relation to local authority spending cuts, the redeployment of staff or the marginalisation of schools linking due to a focus on other priority areas. A quotation from a local link facilitator in the South of England (July 2017) illustrates the problem in clear terms, 'My staff team is going to be cut. There will be just me and I will also be responsible for equalities across 640 schools. Having someone who oversees linking is vitally important – encouraging, resourcing and answering questions.'

During the evaluation the following factors were identified most often in relation to the ways in which local authorities can help to make schools linking more sustainable:

1. Incorporating schools linking into local authority social cohesion strategies
2. Ensure that there is at least one schools linking officer in every local authority area
3. More proactive support – more than signposting in school circulars
4. Whole council support (not just School Improvement or Equalities officers).
5. Partnering link facilitator with local authority where linking is not run by the local council.

During the last twelve months the number of Local Authorities that are actively supporting TLN schools linking has grown. However, in an era characterised by local government spending cuts, it remains the case that TLN and local linking advocates in different part of England need to continue to push the case for stronger and more secure Local Authority support if linking is to fulfil its immense potential.

8.8 Sustainability Indicator 7: Linking Facilitators

Linking facilitators who know and are committed to their local community are an essential part of the schools linking jigsaw. Given the networked approach adopted by TLN where schools linking is forged organically in local communities, rather than being imported from the TLN central staff team, the experience and effectiveness of the local linking facilitator is vital to its success in each Local Authority. It became clear during the evaluation that the experience of local area linking facilitators varies – from facilitators who work and for charitable trusts, community projects or independent consultants to classroom teachers who are seconded for part of their week to developing schools linking and Local Authority employees in departments as varied as Museums, School Improvements, Black and Minority Ethnic community support and Equalities and Inclusion. During the evaluation the following reflections were shared in interviews, focus group activities and survey returns from linking facilitators in all TLN areas:

1. The employment of a schools linking officer by all Local Authorities, for whom linking represents the core of their duties.
2. The development of schools linking teams in neighbouring Local Authority areas to share good practice and provide mutual support.
3. The development of cross-borough schools linking, which could enable scalability.
4. The importance of administrative support for local area linking facilitators.
5. The development of shadow linking facilitators who can take over the role should an experienced facilitator move jobs or retire.
6. The importance of patience amongst linking facilitators – building linking organically will make it more sustainable locally.
7. Developing linking programmes that impact the whole school throughout the year rather than selected classes for a single academic year.
8. The introduction of an Annual Schools Linking award in each Local Authority.

8.9 Sustainability Indicator 8: Embedded in the Curriculum

As noted in previous chapters, TLN's goal is to embed linking in the curriculum and culture of a school. It has become clear during the evaluation that this is an important indicator of sustainability for several reasons. First, linking should not be seen as a 'bolt-on' but an approach to teaching and learning that can resource and enrich the whole curriculum. Second linking provides classroom teachers and SLT's with tried and tested resources that can help schools to deliver their SMSC, 'British' values and citizenship obligations. Third, the embedding of schools linking in the curriculum can meet the concern of overstretched teachers that they are being asked to do more work. By embedding linking in the curriculum teachers can find that TLN resources relieve them of the burden of creating exercises and learning resources. If schools linking is to become sustainable and is to expand effectively to new Local Authority areas local linking facilitators and the TLN staff team need to persuade SLT's that it can enable them to meet their National Curriculum obligations without placing a greater burden on classroom teachers. During the evaluation the following approaches to embedding schools linking arose from focus groups:

1. Create opportunities to engage face-to-face with Headteachers and SLT's to discuss the ways in which schools linking can enhance the education of their pupils.
2. Attend school governors' meetings to persuade them of the value of schools linking.
3. Develop peer-to-peer sharing of schools linking best practice in Local Authority areas.
4. A clearer emphasis on the ways in which schools linking can enable schools to meet Ofsted, SMSC, 'British' values and Prevent obligations.
5. Share good practice case studies on the improvement of pupil attainment in linking schools.
6. Ensure regular face-to-face communication between facilitator and linking teachers
7. Extend the linking of classes for more than one academic year.
8. Trial further collaborative linking within Multi-Academy Trusts.

Alongside these strategic suggestions intended to strengthen the sustainability of schools linking by embedding it in the culture and curriculum of schools the following practical classroom-focused ideas were shared with me during the evaluation. The list below is an illustrative not an exhaustive selection of ideas used for embedding linking in the curriculum:

1. Hold planning sessions with SLTs to illustrate the use of linking in the curriculum.
2. Use one of the 4 TLN key questions as the basis for literacy, Religious Education, SMSC, critical thinking or citizenship sessions – Who am I? Who are we? Where do we live? How do we live together?
3. Use linking visits to neutral venues to form the basis for Religious Education, History, Music, Art, IT or Geography lessons or projects.
4. Use an annual schools' linking theme as the basis for a cross-curricula project (e.g. the 2017-2018 'Stories in a Suitcase' project in Kirklees).

8.10 Sustainability Indicator 9: Diversifying Funding

All respondents to surveys and all interviewees highlighted secure funding streams as the single most important sustainability factor. Similarly, insecure funding, local authority spending cuts and short-term funding support were identified as the most significant practical barriers to building long-term and sustainable school links. The funding that TLN has given to each local linking programme was described as invaluable (£5,000.00 – £15,000.00 this year). This has allowed some forward planning and a limited amount of money to subsidise the cost of transport and administrative support. However, whilst this was identified as vital, and is clearly appreciated, respondents suggested that it will only be possible to make the long-term planning that is the precondition for sustainable funding if this funding is guaranteed for a minimum of 5 years, and, ideally, increased to provide local facilitators with more administrative support, which would enable them to devote more time to meeting face to face with gatekeepers, SLT's and teachers. Since the publication of the interim report the MHCLG and DfE have taken the decision to extend funding for two more years in partnership with the Pears Foundation has taken the decision to extend its funding of TLN schools linking for two more academic years. This welcome vote of confidence in TLN will enable greater sustainability and scalability. However, as noted above, the challenge of diversifying funding and attracting more financial and in-kind support remains an urgent one.

8.11 Sustainability Indicator 10: Parents and Communities

As this report has made clear, schools linking emerged from a desire to address social exclusion, social dislocation and the challenge of building inclusive patterns of social cohesion in 21st century Britain. It has become clear during this evaluation, as I have demonstrated in this report, that TLN and local linking facilitators are united by a belief that schools linking can enable children and young people to explore identity, build community, celebrate diversity and champion equality. Schools linking is becoming a vehicle for building social cohesion beyond the school-gate.

As demonstrated in this report TLN staff and Trustees and local linking facilitators recognise that the building of bridges between school and community has the potential to enhance social cohesion in wider society and can help schools linking to become more deeply rooted in local neighbourhoods and enhance its sustainability. During the evaluation linking facilitators described school-community partnerships that they have been developing in their areas. These partnerships include:

1. Ensuring that each school linking relationship is linked to a community group as part of the arrangement.
2. Twinning linking schools with local community groups.
3. Developing educational projects with the local police.
4. Developing a collaborative relationship with the local Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education.
5. Developing partnerships with the local Chamber of Commerce
6. Schools linking involvement in local Interfaith Networks and ecumenical Councils of Churches in towns/cities.

During the 2017-2018 academic year TLN has made progress in this area through its development of a Parents Linking pilot project in 3 linking Local Authorities. Whilst, it is too early to assess the effectiveness of this pilot project, it is my recommendation that this is extended beyond the initial pilot project period.

8.12 Summary

The Linking Network's Schools Linking National Programme has not only had a positive impact on pupils, schools, teachers and local communities but has become deeply rooted in a growing number of local authority areas. The fact that schools linking has been in place in Bradford since 2001, London since 2004, Calderdale since 2011, Pendle since 2014, Kent since 2010, Luton since 2010, Buckinghamshire since 2010, Kirklees since 2007, Burnley since 2011, Bolton since 2013, Derby since 2009, Stockport since 2010 and Oldham since 2009 is testament to its viability. As the network has expanded into 9 new areas in the 2017-2018 academic year and is due to begin in at least 5 more Local Authorities in September 2018 the question of sustainability becomes more complex. Reflection on the issues identified above can strengthen the sustainability that exists in more established linking areas and further strengthen linking across the country. It is important to note however that such sustainability and the scalability is dependent to a large degree on securing on substantial long-term funding support. This investment would represent excellent value for money given the wide-ranging positive impact that TLN schools linking continues to have in local authority areas across the country.



Figure 33: Secondary Schools Linking in Bradford

9. Enabling Scalability

9.1 Towards Sustainable Growth

Two of the key words that featured in the brief for this evaluation of the TLN Schools Linking National Programme were sustainability and scalability. Whilst the MHCLG had already signalled its initial support for TLN as a means of building social cohesion amongst children and young people its' understandable question was – 'Is schools linking sustainable and can it expand sustainably to other Local Authority areas across England?'

Emerging first in Bradford in 2001-2002, schools linking spread to another half a dozen Local Authorities quite rapidly, especially in years following the 2006 *Ajebbo Report*. As noted above the Schools Linking Network was re-framed and re-focused in 2016 when The Linking Network was established with a new Board of Trustees led by Rt. Revd Toby Howarth, the Bishop of Bradford. I was first approached to undertake this evaluation in February 2017. At that point 11 Local Authorities were an established part of The Linking Network. As I conclude the evaluation TLN schools linking has doubled in size with 9 new Local Authorities joining the programme in 2017-2018 and at least 5 more set to join in September 2018. In interview Bishop Toby (June 2018) said 'I don't think there is any limit to our growth, but we need to make sure we keep our DNA.' The Bishop's assessment is a perceptive one. On the basis of the evidence I have gathered during the last 18 months, I would agree that TLN schools linking has the potential to continue to grow and become established in many more Local Authority areas. However, as Bishop Toby implies, growth can sometimes come at the price of stability and sustainability and rapid growth can alter the character of grassroots movements as they become established institutions. The Bishop's insistence that growth does not change the character, values and focus of TLN is important to keep in mind because a central reason for the success of TLN schools linking is its bottom-up networked character, which was discussed in previous chapters. As noted above TLN has consciously chosen to adopt an approach that places an emphasis on the health of the network and the unique needs of each local school and community, rather than building a powerful top-down organisation based in Bradford.

During this evaluation it has become clear that TLN schools linking has the potential to expand into many more new Local Authority areas. In my view it is a model that the government/DfE should consider adopting nationwide. The scalability of TLN schools linking, therefore, is not in question. The more important challenge will be retaining its character as it grows. TLN is a facilitating and enabling network that is guided by experienced classroom teachers who have a theoretically sound understanding of inter-group contact, a vision for holistic, inclusive and empowering education that brings people together and the ability to translate this into sustainable practice. If it is to be truly sustainable the expansion of schools linking needs to be true to this tried and tested model and to this vision of locally-led linking within a national network. In this brief final chapter, therefore, I note the key elements of such sustainable scalability as they have emerged during the evaluation period. Figures 34-39 overleaf highlight the key sustainable scalability indicators as they relate to the MHCLG, the DfE, Local Authorities, TLN, local area linking facilitators and linking schools:

MHCLG
Long-term secure funding beyond 2019-2020.
Build schools linking into a national social cohesion strategy.
Commission a series of in-depth classroom-based schools linking case studies to inform broader social cohesion strategy and policy.

Local Authorities
Build schools linking into the job description of at least one LA employee
Build schools linking into all Local Authority social cohesion strategies
Draw upon experienced linking facilitators to act as TLN ambassadors within the Council
Create clear and formal lines of communication with linking facilitator and develop strategic overview to the develop of linking locally

DfE
Commission a strategic analysis of role schools linking can play in relation to National Curriculum requirements
Reference schools linking more clearly in relation to pupil achievement
Introduce a nationwide DfE 'badging' of schools linking schools.
Commission a series of in-depth classroom-based schools linking case studies to inform broader education strategy and policy.

The Linking Network
Develop a strategic five-year sustainability and scalability plan.
Develop a national 'college' of trained linking facilitators to serve as advisers
Draw upon experienced linking facilitators to act as national TLN ambassadors
Further develop use of digital linking and Social Media presence
Commission a series of in-depth classroom-based schools linking case studies to supplement evaluation of the TLN model of linking
Twin new linking areas with existing areas and new facilitators with experienced colleagues.

Local Linking Facilitators
Develop a localised three-five year strategic development plan.
Identify a wider range of funding sources and local groups/organisations willing to offer 'in-kind' support.
Develop a local partnership strategy to engage wider range of stakeholders
Development of linking with community/faith groups and Parents' Linking
Development of local area social media presence and digital linking
Develop a 'bring-along-a-friend' initiative whereby each linking school invites another school to begin linking

Local Schools
Draw upon experienced linking facilitators to act as TLN ambassadors
Experienced linking teachers train colleagues
Embed schools linking in local school curriculum plans
Further development of digital linking
Develop new links with local community and faith groups
Develop range of schools linking CPD courses for school governors

Figures 34-39: The Ingredients of Scalability

10. Conclusion

This evaluation of The Linking Network's National Schools Linking Programme began in February 2017. Throughout the evaluation I have drawn on interviews with local area linking facilitators, TLN Directors, staff team, members of the Board of Trustees and the Deputy Director of the Pears Foundation. Focus group activities, participant observation at Network Days and survey returns have added greater depth to the evaluation and the demographic data from 30% of TLN linking schools across England has added statistical clarity. The evaluation has demonstrated that TLN's highly effective Schools Linking Programme has shown its ability to foster greater self-understanding, critical thinking, intercultural and interfaith dialogue and understanding, empathy and mutual respect amongst the 17,575 pupils who participate in the programme. TLN schools linking provides teachers with a tried and tested means of addressing key issues in SMSC, exploring citizenship, reflecting on 'British' values in an inclusive way and modelling future citizens. It provides an effective means of building inclusive patterns of social cohesion amongst children and young people. It is important to recognise that the success of TLN schools linking since its first steps in Bradford in 2002 results from the efforts and support of the network's Directors, the growing TLN team and the commitment of teachers, Headteachers, local authorities and an engaged and effective Board of Trustees. It should also be noted that the development and expansion of TLN's Schools Linking National Programme would not have been possible without the unstinting financial support of the Pears Foundation since 2007, which has provided ongoing core funding and enabled the network to bridge Government funding periods. This report has highlighted the multidimensional positive impact that TLN schools linking has on pupils, teachers, local authorities, parents and local communities.

As I have shown the network continues to face a number of challenges as it continues to build its sustainability and scalability. It should be recognised that many of these challenges relate to factors that are beyond TLN's control. However, there is clear evidence that TLN, the Board of Trustees and local area linking facilitators are addressing these challenges in an increasingly creative manner. On the basis of this evaluation it has become clear that the approach adopted by TLN has ensured that schools linking is increasingly sustainable, where local challenges are met and that it has the capacity to continue to grow in a measured, organic and sustainable manner. Bishop Toby Howarth, the Chair of TLN's Board of Trustees suggested to me that in 3 years-time he would like to see a schools linking programme that is 'sustained, embedded and joyful.' On the basis of this evaluation it is clear that the Bishop's vision is already being turned into reality.

11. Recommendations

The 23 recommendations below arise from my 18-month evaluation of The Linking Network's Schools Linking National Programme. Further, more specific suggestions for the ongoing development of schools linking are found in the body of this final report:

1. That the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department for Education funding is extended at the current rate, adjusted for inflation, for a further 3 years beyond the current funding period, which expires at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year.
2. That the Pears Foundation extends its funding of The Linking Network, adjusted for inflation for a further 3 years beyond the current funding period.
3. That the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government explicitly builds schools linking into a new national social cohesion strategy.
4. That the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Education set aside further ring-fenced funding to enable the expansion of The Linking Network Schools Linking National Programme into 6 new areas p/a.
5. That the Department for Education sets aside funds towards the development of a series of in-depth classroom-based schools linking case studies to inform broader education strategy and policy.
6. That the Department for Education introduces the nationwide 'badging' of schools linking schools.
7. That teachers involved in schools linking receive Department for Education accreditation.
8. That Ofsted signposts TLN schools linking more clearly in its handbook and publications.
9. That The Linking Network formulates a strategic five-year sustainability and scalability plan.
10. That The Linking Network continues its establishment of a national 'college' of trained linking facilitators to serve as advisers in new linking areas.
11. That The Linking Network establishes a diverse working group to explore further creative approaches to localising and diversifying funding streams.
12. That The Linking Network considers the advantages of dispersing funding to local areas on the basis of need.
13. That all Local Authorities build schools linking into their social cohesion strategies.
14. That Local Authorities fund/part-fund a dedicated schools linking post within the Council.
15. That new schools linking areas are twinned with established initiatives.
16. That 'linking beyond the school gate' initiatives such as parents' linking are extended and adopted across all schools linking areas.
17. That local area linking facilitators pair all linking schools/classes with a local community/faith group.
18. That local area linking facilitators establish working groups with all key local stakeholder groups to expand linking in local areas, build schools-community relations and establish creative funding [financial and in-kind] strategies.
19. That an annual schools linking award is introduced in all linking Local Authorities.
20. That further work is developed into the most effective means of strengthening and expanding schools linking by/with faith schools.





21. That TLN considers whether the term 'minority faith' school needs to be replaced with a more precise and contextually appropriate term.
22. That local area linking facilitators are encouraged to explore establishing linking relationships that last for more than one academic year.
23. That The Linking Network and local area linking facilitators continue to explore the possibility of expanding schools linking amongst Year 6 pupils and linking relationships that extend from Primary to Secondary School.

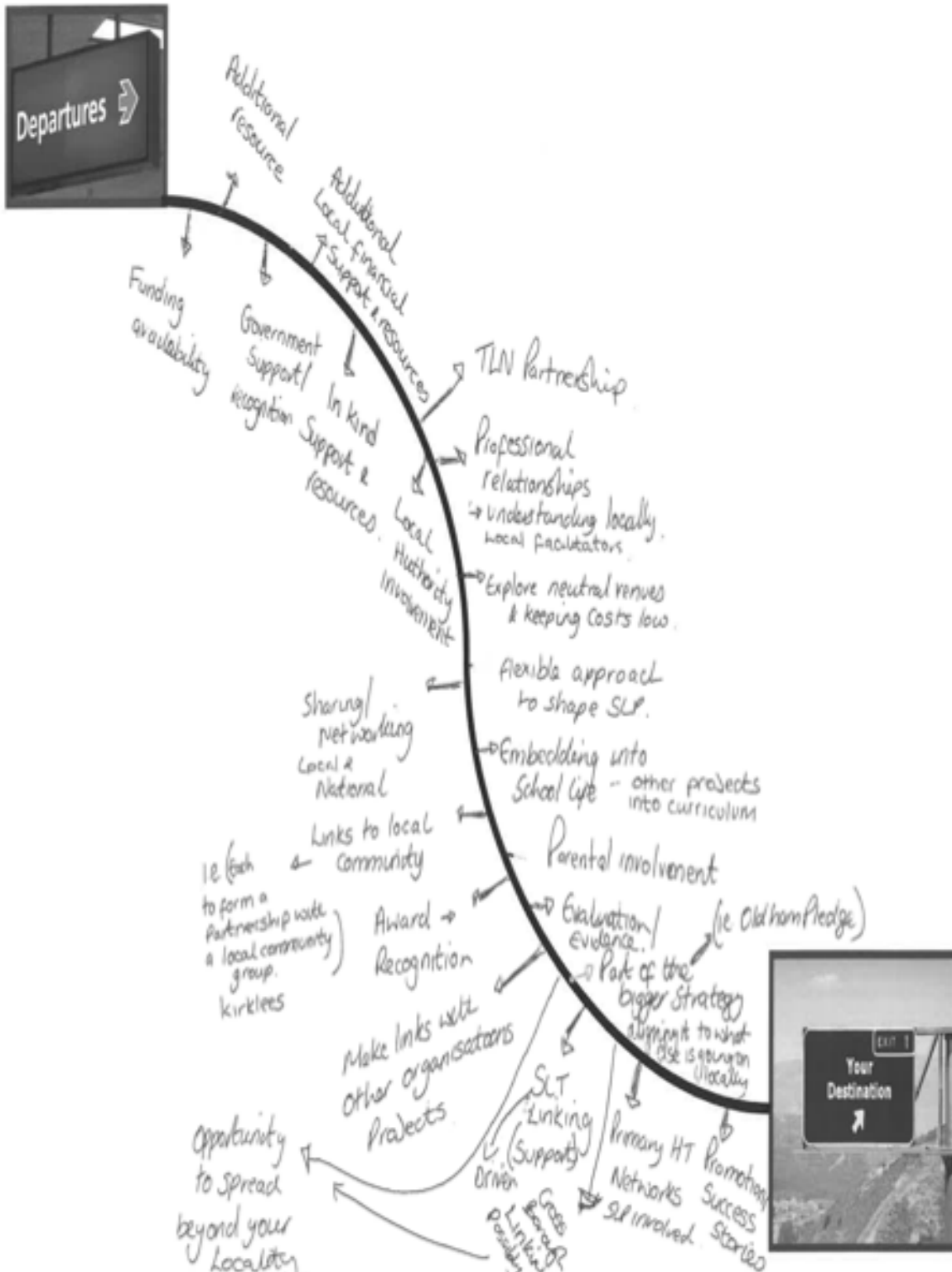


Figure 40: Linking Hands through Schools Linking in Rochdale

Appendix

The two documents below are examples of worksheets used in small focus group discussions at the November 2017 TLN Network day in Manchester:

<p style="text-align: right;">Joy</p>  <p>Bringing on board new schools (Children engaging with 'other' pupils where they experience social problems with their own classmates)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asylum seeking child with little to no English fully engaged + having fun. - Watching schools support each other. - Heads in - M6 Theatre (Rochdale provider) have invited their trust members + local councillor to observe a natural venue visit. 	<p style="text-align: right;">Challenges</p>  <p>Schools to link</p> <p>Key staff not turning up for CPDs</p> <p>Link governor seem secured</p> <p>Getting a school to link with a private school.</p> <p>Edmodo</p>
<p style="text-align: right;">Innovations</p>  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Booklet - Sub-training for schools which missed the CPD <p>- find teachers from interested schools to come and watch a linking day in action. (Bolton - but Rochdale wants to copy this).</p> <p>- bilingual support material</p> <p>- end-of-year booklet showcasing project (for participating schools) + enticing other prospective participants</p>	<p>Not sure e need help</p>  <p>- how to draw the last year to a close and share outcomes for other schools in a meaningful way.</p>



The Journey Towards Sustainability Identify the 'Pit-Stops' that you need to make on the journey

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Endnotes

1. See for example web sites <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2001/dec/10/asylum.raceequality> ['The Guardian'] and <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1364834/Blunkett-in-furore-over-British-test.html> ['The Daily Telegraph'] both accessed 10 November 2017
2. Cameron, David (5 February 2011, Munich), Web site <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference> accessed 10 November 2017. See too <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/8305346/Muslims-must-embrace-our-British-values-David-Cameron-says.html> James Kirkup, 'The Telegraph', 'Muslims must embrace our British Values, David Cameron says', 5 February 2011, accessed 10 November 2017.
3. See The Linking Network web site – <http://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/> accessed 19 November 2017.
4. Web site <http://thelinkingnetwork.org.uk/> accessed 21 November 2017.
5. See <https://sites.google.com/site/markrubinsocialpsychresearch/positive-and-negative-experiences-with-members-of-other-groups> for a useful summary of the possibility of 'negative contact'. Accessed 22 November 2017.





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