

A matter of shared responsibilities



**PAT
MCDERMOTT**
answers your
leadership
questions

I am among a group of secondary heads thinking about setting up a local education improvement partnership, but we are at the very early stages of this process. I wonder what we should be discussing in order to formulate a coherent and convincing application for the Department for Education and Skills.

There is a long and distinguished record in this country of schools working with each other and with other agencies for the benefit of our young people. Education improvement partnerships (EIPs) seek to build upon and enhance this tradition. The first question you need to answer collectively may be something like, "What could we do better together that we could not achieve individually?" Your answer to this question is all about purpose. What exactly do you want to achieve together? You might well want to consider any or all of the following as the headings for a description of your collective purpose related to your individual schools:

- attainment and standards
- leadership and management

● the Every Child Matters agenda, and/or

- the quality of provision in your schools. Alternatively, you might prefer to go for a more strategic purpose for your EIP by asking the question, "Is the way we organise support for our schools at present the best way?" Whatever your starting point, don't rush this stage. Think carefully about how you are going to arrive at this shared understanding of purpose.

The process itself should model the future practice of your partnership. Be sure that whatever the purpose, the impact on school improvement will be evident. The DfES will be very interested in this aspect of your proposals.

As a group of schools (and there appear to be no limits to the size of the group), you would be wise to build upon the best of any partnerships already flourishing in your area. Try to measure the readiness and capability of schools in terms of the contributions they could make to the partnership. Some schools may be ready to join an EIP but be unable to meet the responsibilities, while the converse may be true of other schools in the area.

This stage is all about collectively working out the individual strengths and weaknesses of each member of the proposed partnership. There has been some good work produced in this area by schools getting leadership incentive grants over the past two or three years through their peer review systems. Before long, finance will emerge as a potential stumbling block in your discussions. It seems quite clear that there will be no extra money available



for this initiative, but some EIPs have taken on service level agreements with their local authorities. It works as follows. The local authority delegates certain functions to the partnership. Collectively, you then become responsible and accountable for them. So, for example, you may wish to assume responsibility for 14-19 provision or behaviour and attendance across your

Group of schools. In order for you to carry out your responsibilities for these functions delegated by the LEA, it will also delegate the associated funding to the EIP. Also, if you get funding through other local initiatives in the area, such as Excellence in Cities, you can realign these funding streams with the aims and targets of your partnership. Delegated responsibilities and funding

also bring accountability; if, say, you have assumed responsibility for the the Every Child Matters agenda in your partnership, then why not try out the following on the DfES. As this is a shared responsibility, what about Ofsted inspecting ECM across the member schools of your partnership? One last bit of advice: don't feel that you have to start from scratch on this without making contact with the DfES. Get hold of the DfES prospectus on EIPs. This can be downloaded from www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/si/education/improvement/partnerships Someone from the DfES will come and talk to you if you wish, and there is no harm in involving the department at an early stage.

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