



# UPWARDS CONVERGENCE

An introduction to creating a high performing  
and equitable system



CHALLENGE  
PARTNERS



# INTRODUCTION

We should not be in the business of retaining the status quo. We should to be constantly challenging current definitions of outstanding. At the same time we want to ensure that we close the gap between those with the knowledge of how to be outstanding in the system with those that do not.

We refer to this process of continual improvement as reducing the disparity in performance and growing the top, thereby over time, creating a sustained upwards convergence of our schools', pupils' and teachers' performances.



# CREATING UPWARDS CONVERGENCE

Upwards convergence is a term we use to describe our theory of action - it provides a way of moving forward so that continual improvement is achieved in a sustainable way.

## REDUCING DISPARITY

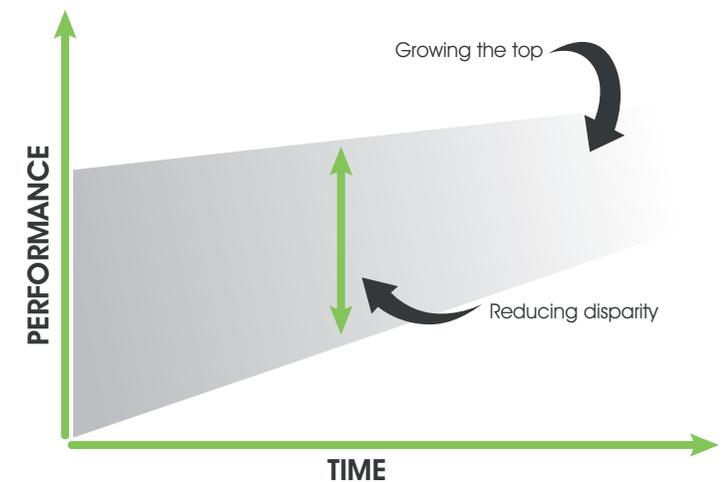
Raising the performance of those at the bottom of the system to the level of those at the top requires closing the knowledge gap between the two. It requires staff in schools to capture their best practice and share it.

## GROWING THE TOP

Our experience shows that a risk with an education system is that it focuses solely on the lowest performing schools. This means that the lowest performing schools improve but the top performing schools drift, and eventually move aimlessly down.

As a result, upwards convergence means not just dealing with failure but stimulating the top to rise higher so that the whole system moves on. It requires schools to develop and engage with research and innovation so that they are constantly re-defining what outstanding practice looks like. Stretching the top creates the momentum for the best schools to drive the system forward.

Closing the gap between the performance of schools at the top and the rest ensures everyone moves forward.



*Learning from the best, whilst challenging them to learn more.*

# DEVELOPING THE SOCIAL SKILL SET

To achieve upwards convergence our theory of action defines that need a process to ensure that knowledge is successfully transferred to those who require it. It means the key questions to answer are:

- How do we identify those who are outstanding?
- How do we ensure those people are capable of sharing their knowledge with others?
- How do we ensure others learn from them?

This means that we need to understand the social skill set required for people to transfer knowledge and what training framework is required so that they are able to share and learn effectively. In this way we are managing the knowledge in the system.

## REDUCING DISPARITY

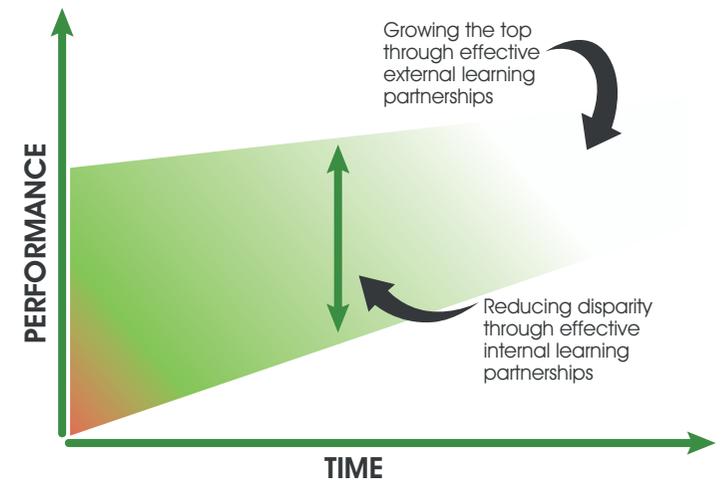
BUILDING CAPACITY IN THE SCHOOL TO SHARE EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Created through effective **internal** learning partnerships, such as role modeling, learning threes, joint practice development, and coaching and mentoring.

## GROWING THE TOP

BUILDING CAPACITY IN THE SCHOOL TO DEVELOP NEW KNOWLEDGE

Created through effective **external** learning partnerships, such as networks, engagement with research, structured innovation, and peer reviews.



# REDUCING DISPARITY SKILLS

## SKILLS REQUIRED IF KNOWLEDGE IS WITHIN THE SCHOOL OR ALLIANCE

Schools at the lowest performing end will need to focus on their internal knowledge management systems first. If they start by taking on external knowledge they will quickly become overwhelmed and improvements won't be sustainable.

Schools should start by using the knowledge of those staff achieving relatively better performance to help the others. This means providing coaching training for these staff members so that they are capable of sharing their knowledge with others. These staff need to be coached to handle and embed the knowledge of their more effective colleagues.

Schools should be releasing staff to coach each other so that internal knowledge sharing is improved. This process will not be effective unless it becomes a key priority and resources are provided to support them. As improvement develops over time and the degree of disparity declines then the school should shift to making links to knowledge holders outside the school.



# GROWING THE TOP SKILLS

## SKILLS REQUIRED IF KNOWLEDGE IS OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL OR ALLIANCE

Schools which have highly developed internal knowledge management systems that they continue to refine should be seeking external partnerships to ensure that their knowledge of what can be achieved can continue to grow. These partnerships will often be with schools performing at similar levels.

At this stage the school needs to develop experienced 'expert coaches'. These coaches will have networking and research skills so that they can locate the latest best practice in the system and integrate this back into the school.

They should also have the capacity to release staff who have the skills to support lower performing schools and coach them to improve. Schools at this level should be increasing the number of people benefiting from expert coaches.

The schools will also have to handle innovation so that it benefits, rather than sidetracks, the school's drive to be constantly redefining outstanding upwards.



# RESULT

Upwards convergence can only be achieved when people are trained and developed, act as role models, and are willing to share and learn from each other. This creates a virtuous cycle of professional development that creates the capacity that the system needs to continue to improve.

As a result of bringing together the two skill sets required for upwards convergence, not only does the number of people in the system who can deliver best practice increase but best practice itself increases.

**This helps us answer those earlier questions:**

## HOW DO WE IDENTIFY THOSE WHO ARE OUTSTANDING?

Analyse performance information to find the individuals achieving relatively higher outcomes for pupils

## HOW DO WE ENSURE THOSE PEOPLE ARE CAPABLE OF SHARING THEIR KNOWLEDGE WITH OTHERS?

Provide coaching training

## HOW DO WE ENSURE OTHERS LEARN FROM THEM?

Ensure that there is time allocated for regular coaching



# THE MODEL IN PRACTICE AT A SYSTEM LEVEL

Improvement in London is a classic example of the upwards convergence model in practice. The London Challenge programme instigated a systematic approach to managing the knowledge in London secondary schools. The diagram shows the results of this work; over more than a decade the number of underperforming schools reduced whilst the percentage of outstanding schools increased as the two parts of the system worked together.

A combination of programmes was used to achieve this, covering schools and individuals. The programmes all had clear outcomes, appropriate learning frameworks which took into account the nature of the knowledge being transferred, and were rigorously quality assured.

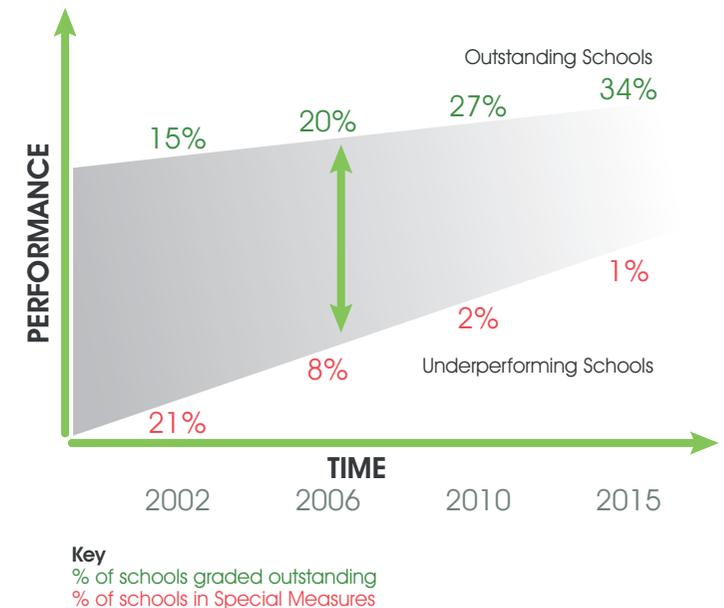
The dynamic situation meant that as a result of the process, achievements were made, expectations were raised, and the definition of what we were trying to achieve was re-defined:

- The first floor standard was established in 2013, which required schools to ensure that at least 25% of their pupils achieved 5+ A-C GCSEs.
- By 2013 the floor standard had been raised so that schools would be below it if fewer than 40% of their pupils achieved 5+ A\*-C GCSEs (including English and maths) and pupils were expected to make median progress in English and maths between key stage 2 and key stage 4
- The Ofsted framework had been revised several times and the challenge has increased with each iteration.

In addition, at the beginning of the London Challenge in 2002 only 1% of outstanding schools were supporting underperforming schools. By 2010, this figure had grown to 17%.

Over time, outstanding schools saw their peers' role modelling moral behaviour and committing to the success of other schools as well as their own. As a result, more outstanding schools began undertaking their own school-to-school work. This building of moral capital in the system is a fundamental part of the success of the upwards convergence model.

The workings of the London schools system today is a result of this model.





## CHALLENGE PARTNERS

We are a group of schools who believe we can achieve the best possible education for all pupils when we harness the skills and knowledge that already exists within our schools.

[www.challengepartners.org](http://www.challengepartners.org)

## PROFESSOR SIR GEORGE BERWICK CBE

George Berwick's approach to knowledge management underpins the work of Challenge Partners, where he is Chief Executive. More on upwards convergence can be found in his book 'Moral Capital' available at [www.georgeberwick.com](http://www.georgeberwick.com).

