

The 9 Pillars of Greatness

(Second Edition)



Bespoke programmes created
by school leaders for school leaders
to transform schools and
improve outcomes for children.

Introduction

In 2009 the London Leadership Strategy as part of the London Challenge launched a 'Going for Great' programme designed to focus on outstanding schools as judged by Ofsted and ask the question whether these schools were truly great. The programme was deliberately very ambitious and intended to break new ground, in the sense that it sought to define and exemplify world class practice and capture something of the essence of great schooling. The outcomes were intended to add significantly to our knowledge of how schools become great and sustain greatness.

To provide a framework of understanding of the range of characteristics that may define 'greatness' successive cohorts of Headteachers, taking part in this programme, have worked with the authors, establishing and refining the idea of Nine Pillars of Greatness derived from leading research

and practice. Six volumes of case studies have been published (all secondary schools) between 2009 and 2015 illustrating various aspects of the pillars and this year (2015-2016) primary schools have joined the programme. Their contribution has led to a new edition of this publication which also encompasses the latest research and practice which will be kept under continuous review by successive groups of Headteachers as they join the Going for Great programme. The Pillars have the great merit of being grounded in the practice of many of London's outstanding schools and refined through constant challenge and clarification and by research and evidence-based practice.

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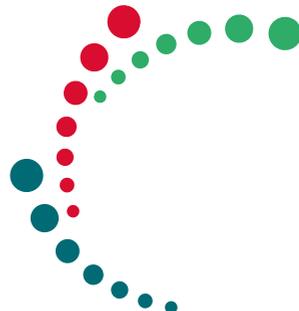
September 2016

The 9 Pillars of Greatness

- 1 A shared vision, values, culture & ethos, based on the highest expectations of all members of the school community
- 2 Inspirational leadership at all levels throughout the school
- 3 Exceptional learning, teaching, assessment and feedback to support the highest levels of attainment and achievement
- 4 A relentless focus on engaging and involving pupils
- 5 Personalised and highly effective continuous professional development within a learning community
- 6 A stimulating and inclusive environment and climate for learning
- 7 A rich and creative curriculum, within and beyond the classroom, fully meeting the needs of individuals and groups of pupils
- 8 High quality partnerships, with parents and carers, the community, other schools and networks, locally, nationally and internationally
- 9 Robust and rigorous self-evaluation, data analysis and collective review

1 A shared vision, values, culture & ethos, based on the highest expectations of all members of the school community

- The vision of the school is clear, understood and shared by all and underpinned by the school's values, philosophy and ethos.
- There is a compelling and inclusive moral purpose driving the school forward, based on equity, social justice and unshakeable principles.
- All those connected with the school are able to articulate and demonstrate their collective values and beliefs and their attention is focused on working to a common ideal and shared goals.
- The vision and aspirations of the school are optimistic and based on a 'growth mindset' philosophy. There is no ceiling on the expectations of the performance of any member of the school community.
- The vision looks confidently forward – redirecting approaches, anticipating developments and inspiring changes through being bold, positive and ambitious.
- The school's culture and ethos result from the application of its vision and values and manifest themselves in customs, rituals, symbols, stories and language. They are successfully expressed through the ways that members of the school community relate to each other and work together, through the organisation of the school's structures, systems and physical environment and through the quality of learning for both pupils and adults.
- The culture and ethos are embedded in the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by all members of the school community and are the 'glue' that holds everyone together.
- There is a commitment to excellence, to remaining open to new ideas and to thinking in new ways.
- All members of the community promote the vision and values of the school.
- The collective vision permeates the whole institution and is felt by everyone who visits.



2 Inspirational leadership at all levels throughout the school

- The school's leadership is transformational - visionary, inspiring and values-based. Leaders are able to envision and share a compelling view of the school in the future; they communicate this effectively to the entire school community. Leaders are champions, enthusiasts, forecasters and dramatists.
- There is excellent operational leadership. Leaders are planners, organisers, resourcers, tacticians and deliverers. They pay attention to detail and get results; they are resilient and determined.
- The school's leadership is transactional – based on building and sustaining high quality relationships between leaders and led. Leaders are nurturers, trainers, mentors and coaches.
- Leaders are reflective and open to learning from difficult situations and mistakes.
- The school practises invitational and distributed leadership (between staff and pupils), based on the belief that all have potential for growth and development, in the knowledge that everyone has a different profile of leadership qualities and with an understanding that the best leaders in one situation may not be the most effective in another. Shared leadership demonstrates mutual respect and trust.
- Leaders deliberately build the capacity for growth and adaptation to change through careful recruitment and retention, developing the workforce and fostering learning in the workplace. They see innovation as part of their day-to-day activity.
- Leaders strive to create and embed aspiration and ambition and develop creativity, wider learning and supported risk-taking. They lead by example: they are approachable and credible.
- Leaders develop an optimistic, lively, energising environment to maximise the additional effort of members of the school community.
- Extended and system-wide leadership are widely practised through school-to-school collaboration, the building of networks and quality relationships with outside agencies, and the provision of an infrastructure for new approaches to innovation and change.
- Leadership characteristics widely observed in the school include a sense of moral purpose, clarity, creativity, transparency, trust, conviction, consistency, courage, resilience, energy, enthusiasm, hope and humility.

3

Exceptional learning, teaching, assessment and feedback to support the highest levels of attainment and achievement

- The promotion of high quality learning is at the heart of the school's endeavours - learning without limits and success for all are guiding principles.
- There is a clear view of pedagogy that promotes expert teaching and enquiry-based learning.
- Teachers provide appropriate challenge and employ excellent classroom management and organisational skills.
- Staff members have considered collectively what constitutes effective learning and put in place effective processes and practices and varied teaching techniques to maximise achievement and attainment.
- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge consistently challenges and inspires pupils.
- Learning is personalised to individual needs, interests and current standard of attainment, so as to maximise pupils' engagement and enable excellent rates of progress.
- Assessment for learning is very well developed and consistently utilised, with regular opportunities for learning dialogues, self- and peer-assessment and diagnostic and developmental feedback based on accurate and robust pupil performance data.
- A variety of learning technologies and resources, which encourage independent thinking and learning, are used highly effectively and imaginatively across the curriculum.
- Pupils are taught to learn independently so that home learning becomes an effective opportunity for learning through practice, preparation, elaboration and exploration, paving the way for future learning and seamlessly linking one lesson's learning to the next's.
- The constant promotion of self-esteem through high expectations and ambition leads to the pupils assuming responsibility for their learning and behaviour.
- Pupils are encouraged to aim high. They are provided with information, advice and guidance on future opportunities to enable them to make informed and aspirational choices and to prepare for the next stage of their learning.
- Enrichment is every pupil's entitlement: opportunities to learn beyond the classroom inspire and motivate pupils and lead to outstanding achievement.



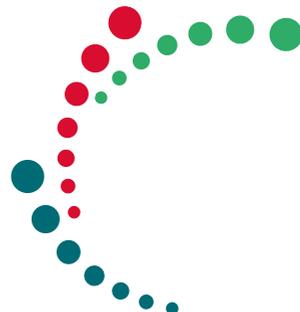
A relentless focus on engaging and involving pupils

- Pupils are involved in leading, managing and planning their educational experience at all levels.
- The pupil voice is strong throughout the school. Pupils feel empowered to suggest improvements to the school, for example through the School Council and pupil leadership teams, pupil surveys, feedback and evaluations. They know that their voice counts.
- The school is a community where everyone is considered a learner and everyone has a responsibility to support and encourage each other in their learning.
- Pupils are citizens of the school in a real sense. They may, for example, play a key part in the appointment of staff, edit and contribute to school publications and communications, observe and evaluate learning, be represented on school working parties and represent the school as ambassadors and guides.
- Pupils are encouraged to carry out their own lines of enquiry through home learning and research. Focus groups investigate and report back on school issues, such as marking, home learning, sanctions and rewards.
- Pupils are regularly used as learning partners, peer tutors, play leaders and co-teachers. They co-plan schemes of learning and co-construct learning activities with staff.
- Peer counsellors, mediators and mentors are used to aid behaviour management and maintain and re-build pupil relationships.
- Pupils design, plan and carry out extended projects and produce publicly-exhibited outputs such as publications, shows and presentations.
- The school celebrates and supports the achievements of pupils in their lives as members of the wider community.

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Personalised and highly effective continuous professional development within a learning community

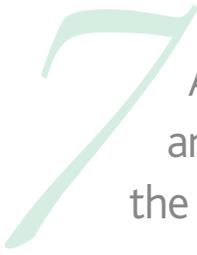
- The school continually emphasises the importance of the study of learning and teaching.
- There is effective staff development which involves discussion, coaching, mentoring and observing; it develops staff as educators and leaders.
- All members of staff feel valued, invested in and developed.
- The school is a knowledge-creating institution which audits professional knowledge and manages, validates and disseminates new knowledge.
- High performance is sustained through effective collaboration between schools and other educational organisations.
- The school is a learning community. Staff and governors, as well as pupils, regularly and openly model their learning and articulate their own learning challenges and goals.
- Learning groups/communities are fostered and developed, which present, review and adapt existing practice and provide quality CPD led by professionals for professionals.
- Innovation and improvement promote critical thinking, build capacity and sustain the vision.
- The school is enquiry-minded, geared to innovation and research, and has a commitment to sharing great practice with other schools, for example through publications, seminars and conferences.
- The school fully mobilises its intellectual, social and organisational capital to produce excellent educational outcomes.





A stimulating and inclusive environment and climate for learning

- The school has consistent and high expectations of the behaviour of pupils and the relationships between them, based on mutual respect, trust and kindness.
- A stimulating visual backdrop to learning is created by the presentation of learners' work: whole school displays and exhibitions, learning walls, the use of photographs, pictures, images and quotations. Displays stimulate learning, celebrate achievement and progress and raise aspirations.
- Considerable attention is paid to the whole school environment and the quality of the daily experience of those who work and learn in the school: the entrance foyer as a welcoming area, the playground, lunch facilities, toilets, corridors and social spaces as bright, safe and quality places.
- The school is outward-facing, welcoming to parents and the community, inviting and encouraging them into school to engage in the learning of their children and learn themselves.
- There is a high quality infrastructure in place to support learning – physical resources such as libraries or resource centres and support staff such as teaching assistants and learning mentors.
- The school is flexibly designed to allow for a variety of learning and teaching approaches, supporting knowledge sharing and learning amongst teachers and support staff and emphasising participation and collaboration.
- Individual classrooms and learning areas are planned to encourage pupils' autonomous learning, their ownership of and responsibility for spaces and risk-taking within a safe environment.
- The use of digital technologies – both within and outside the classrooms and schools – enhance learning.
- Pupils are taught about healthy lifestyles, how to avoid risky behaviours, build successful relationships, manage emotions and act responsibly as future citizens.



A rich and creative curriculum, within and beyond the classroom, fully meeting the needs of individuals and groups of pupils

- The curriculum is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and understanding, the development of learning skills and the fostering of positive character traits. It supports the development of lively, enquiring minds and the ability to question and argue rationally.
- The curriculum helps pupils to understand the world in which they live, and the interdependence of individuals, groups and nations, enabling them to enter the wider world as active and responsible participants in society.
- Pupils have the opportunity to learn and practise skills that will prepare them for careers in a fast changing world.
- The school's curriculum provides memorable experiences and rich opportunities for high quality learning and wider personal development.
- Learning and teaching are personalised throughout the curriculum through pathways and tailored programmes for a wide range of pupils with differing needs, so that all are able to participate, progress and achieve.
- Pupils are provided with cultural opportunities beyond their prior experience and their horizons are widened by a comprehensive programme of trips, activities, visitors, speakers, field work, extra-curricular sessions and other activities that enhance learning.
- Engagement in enrichment activities is an expectation of all staff and pupils.
- The curriculum provides a context for moral learning and experience and overtly focuses on, recognises and celebrates character development.
- Excellent cross-curricular links and the promotion of literacy, mathematics, communication and IT skills in every subject area, contribute to an outstanding whole curriculum.
- Pupils' enjoyment of learning is evident from their interest, concentration, enthusiasm, engagement and progress across a range of subjects and experiences.
- The school is at the forefront of successful and innovative curriculum design.



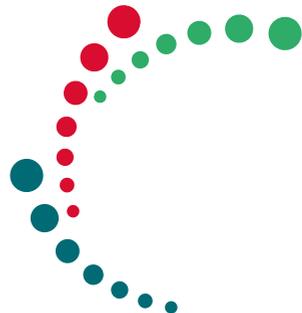
High quality partnerships, with parents and carers, the community, other schools and networks, locally, nationally and internationally

- The school recognises its responsibility for supporting the education of young people throughout the local area and developing leadership in the system. It establishes links with local schools, especially those in challenging circumstances. It makes a system-wide contribution through a sustained and substantial contribution to the local, national and/or international community.
- The school looks globally to learn from best educational practice and seeks to forge and develop links with schools across the world for mutual improvement.
- The school seeks to build positive interactions with all parents and successfully engages with those who are hard to reach, working in partnership to support their children's learning and maximise their progress.
- The staff appreciate that they cannot fully understand their pupils if they do not have knowledge of their out-of-school lives, influences and experiences. The staff members have opportunities for developing their knowledge of the pupils' lives out of school and they reflect on and utilise the knowledge they glean.
- The staff members understand and celebrate the opportunities, but also appreciate and face up to the challenges, presented by their particular community context.
- The school understands that community links are not just about reaching out to help the community but to learn from and make better use of existing resources.
- The school and its community create shared beliefs about what they can achieve together.
- The school effectively promotes community cohesion, safeguards children from exploitation and challenges extremism.
- All pupils, supported and encouraged by the school, are contributing to and enriching the local community.
- The school's facilities and resources are utilised fully by the local community. A wealth of community groups are linked with the school and involved in enriching the curriculum. Through these strong links the school's ethos permeates the local community.

9

Robust and rigorous self-evaluation, data analysis and collective review

- The school has a self-evaluating culture where collective review, book looks, learning walks and lesson observations are used as an opportunity to increase the common wealth of intellectual curiosity, leading to an extension and sharing of knowledge and ensuring consistently high standards.
- The school as an organisation learns its way forward, building in time for collective enquiry, reviewing evidence and continually striving for betterment.
- There is a regular and forensic analysis of performance data by teachers, leaders and governors, leading to discussions about strategies for improvement, the implementation of effective action plans and the securing of accountability.
- The school practises appreciative enquiry by distinguishing the best of 'what is', fostering a dialogue for new knowledge around 'what should be' and creating a vision for 'what will be'.
- There is a continuous process of reflection that becomes implicit in the way in which all within the school community talk about their work and learning and which keeps the school aware of its inner life.
- Self-evaluation at all levels is grounded in sophisticated, accurate and open analysis and is used unflinchingly to compare performance against the most stretching of benchmarks.
- The school regularly seeks feedback from and takes full account of the views of pupils, parents, governors and the community in evaluating its progress. It learns from its mistakes and accepts the challenge of continual improvement.
- The school makes good use of external critical friends, including peer schools, at key points in its journey to provide an open and rigorous reality check.



The London Leadership Strategy (LLS) is a not-for-profit organisation, run by heads for schools, taking forward school-to-school improvement in London and beyond, through a structured programme of support between schools.

Each year, LLS programmes support over 500 schools at varying points of their development journey – from needing improvement through to

maintaining outstanding provision; and supporting leadership from entry to the profession through to mutual support between outstanding heads.

LLS programmes are structured around what practising Headteachers know works in school improvement. These school improvement successes at every level are underpinned by what LLS call the '9 Pillars of Greatness'.



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