



NORTHUMBERLAND
EDUCATION
School's Alliance

In conjunction with



Northumberland
County Council



WHO?

This opportunity is available to any maintained school or standalone academy in Northumberland, including schools within the Church of England diocese.

WHAT?

Northumberland Education School's Alliance is simply that – a group of schools who choose to work more closely together to support not only their own pupils and staff, but those in other alliance schools.

WHY?

We have examples in Northumberland where the very close working of groups of schools generates capacity and improvement in all schools. This shared endeavour reduces the pressure on individual headteachers in particular – pressure that has grown since the pandemic. We would like to support a similar structure that provides the benefits but retains the freedom of LA schools.

WHEN?

- Informal consultation is ongoing.
- A soft launch in June 2024.
- A formal start is anticipated from September 2024.

WHY CHOOSE THE WORD ALLIANCE?

Dictionary

Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#) · [Learn more](#)

 alliance

/əˈlɪəns/

noun

a union or association formed for mutual benefit, especially between countries or organizations.
"a defensive alliance between Australia and New Zealand"

Similar: association union league treaty pact compact entente

- a relationship based on similarity of interests, nature, or qualities.
"an alliance between medicine and morality"

Similar: relationship affinity association connection closeness kinship

- the state of being joined or associated.
"his party is **in alliance with** the Greens"

Alliance



An alliance is a relationship among people, groups, or states that have joined together for mutual benefit or to achieve some common purpose, whether or not an explicit agreement has been worked out among them. Members of an alliance are called allies. [Wikipedia](#)

[Feedback](#)

BACKGROUND - THE DFE WHITE PAPER 2022



HM Government

**Opportunity for all:
strong schools with great
teachers for your child**



CP 850

Chapter 4: A stronger and fairer school system

Summary

By 2030, all children will benefit from being taught in a family of schools, with their school in a strong multi academy trust or with plans to join or form one

- All schools will provide a high quality and inclusive education within the resilient structure of a strong trust,⁶⁴ sharing expertise, resources and support to help teachers and leaders deliver better outcomes for children.
- The best trusts in the system will work where they are needed most, levelling up standards, and transforming previously underperforming schools.

117. Teachers and leaders in strong trusts can form communities of practice, sharing evidence-based approaches and benefitting from high quality professional development to improve outcomes for children. Strong trusts also achieve economies of scale, sharing resources, centralising functions, and ensuring robust financial governance, in order to build resilience and save time and money to reinvest into education. As a result of these benefits and more, our best trusts achieve strong educational outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children – if all children did as well as pupils in a trust performing at the 90th percentile, national performance at key stage 2 would be 14 percentage points higher and 19 percentage points higher for disadvantaged pupils.⁶⁵

**Opportunity for all:
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136. Local authorities will be able to establish new multi academy trusts where too few strong trusts exist, enabling high performing schools with a track record of local partnership to formalise their relationships and add expertise and capacity to the trust system. These trusts will be regulated in the same way as any other trusts, and we will ensure that safeguards are in place to effectively manage any potential for conflicts of interest both for the trust and the local authority – including limits on local authority involvement on the trust board.

138. We know schools in rural areas can be particularly important to their communities, and Diocesan trusts and trusts established by local authorities will be well placed to ensure these schools are effectively supported.

However the White Paper was ditched in December 2022, so local authorities were unable to set up MATs...

“We need a social contract that is about **pooling and sharing more risks with each other to reduce the worries we all face while optimising the use of talent across our sector** ... It also means caring about the well-being not just of our own pupils, but of others’ too, since they will all occupy the same world in the future.”

(Minouche Shafik, Director London School of Economics)

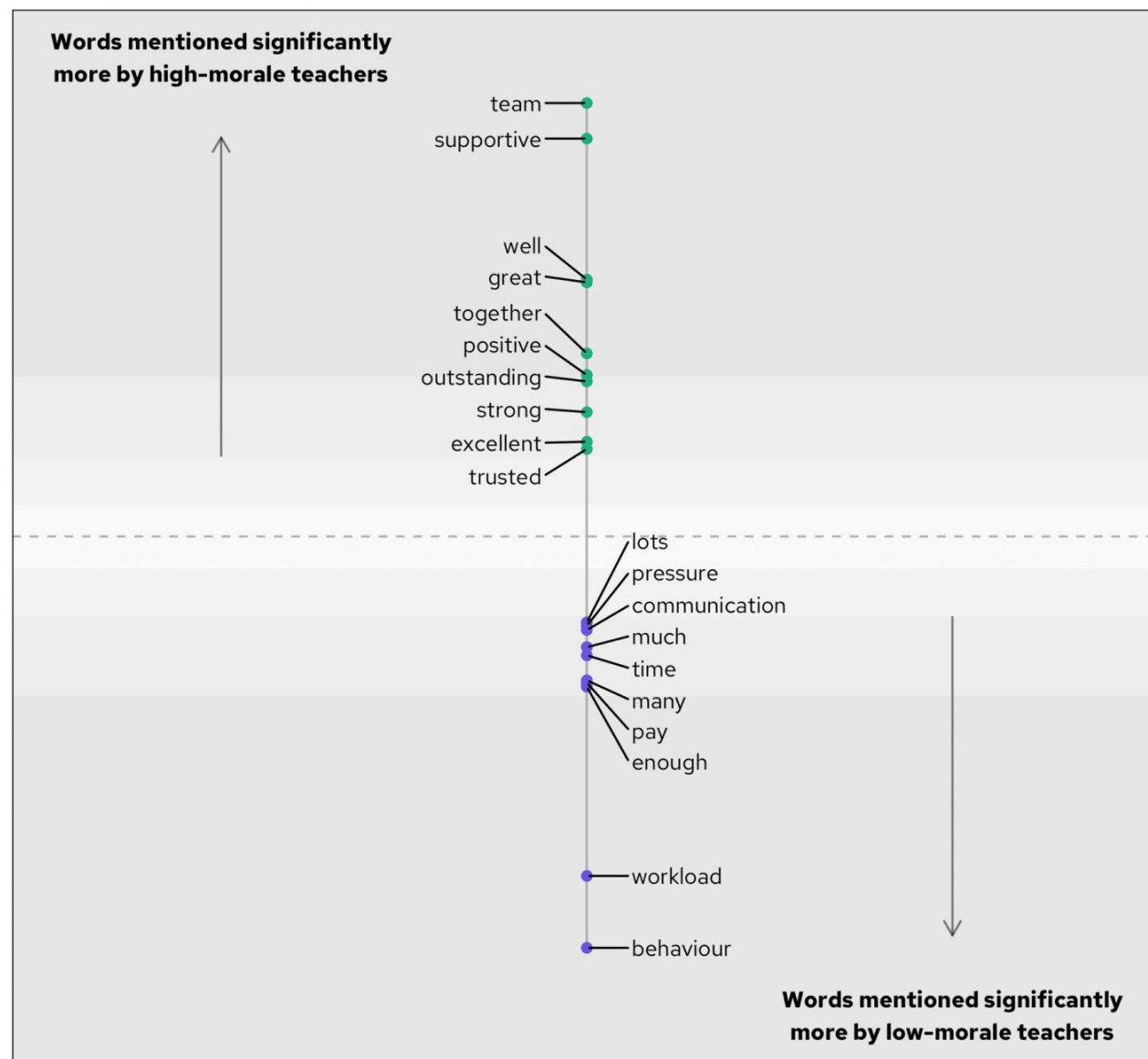
The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) believe that the best bet for a school system that keeps getting better is groups of schools working in deep and purposeful collaboration in a single governance structure.

We think that NESAs can support that idea of "*deep and purposeful collaboration*" However there are **no plans** to amend the structure of school governance.

117. Teachers and leaders in strong trusts **alliances** can form communities of practice, sharing evidence-based approaches and benefitting from high quality professional development to improve outcomes for children. Strong trusts **alliances** also achieve economies of scale, sharing resources, centralising functions, and ensuring robust financial governance, in order to build resilience and save time and money to reinvest into education. As a result of these benefits and more, our best trusts **alliances** achieve strong educational outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children.

Keyness Analysis by Morale

Keyness analysis of question "Tell us why morale is high or low in your school",
crossed against teachers' responses to how morale is in their school



Although an alliance can't create more time for school staff it may be able to reduce workload, improve communication and develop the sense of "team" through the togetherness of staff working more closely together.

WHEN IT'S DONE RIGHT CENTRALISATION IS COLLABORATION

"A core tension for trusts **alliances** is to maintain balance between the needs of individual school contexts and the streamlining of processes across the organisation (thereby reducing unnecessary duplication). Successfully executed centralisation provides clear benefits for schools, but it is essential to approach this tension strategically.

The mental load being placed on principals is immense. Indeed, a third of heads are actively looking to leave the sector, with the majority citing unmanageable workloads. To stop the brain drain, we must find ways to alleviate the burden.

Centralising operations within our trust **alliance** has allowed us to give valuable time back to our principals, cutting out activities which had previously been blocking them from what drew them into the sector in the first instance - teaching and learning.

Likewise, we cannot reasonably expect our principals to be experts in IT infrastructure, the intricacies of estates management, procurement, accounting and HR legalities while also being excellent teachers and leaders. One of the primary benefits of being part of a trust **an alliance** is being able to draw support from dedicated experts, giving leaders more freedom and agency to focus energy on supporting staff and shaping the learning experience of students."

[When it's done right, MAT centralisation is collaboration \(schoolsweek.co.uk\)](https://www.schoolsweek.co.uk)

SMALL SCHOOLS ARE ON THE BRINK. ARE MATS THE ANSWER?

Small schools with fewer than 100 pupils are least likely to be in a trust - but are they the very schools most in need of academy support? Dan Worth investigates

Leora Cruddas, CEO of the Confederation of School Trusts, says it shows these settings are recognising the benefits of being in a trust: **"Small schools can benefit perhaps more than most...by drawing on the wider talent and resources a larger organisation can support."** *(but that doesn't have to be a MAT!)*

"I was increasingly isolated because although I had headteacher colleagues to talk to and we had a strong informal group, in terms of real support from the local authority, there wasn't any," she says.

For example, she says that the local authority would send a school improvement adviser once per year, but in the MAT someone will visit every half term, while there is also support from the centre in terms of finance, budgeting, HR and curriculum.

"It's very helpful having other leaders in the trust you can talk to because leadership can be very lonely. It also means you can ask about initiatives or schemes of work and the impact they had," she says.

She also notes that having access to a wider pool of staff can be hugely beneficial: "When you're such a small set of people, if you lose somebody that can be quite detrimental to the running of the school, so we have seconded people from another school."

[Small schools are on the brink. Are MATs the answer? \(TES\)](#)

THE ALLIANCE DIVIDEND

NESA can develop the dividend that comes from groups of schools working more closely together. Value can be added by supporting standardisation, empowerment, and collaboration across schools.

Some aspects of school life are open to **standardisation**. These aspects act largely the same way each time and are the more mundane elements of the daily life of schools. NESA will support and develop efficient and effective operational structures in order to free up time and space for school staff.

Aspects that are more complicated should be **empowered** to schools and colleagues. Complex areas respond differently in each setting and so require local decision making as quality and outcome is linked to the situation as it emerges. Such areas will be left to the discretion of individual schools.

High quality **collaboration** that purposefully connects colleagues across groups of schools, will support the development of classroom practice.

A strong focus on implementation will see initiatives better embedded and therefore higher performance over time.

WHAT MIGHT SIT WHERE?

Standardisation (supported by NESAs)

Inspection readiness

Data analysis

Quality assurance

Safeguarding

SEND

Service Level Agreements

Policies

Empowerment (individual schools)

Improvement of teaching

Behaviour systems

Personal development

Leadership development

Collaboration (across schools)

Focus on implementation

Use of expertise

Meaningful collaboration

Networks

Subject groups

NETWORKS (possible examples)

Subject	Phonics	Maths	Geography	Art	Computing
Leader	Headteacher	Subject Leader	Office Managers	TAs	Caretakers
Role	Forest Schools	Attendance	Pupil Premium	Assessment	LAC

Networks are designed to:

- Support, enhance and empower practice
- Equip you with important knowledge
- Update you on changes to approach/curricula/policy
- Develop collaboration across schools

- Regular meetings for leaders, subjects and roles (frequency to be agreed)
 - Attendance and engagement expected
 - Research informed
- Pre and post communication (platform to be agreed)
- Peer review: encourage staff to visit other schools and see good practice.
 - External partners brought in as need dictates

WHAT BENEFITS SHOULD WE SEE?

- Consistency - named contacts for all SLAs
- Strategic leadership support - a central support team, including school business management
- Build capacity - possibility of shared specialist staff (music, languages, caretakers, EWO)
- Network meetings for all subjects and non-teaching groups of staff
- Moderation meetings for a wider range of subjects and year groups
- Uniformity of systems across alliance schools if it improves practice
- Greater local CPD opportunities
- Provision of policies from the centre
- Commissioning of contracts, training and services across alliances to reduce costs per school
- Develop over time - you are at the heart of shaping the alliance as it develops
- Greater range of opportunities for small schools e.g.: joint trips, joint teams
- Workload reduction as aspects of school provision are standardised
- Agreeing what schools will stop doing

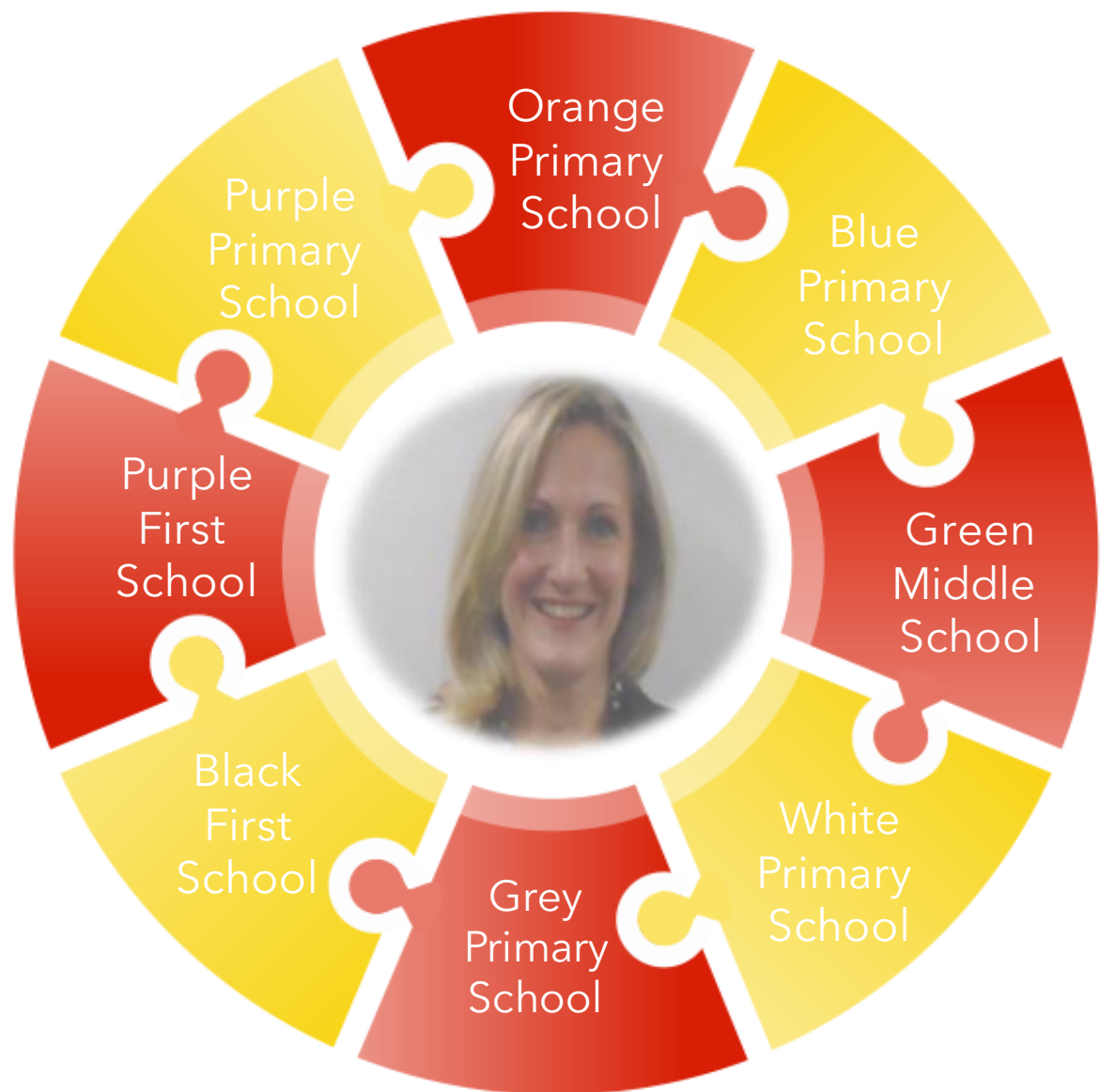
WHAT WILL WE NOT SEE?

- Any changes to staff contracts or terms and conditions
- Staff being forced to work in other alliance schools
- A change to governance structures
- Top slicing of school budgets
- Any changes to identity, uniform, school name
- Any changes to admissions policies
- Schools forced to join NESAs
- Schools forced to stay in NESAs

WHAT WILL BE EXPECTED OF MY SCHOOL?

- Support for, and collaboration with, other schools
- Share your good practice
- Be willing to receive and implement good practice from elsewhere
- Endeavour to support other schools as and when required
 - e.g.: SENCO support across schools if necessary
 - e.g.: Leadership support across schools if necessary
- Facilitate subject leadership/middle leadership networks and training

AN EXAMPLE - THE SIMONSIDE ALLIANCE



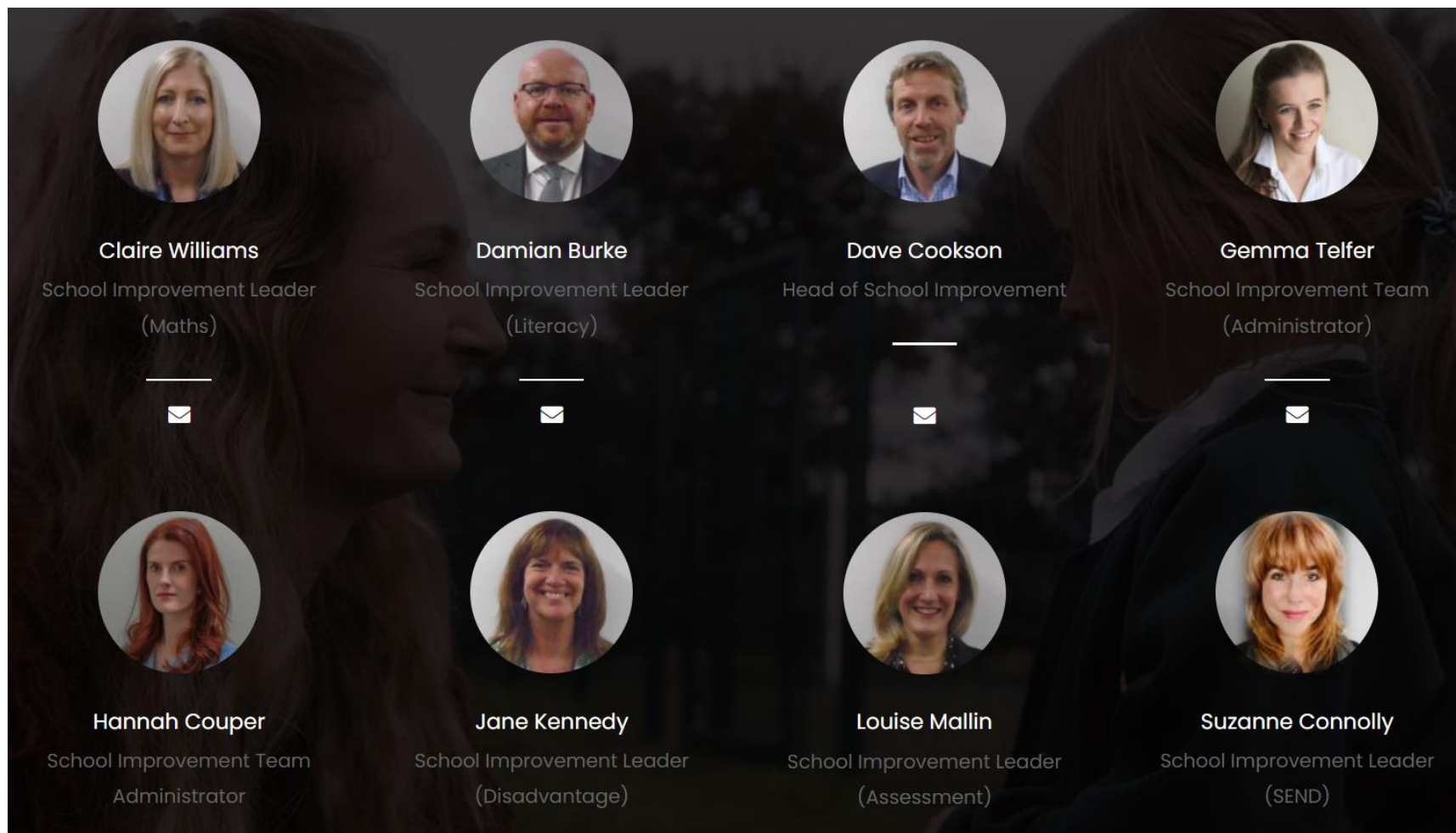
Training days and staff CPD time are co-ordinated across schools. Some of that time is used for groups of staff to meet in person or virtually to develop their practice.

Over time school leaders will develop a peer review process so that they can support and learn from visits to other schools.

The workload of headteachers is reduced as more functions are provided from the central team.

Bulk buying across the alliance (or alliances) means that better value for money is achieved for alliance schools.

Some pupil activities are co-ordinated so that they can benefit from larger groups (sports teams) or lower costs (bus hire).



Claire Williams

School Improvement Leader
(Maths)



Damian Burke

School Improvement Leader
(Literacy)



Dave Cookson

Head of School Improvement



Gemma Telfer

School Improvement Team
(Administrator)



Hannah Couper

School Improvement Team
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School Improvement Leader
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Louise Mallin

School Improvement Leader
(Assessment)



Suzanne Connolly

School Improvement Leader
(SEND)

Each alliance will have a named member of the Central School Improvement to support.

The other members of the central team will support each other as required.

One of the team will provide dedicated support with regard to school business management.

TIMELINE



Questions?



www.northumberlandeducation.co.uk/nesa

or email/phone Dave Cookson

