Sergiovanni (2001) asserted that ‘it seems clear that we can be much more deliberate in organising schools in ways that enhance teacher learning and the learning of other adults’ is what I am setting out to achieve. Tailored in-service provision for individuals, in reality, often consists of ‘off the peg’ solutions - courses run by the local authority which most closely matched identified needs. HMI observed nationally that ‘Course attendance was the main vehicle for professional development in most of the schools … and using consultants to provide in-school programmes of support to tackle a specific need. (HMI: Ofsted 2002: p3). Whilst targeted in-service training has its place, whole school issues can still be limited to immediate concerns and not become strategically centred. ‘Most teachers were very willing to plan professional development activities. In the main, however, such planning tended to be short term … rarely perceived as part of a longer-term sequence … enhancing the skills or knowledge of the teacher to enabling pupils to achieve higher levels of performance. (HMI: Ofsted 2002: p15). Whilst effective CPD may necessarily require the enhancing of skills and knowledge as outlined, this view assumes a static view of a staff team. It supports individuals in maintaining their focus and improving their skills, it does not support long term strategic improvement for the school.

In contrast, where staff have the confidence or authority – described below as ‘culture of leadership’ - to think through and engage in approaches to learning, then conversations created around the activity have a significant effect on both pupil and teacher engagement. ‘Good professional development within the school was a key factor in helping teachers to encourage and assess creative approaches to learning ... Externally produced resources and short training courses had limited impact without local training and continuing in-school support. (Ofsted: 2010: p6).
I take the view that a change of school culture is fundamental to the long term development of the school, and this culture needs to be learning centred; that everyone in the establishment will necessarily be required to play an active part in developing the school as a learning community. I am therefore setting about long term, strategic goals.

There is one key factor that provides a platform from which I am seeking to take the school forward -The Primary Capital Programme. I am seeking to use the changes in the built environment to promote professional development. Minor works already completed have provided the catalyst. The government’s major development of Primary schools nationally recognises that: ‘to deliver world class education and children’s services we need world class buildings and use of technology.’ (The Children’s Plan: Building brighter futures: 2007). The Primary Capital Programme is a building programme designed to be transformative. Its stated intention is to: ‘create primary schools that are equipped for 21st century teaching and learning, and are at the heart of their communities with children’s services in reach of every family. The primary capital investment should support a wide range of policies with the Children’s Plan at its heart.’ (Every Child Matters: The Primary Capital Programme, 2008 – 2022)

I seek to in these articles to outline the reasons and background to the changes to take the school through the next stage of its development – to take the school from a good school to one that aspires to be outstanding.

In this section, I explore the research literature relating to the built environment of schools. The second article is devoted to the research literature relating to effective professional development and developing a culture of leadership. The third is devoted to insights from the group interview exploring the effectiveness of the recent changes in the environment in the year 3 and 4 areas. The final article draws conclusions about the future direction of the school.
The built environment

McIntyre (2006), Steer Committee report (2005), Price Waterhouse Coopers (2001) and others have shown demonstrable effects, both perceived and identifiable, of the built environment on adults and children alike. This led to the statement that: ‘School buildings should inspire learning. They should nurture every pupil and member of staff’, (Ministerial introduction to the BSF consultation: DfES 2003a)

The Steer committee report (2005) reported that building layout had an identifiable effect on children’s behaviour. It implored schools to develop communal areas as civilised and well-ordered places that offer opportunities for positive social interactions between children and adults. Early attempts to put this in practice did not always result in the desired outcome; the borough of Southwark, Evelina School review 2007 remarked that ‘The school suffers from being located in an atrium area. Ambient sound is totally inappropriate for a school environment. This can range from loud conversations, mobile phones, performance noise...’ Lundquist, Holmberg and Landstrom (2000) recognised the impact of such noise on children’s levels of annoyance in particular. Issues such as ambient noise and reverberation in existing environments can be alleviated through acoustic insulation, so it is important for schools to recognise that young children are far more susceptible to poor acoustic conditions than adults (Elliott: 2002) and that children may have different psychological responses to a wide range of environmental factors from adults (Corsi, Torres, Sanders and Kinney: 2002). ‘School facilities affect learning. Spatial configurations, noise, heat, cold, light, and air quality obviously bear on students’ and teachers’ ability to perform’, (Schneider: 2002).

In 2008, the local authority produced a primary strategy for change (PSfC) document, setting out and prioritising the PCP funding strategically. The DCSF published detailed guidance and also commissioned the research project “Space for Personalised Learning”, aimed at supporting schools to change or evolve the physical environment in response to personalised learning. The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE: 2010) outlines the implications for primary schools; ‘School buildings will have to become more accessible and adaptable for … the change in learning patterns and the implications of increased ICT use’. Flexible learning spaces, enabling future adaptation to take account of developing technologies have become central. ‘Flexibility <is> paramount
for new school buildings.’ (CABE: 2010: p 99), it ‘is the opportunity to make modifications quickly to a school building to enable it to be used differently, sometimes changing the way it is used several times a day’.

However, research into developing flexibility within a learning space is only part of the issue. The Cambridge Primary Review states that ‘Current research does not address the way in which primary school spaces are interconnected and influence one another, how they are used pedagogically, or how they are managed and maintained. This has meant that a particular learning space has tended to be examined in isolation rather than in the context of the learning environment. (Wall, Dockrell and Peacey: 2010: p 611).

Futurelab ask two pertinent questions to planners of new learning spaces; ‘What if … we design spaces for learning competences as well as content?’ and ‘What if … most learning was collaborative?’ (Rudd et al: 2006). A built environment tuned to promote learning - collaboration, team working, reflection and ease of access to information – might look significantly different to one focused on teaching within individual classrooms. If I am to put collaborative learning at the heart of the process, We need to consider how spaces can interact to promote collaborative learning for both teachers and children. My research considered, then, the interaction of spaces within the year 3 and 4 joint area.

The government’s guidance for the Building Schools for the Future programme advocates the ‘… need to plan for professional development … to ensure they can contribute effectively to, and get the most from, the programme. (DCSF: 2009a: 15). My research seeks to develop this professional dialogue.