

## Chapter 2

# Responsibility in a High-Accountability System: Leading Schools in England

Daniel Muijs

### Introduction

In this chapter, we will look at the challenges of leadership in a context characterised by high levels of school autonomy coupled with high levels of accountability and a great frequency of change. This context characterises schools in England, leading to a high-pressure environment, but also a high level of innovation in leadership practices. Some of these will be discussed here. First, we will outline the policy context for English school leaders before going on to implications for their role and some recent responses to the challenges of leading in this context.

### The English Education System: A Hotbed of Reform

Often known as an educational laboratory, the English education system has long been subject to the reforming zeal of respective governments, with education policy being a more prominent political issue than in many other European countries. Standards have been at the forefront of successive reforms, with school improvement a key aim of reforms by both Conservative and Labour governments. The amount of change and the number of initiatives that have affected the role of headteachers in this rapidly moving system over the past 20 years is too extensive to catalogue here, so in this section, I will review the main developments in terms of consequences for schools and teachers.

A key development and the starting point of the current era of standards-based accountability in England was the Education Reform Act of 1988. This act, introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government, instigated the move towards simultaneously encouraging school autonomy and instigating stronger central control over standards. Thus, the act both introduced school-based management and

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D. Muijs (✉)  
University of Southampton, Southampton, UK  
e-mail: D.Muijs@soton.ac.uk

significantly reduced the power of local authorities over schools, and, for the first time, a national curriculum intended to ensure an equal entitlement of all pupils to a broad academic schooling. This policy direction, weakening local authority control and encouraging school autonomy on the one hand and putting in place increasingly strong central accountability measures on the other, has broadly characterised English education policy for the past two decades.

School-based management was introduced essentially to encourage competition and management techniques from the private sector. This part of the Act allowed all schools to be taken out of the direct financial control of Local Authorities. Financial control would be handed to the headteacher and governors of a school. The devolution of responsibility to school was seen as a way of allowing management to occur at a level closest to its immediate effects and move away from a more socialised model of central control by local governments. This move, therefore, fit firmly in the Conservative Party's policy of moving from a Social-Democratic towards a Liberal economy based on market principles. Local Authorities, particularly those run by the Labour Party in the big cities, were seen as inimical to this shift.

A variety of reasons underpinned the introduction of a national curriculum model. Some felt that the removal of an examination at 11-plus, combined with the relative freedom of the comprehensive school to develop its own curriculum pattern, had resulted in too much unstructured or 'child-centred' teaching (West and Muijs 2009). There was growing frustration with the imbalance in curricular models, both within schools, where between the ages of 14 and 16 years, some pupils spent as much as a third of their time studying science subjects, while others avoided science altogether, and between schools, where models sometimes seemed to reflect the teaching interests and strengths of the staff as much as they did the interests and needs of the pupils (West and Muijs 2009). Also, there was a growing determination within government to increase accountability at school level for student performance. This is difficult to do unless performance can be 'measured' and compared in some way. An attraction of the national curriculum is that it brings with it the possibility of national testing and hence provides a basis for the comparison of individual school performance levels.

National assessments are held at the end of year 2 (second year of primary school), at the end of year 6 (final year of primary school), at the end of year 9 (third year of secondary school) and at the end of year 11 (fifth year of secondary school), which is when compulsory schooling ends. The English schooling system divides the school career into four so-called 'Key Stages' and the assessments mark the end of each Key Stage. During Key Stages 1–3, progress in most National Curriculum subjects is assessed against eight levels. It is therefore a criterion-referenced assessment system.

At Key Stage 1, the level is determined by teacher assessment, taking into account the child's performance in several tasks and tests. At Key Stage 2, the level will reflect the teacher's assessment and a national test taken by all year 6 pupils. At Key Stage 3, the level is based on the teacher's assessment. Each child therefore takes a national test at the end of Key Stage 2. The tests are intended to show if your child is working at, above or below the target level for their age. Subjects covered for the Key Stage 1 assessments are: reading, writing, speaking and listening, math

and science. The teacher assessment is moderated by the local authority to make sure that teachers make consistent assessments of children's work. Most children are expected to reach level 2 by the age of 7 years. Key Stage 2 tests for 11-year-olds cover English—reading, writing (including handwriting) and spelling, maths—including mental arithmetic and science. These tests are taken on-set days in mid-May and last less than 5.5 hours altogether. By the age of 11 years, most children are expected to achieve level 4. The Key Stage 3 teacher assessment for 14-year-olds covers English, maths, science, history, geography, modern foreign languages, design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT), art and design, music, physical education, citizenship, religious education. By the age of 14 years, most children are expected to achieve level 5.

A key element of the national assessment system is the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). GCSEs are the main qualifications taken by 14–16-year-olds, but are available to anyone who would like to study a subject that interests them. Pupils can take GCSEs in a wide range of academic and 'applied' (work-related) subjects. GCSEs are available in more than 40 academic and 9 'applied' subjects. The applied subjects are related to a broad area of work, such as engineering or tourism, and many are double the size of traditional GCSEs.

GCSEs are assessed mainly on written exams, although in some subjects there are also elements of coursework. Some subjects, like art and design, have more coursework and fewer exams. Some GCSE courses are made up of units; for these, one can take exams at the end of each unit. Other GCSEs involve exams at the end of course. GCSE's are a formal qualification which depending on subjects taken and results achieved can lead to further study, work or apprenticeships.

GCSEs are graded A\* to G and U (unclassified): higher tier exams leads to grades A\* to D and foundation tier exams leads to grades C to G. A 'good' qualification, leading to further education with the possibility of university study, consists of getting at least five GCSE's graded at least C. This five A\* to C level is also the main accountability measure for secondary schools.

The percentages achieving the different levels on the Key Stage 2 (end of primary) tests and five A\* to C grades at GCSE are published at the school level and open to inspection by the public. Media organizations publish so-called 'league tables' of school performance based on these test results. This publically available assessment data is intended to aid parents in making school choices and forms an important part of the national accountability system, as there is clearly pressure on schools to perform well in the 'league tables'. This pressure led, towards the late-1990s, to schools, especially those serving disadvantaged areas, enrolling ever more students in vocational subjects, seen as easier, to enhance their league table position. As a result of this, the Labour government under Gordon Brown mandated that for school accountability purposes the five A\* to C grades had to include English and math and the current government has instigated the so-called English Baccalaureate which includes English, math, a science, a humanities subject and a foreign language.

The 1992 Education Act, under John Major's Conservative government, strengthened accountability through changes to the inspection system in schools. The 1992 Education (Schools) Act which provided the legal framework for the launch of the

Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED). This policy set out to inspect and report on the performance of every school in the country and to drive up standards; the underpinning rationale was that if schools had to attract students standards would automatically rise in the face of local competition.

OfSTED's early years were not without controversy. Some commentators claimed the Conservative government had legitimately pitted public interests against the self-interest of the educational establishment in an attempt to demystify the closed world of schools and classrooms. Others from within the educational establishment claimed the process was demoralising and de-professionalising (Muijs and Chapman 2009). A number of studies challenged the value of the OfSTED system of inspection, Fitz-Gibbon and Stephenson-Foster (1996) for example, challenged the sampling, reliability and validity of the process. Other researchers have focused on OfSTED's contribution to school improvement (Earley et al. 1996) and OfSTED has developed its own research and publications arm to support the claim of '*improvement through inspection*' (Chapman and Muijs 2010). The original framework was modified several times before being relaunched by the Conservative government in the summer of 1996. The new framework moved OfSTED further in to the terrain of school improvement by promoting "school improvement by identifying priorities for action" (OfSTED 1995, p. 2) as well as assessing the schools capacity to manage the change process and review its systems for institutional development (Early et al. 1996, p. 3). However, in many cases the key elements of trust and mutual respect between the inspecting and the inspected remained limited and limited OfSTEDs contribution to school improvement and therefore the improvements made because of inspection continued to be challenged (Cullingford 1999). There was an expectation within the profession that much would change, and quickly, and much did, schools reaping the benefit of increased funding and being asked to work in different ways by collaborating with each other on new initiatives such as Education Action Zones. However, less change occurred to the inspection system.

When the Labour Party under Tony Blair took office in 1997, they built on the policies of the Conservative governments that had preceded them, claiming that their inheritance included some positive aspects such as the introduction of regular independent inspection of all schools and the publication of school performance tables (Chapman and Muijs 2010). The government therefore intended to build on rather than replace some of the previous administration's attempts to improve the system. Barber (2001) one of the New Labour architects of change argued that to move from the relatively underperforming system of the mid-1990s to a world-class system for the twenty-first century the context for change required attention because the previous administration had attempted to change the system by identifying problems and increasing the level of challenge, neglecting to increase levels of support needed to counter conflict and demoralisation within the system. New Labour's belief was that excellent education systems are underpinned by high levels of challenge and support which would lead to, in their terms 'a framework for continuous improvement' (Barber 2001). This framework remained sharp with a focus on raising standards, accountability, data and targets but added supporting elements including devolved responsibility and an intention to provide high-quality professional development.

A major development in the later years of the New Labour government was the renewed focus on diversity and choice, through the introduction of Academies. An academy is a school that is directly funded by central government (the Department for Education) and is independent of local government control. An academy may receive additional support from personal or corporate sponsors, either financially or in kind. They must meet the National Curriculum core subject requirements and are subject to inspection by OfSTED. Academies are self-governing and most are constituted as registered charities or operated by other educational charities. Most are secondary schools but some cater for children from nursery age upwards. They were first announced in a speech by David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education and Skills, in 2000. A number of private organizations run groups of academies.

The most recent White Paper, the first from the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government elected in 2010, is again moving towards increased school autonomy, with the Academies programme being significantly expanded, and parents being allowed to start their own so-called 'Free Schools', which have greater freedom to deviate from the National Curriculum as well as greater freedom to select and appoint staff. Free schools still need to be approved by the Department of Education before being set up and will be state-funded. It is also proposed that teacher training become (even more) school-based with training schools to be set up and that all government funding will go directly to schools, further weakening the (already limited) role of local authorities in the system.

At the same time, the accountability system is being tightened up through the creation of a 'British Baccalaureat'. This means that school performance will be judged using a new measure, the percentage of pupils receiving five grade A+ to C at GCSE (national exams at the age of 16 years) in English, maths, a science subject, a humanities subject and a modern foreign language. The curriculum is also currently being revised and is likely to move back towards a more subject-based system.

## **The Role of School Leaders in England**

The role of the headteacher has always been important in English education. Reforming headmasters of public schools (this, confusingly, means private non-state-funded in England), like Rugby School head Matthew Arnold, were well known and influential in the nineteenth century education system and ran their schools as hierarchically structured organisations. This hierarchical structure was taken over in state schools and has persisted across the waves of reform of the state education system. In many ways, the centrality of the headteacher to the system has increased over recent decades, in part because of the decentralising tendencies mentioned above, but in part also due to the perceived importance of the head in instigating and leading school improvement. Successive British government leaders (and attendant initiatives such as Leadership Incentive Grants) have stressed the importance of school leadership, Britain's former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, for example, stating that 'As new headteachers you are the critical agents for change and higher standards school

by school. There is literally no more important job in Britain today than yours' (Blair 1999). Similarly, the English inspection agency OfSTED has claimed that 'changing the headteacher has been found to be the most successful means of taking a failing school out of special measures'. This perception of the importance of leadership has led to a significant investment in the recruitment, training and development of educational leaders. The most ambitious of these developments is probably the setting up of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) by the government in 2001 to provide and coordinate leadership development, pointing both to the importance attached to school leadership by the government and to a belief that leadership can be learned to at least to some extent. The National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) was set up as pre-service training programme for headteachers and is now mandatory for all new heads. The National College (recently renamed National College for the Leadership of Schools and Children's Services) offers a suite of programmes that provide leadership development from pre-service onwards, with programmes for newly appointed heads and those with experience.

The current system therefore is once again in a state of change, with the move towards academy status being considered or undertaken by many schools and the new accountability measure already impacting on planning for future years. The dual nature of the system, with its emphasis on both strong accountability and school autonomy puts the principal in a particularly central position within the system. While the formal responsibility for the school rests with the governing body, composed of representatives of parents, the community, school staff and the local authority or academy sponsor, day-to-day responsibility both for the financial management of the school and school outcomes rests with the headteacher, who can be held to account and dismissed by the governing body. School-based management itself, while generally seen as beneficial in terms of school improvement and effectiveness (Caldwell and Spinks 1992), challenges school staff in terms of leadership and management.

It is clear that the role of the headteacher within the English education system is both varied and broad. This is leading to a systemic problem in terms of the capacities of the headteacher to take on these tasks in an effective way and to a crisis of recruitment where even those leaders who have completed the NPQH often fail to move into headteacher jobs. One of the issues related to school-based management is that studies suggest that headteachers may spend an increasing amount of their time on the non-educational aspects of their role, such as fund raising, buildings management and financial management (Armstrong et al. 2010). This is problematic, as research in school effectiveness and school improvement has put a lot of stress on the concept of instructional leadership as a key component of effective schools (Teddle and Reynolds 2002).

Instructional leadership is seen as being concerned with hands-on involvement with teaching and learning processes, and with the headteacher acting as the leader in terms of pedagogy and instruction rather than taking a more hands-off role concerned more strongly with administration. Instructional leadership has been defined as those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning, make instructional quality the top priority of the school and bring

that vision to realization (Hallinger and Heck 1998). Instructional leaders have a pedagogical vision, have pedagogical expertise and focus on teaching and learning. An instructional leader promotes homogeneous approaches to teaching and behaviour management in the school, monitors teaching and makes sure professional development focusses on teaching and learning. In many cases, instructional leaders start the process of school improvement by implementing a particular initiative such as promoting a teaching strategy (Muijs et al. 2004). The relationship between instructional leadership and educational outcomes is quite long established. In one early study, for example, Heck et al. (1990) found an indirect relationship wherein three latent variables related to principal instructional leadership (school governance, instructional organization, and school climate) affected student achievement. The relationship was still found to be there in an overview of research on instructional leadership conducted 15 years later by Hallinger (2005) and had received consistent confirmation in research. There is significant empirical support for instructional leadership (e.g. Teddlie and Stringfield 1993), though questions can be asked as to how the strong focus on the headteacher in this body of research fits with conceptions of distributed leadership. Likewise, we can question the extent to which this hands-on approach is still feasible as headteachers taking on new roles with regards to leading federations or groups of schools, such as is happening increasingly in the UK. However, that headteachers need to be instructional leaders if school improvement is to occur is a well-supported finding and it is therefore worrying if school-based management results in headteachers focussing primarily on administrative tasks.

## Developing School Leaders

There are several possible responses to this problem, one of which, as mentioned above, has been the upskilling of headteachers through professional development. This has meant reorienting practice around leadership development rather than selection of leaders, the underlying view being that everyone has the potential to lead if only they receive the necessary professional development. This view is reflected in investment in leadership development at the national policy level (such as through the formation of the NCSL in the UK) and in the success of leadership programmes at university level in many countries. This view reflects a more general move away from a belief in fixed innate characteristics as determining behaviour, as is also evidenced by the discrediting of the fixed view of IQ as a measure of innate intelligence, and the decrease in gender stereotypical role orientation as again the innateness of many traditional gender roles has been found to be a result of nurture rather than nature.

Therefore, while the view that leadership can be learnt appears to have support (though we must not lose sight of the fact that psychological research does appear to show that genetically determined personality characteristics do exist, e.g. Frederick's five factor model), the key question is whether all this activity in leadership development has, in effect, improved leadership in the schools. In other words, what

is the impact of leadership development, what forms of leadership development have an impact and is investment in leadership development a cost effective way of improving the education system? The English inspection body, OfSTED, appears to believe that the investment in leadership development through the National College is paying off: The OfSTED report, 'Leadership and Management: What Inspection Tells Us', suggests that some of the improvements in the quality of leadership and management were attributable to headteacher training programmes that began in 1995 and the establishment of National College in 2000 (OfSTED 2005).

The question that needs to be asked first, however, is to what extent leadership development has an impact on organisational performance. While the potential of continuing professional development to influence organisational performance is assumed in much of the generic literature, it is far from proven. A recent review of the literature concluded that there was insufficient evidence to link leadership development directly to improvements in organisational performance. A number of evaluations of specific leadership development programmes appear to point to positive effects, but these typically rely on self-report or satisfaction questionnaires and have not systematically explored impact (Huber and Muijs 2009). However, the literature on organisational change and improvement would assert that there is an indirect relationship simply because both leadership and continuing professional development feature prominently in many studies of effective organisational change (Berends et al. 2000; OECD 2002). The evidence supporting the great investment in leadership development under the New Labour government is therefore mixed.

## Distributed and Delegated Leadership

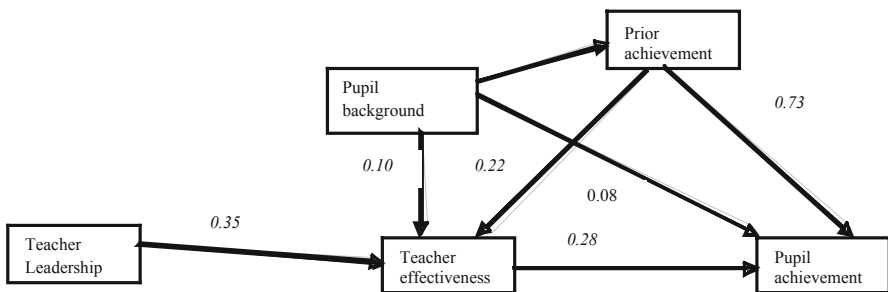
A second response, that has stronger evidential support, is to involve a greater proportion of school staff in leadership. The increased responsibilities of headteachers have recently led to many researchers and practitioners espousing so-called distributed forms of leadership, involving all staff in leading their organisation. This view contradicts the traditional view of transformational leadership by stating that transformational practices can reside in all members of an organization rather than just the head. The heroic view of leadership has only on occasion been found to be the factor that has led to organisational improvement, while distributed forms of leadership have been found to benefit improvement efforts in a range of studies (Harris and Muijs 2004). Distributed leadership implies that the practice of leadership is *stretched* within or across an organisation and that there are high degrees of involvement in the practice of leadership (Spillane et al. 2001). This 'deep leadership' is co-constructed through joint practice drawing in part on yet untapped leadership potential and under-developed resources for collaboration and co-ordination. In this sense, distributed leadership is '*an emergent property of a group or network of individuals in which group members pool their expertise*' (Gronn 2000, p. 23).

Distributed leadership is "*enacted by people at all levels rather than a set of personal characteristics and attributes located in people at the top*" (Fletcher and



Käufer 2003, p. 22). However, this does not mean that everyone leads simultaneously or that leadership activity has no agreed or common direction. Instead, it is a form of leadership that brings together both lateral and formal leadership processes in order to generate organizational change and development. It is *‘educational rather than institutional in its focus and is exercised through the liberation of talents within a participatory framework’* (Fullan 2005, p. 6). In summary, it is a form of leadership practice where individuals collaborate in order to extend and enhance the leadership capacity within or across organisations.

Distributed leadership clearly holds theoretical promise in terms of organisational improvement and achievement. However, while there is some evidence linking distributed leadership to organisational growth and change, it remains the case that empirical studies of distributed leadership are relatively limited. As Bennett et al. (2003, p. 4) note in their review of the distributed leadership literature that *‘there were almost no empirical studies of distributed leadership in action’*. The studies that do exist suggest a favourable relationship between distributed forms of leadership and organisational outcomes. Silns and Mulford’s (2003) comprehensive study of leadership effects on student learning provides some cumulative confirmation of the key processes through which more distributed kinds of leadership influence student learning outcomes. Their work concluded that *‘student outcomes are more likely to improve when leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and when teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them’*. The largest contemporary study of distributed leadership practice in schools concluded that intervening to improve school leadership may not be most optimally achieved by focusing on the individual formal leader and may not offer the best use of resources (Spillane et al. 2004). In England, Harris and Muijs (2004) found positive relationships between the extent of teachers’ involvement in decision making and student motivation and self-efficacy. Looking at a number of factors, they found quantitative evidence that teacher involvement in leadership had an indirect impact on pupil performance through improving teacher effectiveness (see the following diagram)



Hallinger and Heck (2010) similarly reported that collaborative school leadership (a somewhat more limited concept than distributed leadership) can lead to improvements in reading and math, with the relationship being mediated by leaders building the school’s capacity for academic improvement. School capacity itself, however, also shapes schools’ collective leadership capacity in a reciprocal relationship.

In England, distributed leadership has been encouraged through organisations such as the National College, which has promoted this through its training programmes, and academics and consultants, who have quickly taken on board this message and have also been instrumental in encouraging schools to move in this direction.

In practise, of course, English schools by no means have all subscribed to distributed leadership. The model of strong directive leadership from the head with little involvement of other staff is still present in many schools and a lot of school improvement research still points to strong leadership from the head as a key element in improving schools, especially for those in the most troubled situation (Muijs et al. 2004).

A hybrid model, which is seen in quite a few schools, is that of an expanded leadership team. In this model, which is mainly present in secondary schools, a larger number of staff members than is traditionally the case are included on the senior management team, allowing greater delegation of responsibilities. In one example of this, a school expanded its senior management team to include subject leaders in English, math, science, cultural studies, creative arts and applied learning as well as four heads of house responsible for pastoral care.

Another example of an extended leadership team from a secondary school is given in Table 2.1.

As members of the core school leadership team (SLT), the headteacher, the Head of pastoral care and the Head of curriculum and achievement share responsibility with the Head for policy making, procedures, monitoring, reviewing and forward planning; responsibility for the school in the Head's absence; and additional responsibilities and initiatives as required. The Assistant Heads are members of the extended SLT, augmenting the core SLT as appropriate and undertaking additional responsibilities and initiatives as required. As members of the extended SLT, the assistant Heads support the core SLT in policy making, procedures, monitoring, reviewing and forward planning; accept lead responsibility for specific aspects of the school development plan; and undertake additional responsibilities and initiatives as required.

Clearly, this type of leadership arrangement can help the Head deal with the expanded responsibilities by delegating leadership tasks. It is also clear from the example in Table 2.1 how the accountability mechanisms shape leadership, by enforcing a strong emphasis on pupil outcomes, in particular achievement, a factor that is present in the description of the responsibilities of several members of the extended leadership team. However, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of this type of arrangement is still limited, though some qualitative studies show some positive views from school leaders themselves (Chapman et al. 2010).

## School Business Managers

As identified in a recent PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC 2007) report, school heads are still having problems balancing their dual roles as operational and strategic leaders. The report suggests the more widespread and effective use of devolved leadership

**Table 2.1** An expanded leadership team

Role	Responsibilities
Headteacher	Leadership and management of the school Staff Co-ordination of specific programs Representation and communication Oversees SLT and is responsible to Governors and the local authority for all aspects of the school
Head of pastoral care and staff development	Oversight of pastoral care Chair of Pastoral Leadership Group Staff Ethos and values Specific initiatives and responsibilities (including learning support, oversight of lunchtimes, monitoring and supporting effective teaching and approval of trips and visits)
Head of administration and resources	Administration Resources Specific initiatives and responsibilities (including oversight and development of community links, oversight of Science College primary school links, oversight of trips abroad and chair of the School Association)
Head of curriculum and achievement	Curriculum Achievement Specific initiatives and responsibilities (including science and applied learning statuses, teaching and learning in secondary schools strategy, 14–19 developments, locality curriculum co-ordination and timetabling and the skills agenda including TEEP, AfL, L4L, AG&T and OOHL)
Assistant Head 1	Overall leadership and co-ordination of all aspects of the pastoral care and pastoral management of Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and post-16 vulnerable learners Leadership and co-ordination of learning support as head of faculty Specific initiatives and developments (including work related learning; post-16 provision at Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2; oversight of Cover Supervisors; and deputising for Assistant Heads and Deputy Heads as required)
Assistant Head 2	Overall leadership and co-ordination of improving learning and progress in years 7 and 11, with a particular focus on Key Stage 4 Leadership and co-ordination of physical education as head of faculty Specific initiatives and developments (including staff development leading to the raising of achievement, the skills agenda, assessment and reporting and deputising for Assistant Heads and Deputy Heads as required)
Assistant Head 3	Overall leadership and co-ordination of Level 3 post-16 Co-ordination of 14–19 applied learning Leadership and co-ordination of technology as head of faculty Specific initiatives and developments (including diploma development in school and city-wide, development of business links and deputising for Assistant Heads and Deputy Heads as required)

*SLT* school leadership team

to enable senior staff to develop their practice in ways that have potential to impact favourably on pupil attainment. The report also suggests many teaching and support staff perceive that their involvement in leadership falls short of what is possible and desirable. In a scoping study recently carried out for NCSL, it was found that school staff felt that over the last few years School Business Management (SBM) tasks had become both greater in number and more difficult (Woods et al. 2007), not surprising in view of the expansion of school-based management and autonomy mentioned earlier in this chapter. Substantial deficits in SBM expertise in schools were predicted over the next 2–3 years.

One increasingly important area of leadership development in schools is therefore the training of individuals within the school to manage the business aspects thereof, thus lightening the burden for headteachers who would be better able to concentrate on academic leadership and setting business management in schools on a more professional level. This need led to the development of the Bursar Development Programme, aimed at providing suitable training for School Business Managers. Key components thereof are the Certificate in SBM, the pilot for which was launched in 2002 (national roll-out followed in 2003) and the Diploma in SBM, the pilot of which ran in 2003, with national roll-out the following year. More recently, an Advanced Diploma was piloted (2009) with national roll-out following now. The idea is to upskill business managers in schools, who often start off as school secretaries, with a view towards them taking on leadership roles in the schools they are working in, in this way alleviating the demands on educational leaders and allowing them to exercise instructional leadership.

The programme has been the subject of a number of external evaluations (Woods and Brown 2003), which showed evidence of early impact on participants' professional skills, some evidence of impact in the workplace for about half of the participants, and satisfaction with content, though there was also evidence of too much variation in quality between venues and tutors. Further longitudinal evaluation supported the impact of the programme on participants' professional knowledge and skills and suggested that trainees could contribute to enhanced effectiveness in the workplace. In particular, the programme was seen as very helpful to the heads engaged in workforce remodelling, allowing them to change the job description of school administrators engaged in business management.

The involvement of non-educational actors in SBM was evaluated by Armstrong et al. (2010) using mixed methods research design. Findings were largely positive. In terms of SBM's roles, it is clear that as candidates move through the SBM training programmes they become more involved in leadership and management in the school. This is evidenced by their changing job titles, greater amount of time spent on leadership, and increased salary. In the most advanced cases, SBM's become central to the leadership team, as one candidate stated 'working alongside, not under the head'.

Findings also suggest that SBM has led to significant reductions in the amount of time Senior Leaders spend on administration and Finance, and has been particularly beneficial for small primary schools in rural areas, where previously no business

management function existed. The fact that a joint Business Manager could be appointed for collaboratives and networks of schools has helped to solve this problem in many cases.

There is also evidence that School Business Managers have been able to make considerable cost savings for schools through more thoughtful procurement processes and the pooling of school resources. This, however, has in some cases led to conflict with the Local Education Authority which has seen its services taken over by external providers. School Business Managers themselves felt very positive about the increased responsibility they were given, although there were some complaints that while work-life balance issues of teaching staff were being addressed, this was often done by loading tasks onto administrative staff, thus relocating rather than solving the problem. Most heads felt that School Business Managers had helped them to concentrate on the core educational tasks, although some had found it hard to delegate financial tasks to the School Business Manager. Contextual factors appeared important here, with heads of smaller schools sometimes finding it harder to delegate these responsibilities. Performance levels of schools also appeared to play a role, with heads of lower performing schools finding it harder to delegate significant responsibilities to their School Business Managers. Interestingly, School Business Managers have not just become more strongly involved in financial management and leadership, but have become increasingly involved directly with teaching and learning, in part through the greater confidence and understanding of the school that their training has given them. They are, for example, working in developing programmes to involve pupils in budgeting, or in greening the school.

Overall, there was evidence of greater effectiveness in terms of management and leadership in the school. However, till date, evidence that this had led to improvements in student progress remains elusive. It is likely that the impact of changed leadership and management arrangements, which by definition are unlikely to have a direct effect on student performance, will take longer to impact on students (if any impact is to be found). Creemers' (1983) model of educational effectiveness posits that the leadership function in schools exerts its impact mainly through creating the conditions in which the effectiveness of teaching can be maximised. SBM may aid this through allowing leaders to concentrate more fully on issues of learning and teaching in the school. Effective teaching and learning in turn will improve student outcomes. Of course, a problem that schools may face is whether they have the financial capacity to recruit a School Business Manager, one reason why they may form networks, thus increasing their financial capacity, to hire a joint Business Manager.

## **Leading Networks of Schools**

These attempts to alleviate the pressures on headteachers through greater involvement of school staff in leadership is obviously one solution. However, increasingly, it is becoming clear that the challenges faced by schools and school leaders require greater collaboration between schools. Not least of these problems is the issue that

improvements in one school in an area may be at a cost to others in the area, as the school choice existing in England will tend to lead to pupil transfers from one school to another, i.e. from the less to the more successful school. Also, weaker schools may benefit from support provided by stronger schools, as was found in Chapman and Muijs (2010) study on the impact of Federations of schools for the National College. Arrangements whereby schools collaborate have become increasingly common in the UK, with Federations of schools being the most frequently found. The term “federation” encompasses a broad spectrum of collaborative arrangements and is often used to loosely describe a range of partnerships, clusters and collaborations. In general, groups of schools agree to work together to raise standards, promote inclusion, find new ways of approaching teaching and learning or build capacity between schools in a coherent manner. This will be brought about in part through structural changes in leadership and management, in many instances making use of the joint governance arrangements invoked in the 2002 Education Act. The establishment of a federation, often referred to as ‘hard federation’, as specified in the 2002 Education Act, allows for the creation of a single governing body or joint governing body committee to operate across two or more (often cross phase) schools. A collaboration, often termed as ‘soft federation’, is where one or more governing bodies delegate some but not all of their powers to a sub-committee (with somewhat limited purpose). Whichever arrangements are adopted, each partner school remains as a separate entity, headed, inspected, ranked in league tables and funded in its own right.

The role of the headteacher or principal is a key one in networks. We have seen in many of our own case studies that successful networks either originate from the initiative of one or more charismatic headteachers, or else are steered through the always difficult set-up phase by individual leaders. While, therefore, we have evidence that distributed leadership is fostered through collaboration and networking, it remains the case that strong headteacher leadership at the network level appears to be a facet of many successful networks. There is evidence both from education and from other field that leaders play a key role in the establishment of networks, McGuire and Agronoff (2007), for example, pointing to the fact that a leader or leaders usually lie at the basis of new public service networks. Within schools themselves, headteachers and other senior staff in schools who are willing and able to drive collaboration forward are key to making it work. As with other educational interventions, networking will only work if headteachers are committed and behind the idea. Headteacher support is necessary to encourage other school staff to see network activities as key, to put in place the cultural and structural changes needed for collaborative work with other schools or organisations, and, not least, to ensure that time is freed up for staff to take part in network activities (for example joint Continuing Professional Development (CPD) with another school) and that staff are encouraged to disseminate the outcomes of any network activity in the school. Obviously, where a network proposes thoroughgoing forms of integration such as teachers teaching at multiple schools or joint appointments the role of the head in making this happen is crucial.

Headteacher leadership is therefore clearly important to effective networking (Muijs et al. 2011). At the individual school level, this means that the Senior Management Teams of all network schools need to support the network in order for it to

be sustainable. Networks that are driven solely by staff, lower down the school hierarchy, while potentially successful in the short term, are unlikely to show long-term sustainability. Networks of teachers, where there is little senior management involvement, are unlikely to result in systemic change across the school and are likely to peter out (Ainscow and West 2006). In practice, according to Hadfield (2007), most successful networks are driven by a small group of activist leaders, given 'permission to lead' by colleagues. According to one report, firm directive leadership is required at the start, at least for schools facing challenging circumstances, which can later be relaxed. A more distributed approach can then be adopted once changes have been bedded in (Chapman and Harris 2004). Changing leadership styles can be fraught with difficulty, however, as staff expectations may have become embedded to the extent that such changes may be met by mistrust and a reluctance to take on new leadership roles (Muijs and Harris 2003).

The development of networks and collaboratives obviously challenges school leaders in a number of ways. Leaders' interpersonal skills are a key aspect of successful networking. Inevitably, networking entails the bringing together of different organizational cultures, so some measure of misalignment and misunderstanding is inevitable. In order to be able to overcome this problem, a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and the emotional impact of collaboration are necessary (Muijs 2006). Heads also need to be open and honest, in order to help develop the trust that is so important to effective networking arrangements.

However, as well as these softer elements of management, networks appear most successful where a clear management structure exists (Lindsay et al. 2007). Again, this is similar to the findings from other studies on school effectiveness and school improvement, which have, for example, shown that even school improvement based on notions of distributed leadership benefits from strong and clear management structures (Muijs and Harris 2007). In some of the Federations, the creation of new management posts at the network level (such as Associate Heads and Assistant Heads for the whole federation) has been found to aid that process, though this would only be appropriate where the network is intended to show permanence rather than a more short-term focus on particular programmes or aspects of improvement. New roles, described by Fullan (2004) as 'system leadership' are emerging in networks, largely structured around key-brokering roles. These include the building of group identity, trust and the fostering of mutual knowledge.

More generally, there is evidence that networks not only require additional leadership roles and skills, but that they, by creating these, help to involve more school staff in leadership, thus promoting both distributed leadership and an increased leadership capacity in the system. Likewise, the creation of leadership roles specifically related to network leadership creates a cadre of peoples with experience of system leadership and thus makes future networking easier (Hadfield 2007; Fullan 2004).

One of the key differences between managing networks and single organisations is the fact that networks are generally voluntary collaborations between equals, as opposed to hierarchical organisations. This is a very different situation than the norm for educational managers, used to being at the top of a hierarchical system, where, essentially, what they say goes. When managing a network, the role becomes very

different, focussed on getting a community of equals (who are likely to jealously guard that sense of equality and strongly resist signs of hierarchy) to work together and coordinate activities for the common good. This is what is known by economists as the Joint Production Problem. This form of management is characterised by the lack of possible sanctions and by often limited economic incentives (Milward and Provan 2003). As Handy (1991) pointed out, the good thing for network managers is that they manage a programme with far greater resources in terms of staff, but the bad thing is that none of them think they work for you.

According to some theories, networks are in fact unmanageable, due to the fact that they emerge from multiple micro-interactions, and therefore are not controlled by any one actor (Ritter et al. 2003). This view of networking fits well with a 'new social movements' perspective, but does not fit well with those networks that have been more deliberately created, and where often a network leadership position has been formally created, in which cases some element of network management is present. What is clear is that in many cases some form of central administration and management is necessary for a network to be sustainable and effective over time (Milward and Provan 2003).

Consensus building has been identified as another key role within networks, and one that is part of the role of all headteachers in a network. In his study, Hadfield (2007) found that in the early stages of network development, the aspect of consensus building that was central was the selection of an initial theme that could give cohesion to the work of the network as a whole. Later on, consensus building emerged around the choice of specific network activities.

Continuous change and fluidity of networks is another issue managers have to be able to deal with and this necessitates a flexible outlook, and again, strong communication skills. Communication in particular is important, as the more diffuse nature of a network can mean that not all teachers and other staff will be clear on network goals and purposes. Continuous and extensive communication to staff is therefore imperative. Likewise, parents may not be clear on the benefits of networking. In particular, where a highly effective school starts to collaborate with a school perceived as less effective there are often tensions with parents who fear that their head may lose focus on their school and pupils. Communication with parents is therefore important (Jones 2009). Overall, then, while school-to-school collaboration appears to have a lot of potential as a school improvement mechanism (Chapman and Muijs 2010), it also throws up a range of challenges to school leaders.

## Conclusion

Overall, the English system is characterised by strong accountability systems coupled with a great deal of school autonomy, and speedy changes to policies and initiatives, a combination that seems almost purpose-built to maximise the pressure on school leaders. This has led to a number of problems, such as difficulties in recruiting school leaders, but also to a number of creative solutions within the system.



These include expansion of the leadership teams and greater distribution of leadership in schools, the use of non-educators in leadership through roles such as School Business Managers, and working with networks of schools that can utilise shared resources and lead to innovative approaches to school improvement.

It is clear that as the system evolves towards even greater school autonomy through the expansion of the academies programme and the setting up of so-called 'Free Schools', that the role of the school leaders will remain central to the English system. A key challenge for policymakers will therefore remain the issue of providing appropriate support and training mechanisms for school leaders in dealing with the challenges of leading autonomous schools often grouped in networks or chains of schools. Creative solutions which make greater use of the capacities present in local authorities, schools themselves, private providers and higher education will be needed alongside the role of national institutions such as the National College, if this effort is to be successful. Collaborative arrangements at local level or within chains of schools are likely to be best able to tailor local solutions in a cost-effective manner. The national organisations could then usefully act as accreditors and inspection bodies, developing national competency frameworks and accrediting deliverers rather than delivering and developing programmes themselves, which has proven to be a rather costly mechanism.

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