

DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION  
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE

## IMPROVING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

## CASE STUDY REPORT ON ENGLAND

*This document is a Case Study report produced for England within the context of the EDPC activity on Improving School Leadership. It is one of a series of five case studies prepared after a review visit to selected countries with innovative practices in the field. This report was prepared by the following team of experts: Stephan Huber, Hunter Moorman and Beatriz Pont and is based on a study visit which took place in October 2006, as well as background documents prepared to support the visit.*

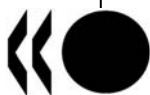
*The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of England, the OECD Secretariat or its member countries.*

*This report is part of "Improving School Leadership Volume 2: Case Studies on System Leadership", to be published in both English and French. It will be a companion volume to the Improving School Leadership comparative report EDU/EDPC(2008)1 "Improving School Leadership Volume 1: Policy and Practice".*

*A non-edited version of this document is published on the website dedicated to the Improving School Leadership Activity: [www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership](http://www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership)*

Beatriz Pont, tel: +33145241824; email: [beatriz.pont@oecd.org](mailto:beatriz.pont@oecd.org)  
Deborah Nusche, tel: +33145247801; email: [deborah.nusche@oecd.org](mailto:deborah.nusche@oecd.org)  
Education and Training Policy Division, Directorate for Education

JT03246309



# School Leadership for Systemic Improvement in England

---

## A case study report for the OECD activity Improving School Leadership

By:

Stephan Huber, Rapporteur

Hunter Moorman

Beatriz Pont

December 2007

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction: Some background .....	4
1.1. Why and how to explore systemic approaches to school leadership? .....	5
1.2. The OECD case study visit to England .....	6
2. The English context.....	7
2.1. How the English school system has evolved.....	7
2.2. Current school leadership policy in England.....	11
3. Defining and conceptualising system leadership in England .....	14
4. System leadership in practice: two particular school approaches .....	16
4.1. Description of the schools' systemic approaches.....	17
4.2. Common features of the school settings.....	23
4.3. System leadership in practice .....	28
4.4. Different layers of leadership: individual, distributed, and system .....	30
5. The English approach: food for thought.....	32
5.1. Strengths .....	32
5.2. Towards further progress.....	36
REFERENCES .....	39
ANNEX 1: ENGLAND STUDY VISIT PROGRAMME.....	42

### Boxes

Box 1: The OECD Improving School Leadership Activity .....	5
Box 2: Criteria for the selection of innovative case studies .....	6
Box 3: What is the core purpose of the head teacher in England? .....	12
Box 4: School improvement and system leadership initiatives in a particular school .....	18
Box 5: Effective school monitoring and support processes .....	25
Box 6: Benefits of collaboration .....	29

### Figures

Figure 1: Policy mix for schools which have attained school improvement.....	9
Figure 2: Leadership and management structure in school B .....	20

## **SCHOOL LEADERSHIP FOR SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT IN ENGLAND**

This report is part of a larger OECD study exploring school leadership policy issues. It aims to provide information and analysis on the English systemic approach to school leadership for school improvement. This refers to a practice in which schools work beyond their school borders for the benefit of the school system as a whole. England (UK) was selected by the OECD as an example of a systemic approach to school leadership because it has been promoting this vision through a number of policies and practices at national, regional and school level by stimulating school and school leadership collaboration so that “every school is a good school for every pupil”. In the past five years, the English have developed a number of different opportunities for schools and school leadership to collaborate for school improvement as a whole. Among the different approaches we can highlight the role of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in the development of school leaders who “think and act beyond the school”, such as the National Leaders of Education or school improvement partners, the role of an independent organisation which has promoted school networks called the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) and the possibility for schools to develop different degrees of collaboration or partnerships with other schools.

The report is based on a study visit to England, organised by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), now the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), at OECD’s request. The visit included meetings with stakeholders in London and visits to two schools. The report sets the English context, defines the systemic approach and provides examples of the two schools, which had improved their results considerably following a systemic approach to school leadership. It then provides some analysis of the practices and ends with recommendations.

### **1. Introduction: Some background**

School leaders in OECD countries are facing challenges and pressures with the rising expectations for schools related to rapid and constant technological innovation, massive migration and mobility, and increasing economic globalization. As countries struggle to transform their educational systems to prepare all young people with the knowledge and skills needed to function in rapidly changing societies, the roles and expectations for school leaders have changed radically. They are no longer expected to be merely good managers but leaders of schools as learning organisations. Effective school leadership is increasingly viewed as key to large-scale education reform and to improved educational outcomes. This is the reason why the OECD has developed an activity on this topic (Box 1).

### Box 1: The OECD Improving School Leadership Activity

The purpose of the OECD activity is to provide policy-makers with information and analysis to assist them in formulating and implementing school leadership policies leading to improved teaching and learning. The activity has the following objectives: (i) to synthesise research on issues related to improving leadership in schools; (ii) to identify innovative and successful policy initiatives and practices; (iii) to facilitate exchanges of lessons and policy options among countries; and (iv) to identify policy options for governments to consider.

**Methodology:** Parallel complementary approaches have been developed to achieve these objectives more effectively. Participating countries have provided a country background report following a common framework (analytical strand). Additionally, a small number of case studies in a) school leadership for systemic improvement and b) training and development of school leaders complement the work by providing examples of innovative practice (innovative case study strand). This approach permits the collection of information necessary to compare country developments while at the same time adopting a more innovative and forward looking approach to policy making.

**Participating countries:** Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Belgium (France), Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Korea, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom (England), United Kingdom (N. Ireland), United Kingdom (Scotland).

The **definition of school leaders** guiding the overall OECD activity suggests that effective school leadership may not reside exclusively in formal positions but instead be distributed across a range of individuals in the school. Principals, managers, academic leaders, department chairs, and teachers can contribute as leaders to the goal of learning-centred schooling. The precise distribution of these leadership contributions can vary and can depend on factors such as governance and management structure, levels of autonomy and accountability, school size and complexity, and levels of student performance. Principals can act as leaders of schools as learning organisations which in addition can benefit and contribute to positive learning environments and communities.

#### *1.1. Why and how to explore systemic approaches to school leadership?*

Within the broader OECD mandate to explore school leadership, there was a need to better understand the roles and responsibilities of school leadership focusing on improved schooling outcomes. One of the foci is on “system improvement,” where the school leaders take responsibility for contributing to the success of other schools as well as to their own school or on partnerships or collaborations of schools with other organisations in which the organization and management arrangements distribute leadership across a combination of individuals, organisations and groups.

A number of case studies have been chosen to explore this concept of school leadership for systemic improvement based on specific criteria (Box 2). The aim is to provide information and analysis for policy makers and researchers on models of school organization and management and leadership approaches that are aiming for systemic improvement. The case studies: 1) document details regarding the structure, content, processes and outcomes of the practice examined; 2) analyse the content in terms of specified constructs and 3) identify the policy conditions that are and/or should be in place to support the innovation at the systemic level. The different case studies will be compiled in a publication on school leadership policy and practice to be published in 2008.

**Box 2: Criteria for the selection of innovative case studies**

The final set of case studies reflects the diversity of education governance systems, financing arrangements, and political cultures of the countries represented in the activity;

The full range of relevant stakeholders is involved;

The practice has been in operation for a period of time sufficient to establish its operational viability;

The practice focuses on educational results and reflects a clear theory of action grounded in the current literature with promise of achieving those results;

The practice can demonstrate initial results that suggest that it is on track to achieve its intended outcomes;

Full access to the site and to relevant data is afforded.

The practice can demonstrate models of school organization and management where leadership roles and responsibilities are distributed in new ways;

The practice takes a systemic orientation that situates the leaders' behaviours and effects on student outcomes in the whole of the school or larger system or explores the interactions of the school with larger elements of the education or community systems.

**1.2. The OECD case study visit to England**

England (UK) was selected by the OECD as an example of systemic approach to school leadership because it has been pioneering a number of policies and practices at national, regional and school level by stimulating school and leadership collaboration with the aim of making “every school a great school”.

---

***In the past five years, the English have developed a number of different opportunities for schools and school leadership to collaborate for school improvement as a whole***

---

Data collection from the study visit to England included extensive documentation and individual and group interviews during the visit. Documentation for the analysis included material from the DfES (now DCSF), the National College for School Leadership, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, the Training and Development Agency for Schools, the Association of School and College Leaders and several other associations. The schools visited provided extensive documentation including evaluation reports, development plans, and school management documents.

The report is based on an expert-oriented team effort. The team comprised Professor Dr. Stephan Huber, Professor and Head of the Institute for Management and Economics of Education (IBB) of the Teacher Training University of Central Switzerland (PHZ), as team rapporteur, Mr. Hunter Moorman, OECD consultant and expert in leadership, education reform, and organisation development, and Beatriz Pont, from the OECD Education and Training Policy Division. Prof. David Hopkins, inaugural HSBC iNet Chair in International Leadership at the Leadership Centre of the Institute of Education, University of London, provided as an internal expert country specific expertise and knowledge to the team.

## **2. The English context**

### ***2.1. How the English school system has evolved***

In England, the responsibility for education policy lies principally with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, formerly DfES), though responsibility for implementation and monitoring is shared with the local authorities, formerly called local education authorities (LEA). Scotland and Northern Ireland have autonomy in education policy decision making and therefore differ from what is described here for England. The DCSF holds responsibility for the development, interpretation, implementation, and control of the national educational policy through a framework of Education Acts passed by Parliament. The Department also oversees the National Curriculum, monitoring both the content and the quality of teaching in schools. Through the Teacher Training Agency (now Teacher Development Agency), it has established a framework for the initial training of teachers, and most recently, it has begun to focus on the continuous professional development needs of teachers and head teachers. The Department's role also includes devising formulae for the allocation of budgets to local authorities, and, since 1988, also directly to individual schools. The trend has been towards increasing financial and managerial autonomy at the school level, which has contributed to a decrease in local authority influence.

Under the Education Reform Act 1988, the influence of the LEA was reduced. Originally, schools were given the chance to become grant-maintained (GM schools), and to leave their LEA in favour of direct funding from the government. This meant that they no longer fell under the jurisdiction of the regional education authority, but under the Department for Education directly, and, as a consequence, received their budget directly from London. The amount of the budget, which still depended on the number of pupils, was greater this way, as no deduction to support local educational services was applied. On the other hand, the services of the LEA were no longer available, except on a paid for basis. The schools could buy services on the open market, in which the local authority is one, but only one, of the providers. Schools opting out in this way affected all schools in the district, as the government did deduct the amounts paid to such schools from LEA budgets, making it more difficult for LEAs to maintain services for schools that remained within the local system. The replacement of grant maintained status with foundation schools effectively extended the arrangements to more schools, making the role of the LEA even more difficult to sustain.

The LEAs have recently been incorporated into their local authorities, bringing together local education and children's services. Local authorities remain responsible for the performance of publicly financed schools in their respective districts, and their tasks include ensuring that there are enough school places and school buildings suitable for the education of children living in the district. The regional differences which shape the school system in England can be accounted for by the freedom with which the local authorities can establish schools. However, their capacities to determine the distribution of funds to schools, to develop curriculum locally, to appoint teaching staff and to inspect schools have all been eroded over the past two decades, as the national policy has moved towards a partnership built around strong government and strong schools. There was a high degree of ambivalence in the 1990s as to the local authority role. But with the Education and Inspections Act 2006, their new role of commissioner, champion and challenger is clearly laid out. Although it is a much more limited role than previously it is secure at least into the medium term.

Within the individual school, the school governing body is in charge of the delegated budget, and of the management of the school. Members of this body include the school leader, elected representatives of the parents, representatives of the teaching and the non-teaching staff and of the local authority – the latter being representatives of the local political community. Since the 1988 Education Act, school governing bodies have had considerably increased powers, which extend to the selection of teaching staff, the establishment of salary and promotion policies and, significantly, the appointment and suspension of the

teachers and of the head teacher. Generally, responsibility for the day-to-day management of the school is delegated by the governing body to the head teacher, who consequently needs to have a close relationship with and the confidence of the school's governors.

For the last decades, the practice of school leaders has been shaped and influenced by changes in the education system, particularly by the reorganisation of selective schools into comprehensive schools and by the subsequent creation of many large schools. The head teachers of these schools were perhaps the first to feel the burden of school management alongside the professional leadership role, as the sheer size of these schools brought new problems of structure and control. For school leadership, this meant a much stronger management orientation within the job, more complex organisational structures and more complex patterns of decision-making and delegation. The pace of change has accelerated within the last decade as devolution and decentralisation have continued to be pursued by successive governments committed to local management. The range of reforms introduced during this period is unprecedented, and includes:

- a national curriculum;
- national, standardised tests for all pupils at the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16;
- nationwide publication of individual school results in school ranking lists in national newspapers; the so-called league tables;
- increased parental choice of (and so competition between) schools;
- significantly increased powers for the governing body of each school, by which the influence of the parents was to some extent institutionalised;
- annual reports on the school's progress by the head teacher to the governing body;
- annual reports from the members of the governing body, the school governors, to the parents, the community, the ministry or the school authorities and the general public;
- local management of schools (LMS), a formula under which school funding levels are determined by pupil numbers;
- a nationwide accepted assessment procedure for teachers and school leaders;
- regular school inspections (originally at four-year intervals) against national standards of the quality of teaching, learning and management in each school;
- the publication of the results of these inspections;
- the obligation to draw up a school development programme taking into account the recommendations from the inspectors' report;
- the possibility for schools to leave their local authority and to become directly funded (grant maintained) – to receive their budgets centrally from London.

Out of these reforms a number of new responsibilities and additional duties have emerged. The role of head teachers in England has become much more demanding and challenging, as a recent survey to more than 1 000 principals in England and Wales has highlighted (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007).

The accountability of schools towards the parents and to the community in general has also increased and become sharper. It is now one of the central areas of focus for school leaders. Preparing for one of the regular school inspections held by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), for example, means a lot of additional work and creates considerable strain for head teachers and staff alike. During inspection, a team of inspectors can seem to turn the school upside down for anything up to a week, and after their findings have been published, the head teacher is responsible for setting up a school programme within a given time and with a clear timescale, which takes remedial action for any deficiencies stated. In England, inspection reports are made public, that is they are available to parents and extracts from them are frequently published in local newspapers. (This procedure has been described as a name and shame policy.) This additional pressure created is meant to stimulate the school's improvement efforts.

Recent education legislation has transferred a great deal of authority to the school governing body. The head teacher has to cooperate with this body continuously in all major decision-making processes. Yet, in some schools, head teachers questioned the competences and even the availability of governors, as a recent survey revealed. One fifth (21%) of the participating head teachers described their governing body as quite or very ineffective which suggests that there is need for capacity building measures for some governing bodies in order to provide the strategic challenge required (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2007).

Due to the changes in the school system and the resulting market orientation (the number of pupils has a direct impact on the size of the budget allocated to the school), there has been intense competition among schools for the last two decades. A good reputation for the individual school is an important aim, to attract gifted and high-achieving pupils, or at least their parents are encouraged to opt for the school under local selection procedures. The ranking by exam results has, therefore, become extremely important to establish and protect. Consequently, schools and their school leaders are very much interested in the performance and image of the school, on which they are dependent for their income.

Many educationalists claim that these ranking lists have had an unfortunate influence on public perceptions. Certainly, the consequences for the individual school, as well as for the individual pupil, are often negative, and it is clear that the construction of the tables favours schools that are already advantaged. Less successful schools have to fight against the following vicious circle: bad reputation, worsening school atmosphere, decreasing identification of the pupils with their school, decreasing number of pupils, reduction of resources, decreasing job satisfaction and motivation among staff, lack of applications of well-qualified teachers for this school, worse quality of lessons, decreasing pupil achievement, worse results in the league tables. Different studies show that most head teachers disapproved of the great competitive pressure open enrolment and league tables had produced, and considered the strong market orientation as educationally misconceived, even harmful.

In England, even in the largest schools, traditionally the head teacher had retained some teaching commitment. Head teachers wanted to take a part in what they saw as the core activity of the school – teaching, for a variety of reasons: for “they can give some support where needed, they know about what is expected, know what the pressures are and gain understanding, and they get “street credibility” (Huber, 1997, p. 30). Sadly, finding time for such activities had become more difficult as many came to see administrative tasks as the new priority.

It is within this framework that the central government recently established a five year strategy focused on improving standards for all, closing the achievement gap, and promoting choice and opportunity among a diverse student body by preventing dropouts and preparing all students for a successful transition to work or further education. An elaborate body of policy and support mechanisms have been put in place to advance these policies. These include setting national standards, national testing, school inspection, and accountability measures and new programmes like the New Relationship with Schools, Every Child Matters, extended schools and children's centres.

At least two assumptions are at work behind these policies: (1) Given the variability among school conditions and quality, it is necessary to find ways to prompt schools to take responsibility for improving against new accountability requirements, and, (2) schools may not be able to meet their responsibilities unless they work with partners, *e.g.* with another school, a local college, or an employer institution.

---

***Policy and support mechanisms in England include setting national standards, national testing, school inspection, and accountability measures and new programmes like the New Relationship with Schools, Every Child Matters, extended schools and children's centres.***

---

Thus inspection responsibilities have been somewhat shifted to the schools themselves, and school improvement partners (SIPs) have been introduced to help school leaders deal with new mandates and accountability pressures. Support for partnering and school improvement has been provided, among other means, through the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. By 2008, each comprehensive school is to become a specialist school or an Academy, concentrating on particular academic areas while offering the full national curriculum. Schools facing special challenges or in need of improvement are particularly encouraged to become Academies, independent of their local authority but publicly funded and run. Schools may also seek Trust status to operate with considerable independence as government maintained schools in partnership with outside organisations providing unique expertise and perhaps additional funding.

The central government has established the National Strategies Programme to provide schools with special support to help them raise standards through a focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning and on improving school management and leadership (DCSF, 2007a).

---

***One of the assumptions behind current education policy in England is that schools may not be able to meet their responsibilities unless they work with partners, e.g. with another school, a local college, or an employer institution***

---

Hopkins (2006) has provided a theoretical framework for the different policy tools available for school reform:

“England has since 1997 taken the opportunity to achieve high standards across an entire system of 24 000 schools and over 7 million school students. In order to move from the evidently underperforming system of the mid-1990s the government put in place a policy approach best described as “high challenge, high support”. The way in which these principles of “high challenge, high support” are turned into practical policies to drive school improvement is summarised in the following diagram (Barber, 2001:4).” (Hopkins, 2006, p. 3f)

**Figure 1: Policy mix for schools which have attained school improvement**

The important point is that the policy mix was complementary and mutually supportive (see Barber, 2001, p. 4). The policies for each segment (see below) are linked:

- ambitious standards: high standards set out in the national curriculum, national tests at age 7, 11, 14, 16;
- devolved responsibility: school as unit of accountability, devolution of resources and employment powers to schools;
- good data/clear targets: individual pupil level data collected nationally, statutory target-setting at district and school level;
- access to best practice and quality professional development: universal professional development in national priorities (literacy, numeracy, ICT), leadership development as an entitlement;
- accountability: national inspection system for schools and local authorities, publication annually of school/district level performance data and targets;
- intervention in inverse proportion to success: school improvement grant to assist implementation of post-inspection action plan, monitoring of performance by local authority (district), less frequent inspection visits for successful schools.

## ***2.2. Current school leadership policy in England***

In England, school leadership has been a key policy focus for the last decade. At a national level, leadership policy is aiming to ensure that there is the right number of school leaders with the appropriate skills to be effective leaders. In particular, with apparent disparities in leadership across schools in the country, there are different efforts to try to help increase performance of low performing schools by a)

promoting the systemic view of school leadership and b) providing schools with tools for improving leadership. The creation of standards for school leadership, the National Standards for Headship, in 1997 and the establishment of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2000 fall within this remit.

The National Standards for Headship are constantly revised following widespread consultation within the profession but also incorporation of current government thinking and guidance. This catalogue of requirements for the qualification and for assessing candidates consists of two sections: a short section on the core purpose of headship (Box 3) and a more detailed section on the key areas representing the role of head teachers.

**Box 3: What is the core purpose of the head teacher in England?**

For the DfES (now DCSF), the "Core purpose of the head teacher" is "to provide professional leadership and management for a school" as this "will promote a secure foundation from which to achieve high standards in all areas of the school's work" (DfES, 2004, p. 4; Ref: 0083/2004).

The standards claim:

"To gain this success a headteacher must establish high quality education by effectively managing teaching and learning and using personalised learning to realise the potential of all pupils. Head teachers must establish a culture that promotes excellence, equality and high expectations of all pupils."

"The head teacher is the leading professional in the school. Accountable to the governing body, the head teacher provides vision, leadership and direction for the school and ensures that it is managed and organised to meet its aims and targets."

"The head teacher, working with others, is responsible for evaluating the school's performance to identify the priorities for continuous improvement and raising standards; ensuring equality of opportunity for all; developing policies and practices; ensuring that resources are efficiently and effectively used to achieve the school's aims and objectives and for the day-to-day management, organisation and administration of the school. The head teacher, working with and through others, secures the commitment of the wider community to the school by developing and maintaining effective partnerships with, for example, schools, other services and agencies for children, the local authority, higher education institutions and employers. Through such partnerships and other activities, Head teachers play a key role in contributing to the development of the education system as a whole and collaborate with others to raise standards locally."

"Drawing on the support provided by members of the school community, the head teacher is responsible for creating a productive learning environment which is engaging and fulfilling for all pupils."

Source: DfES, 2004, p. 4; Ref: 0083/2004

The NCSL has the responsibility for coordinating and further developing head teacher training and development programmes. Hence, the college's purpose was to create, for the first time in the UK, a coordinated and structured approach to leadership progression.

In 2001 the NCSL produced its Leadership Development Framework. It set out the five 'key stages' around which school leader development activities should be targeted in the following years. These are:

- emergent leadership: when a teacher is beginning to take on management and leadership responsibilities and perhaps forms an aspiration to become a head teacher;
- established leadership: comprising heads of faculty, assistant deputy heads who are experienced leaders but who do not intend to pursue headship;

- entry to headship: including a teacher's preparation for and induction into the senior post in a school;
- advanced leadership: the stage at which school leaders mature in their role, look to widen their experience, to refresh themselves and to up-date their skills;
- consultant leadership: when an able and experienced leader is ready to take on training, mentoring, inspection or other responsibilities.

Under the college umbrella, various training and development schemes have been implemented across the country, *e.g.* the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), the Leadership and Management Programme for New Headteachers (HEADLAMP), Leadership Programme for Serving Heads (LPSH), New Visions, and Leading from the Middle. The NCSL now runs around 25 individual leadership development programmes, various strategic initiatives, some research projects and online learning possibilities. Hence, England is taking significant steps towards a comprehensive provision of school leader development.

Following these measures, a number of positive developments can be observed, according to the DCSF:

- As of April 2004, all new candidates for headship must have gained or be working towards the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). Since 2001, over 16500 candidates have passed NPQH.
- The recent report from the Public Accounts Committee on 'Poorly Performing Schools' acknowledges that the NPQH and other leadership programmes have contributed to the increased professionalism of school leaders.
- Over 90% of heads enjoy and feel confident in their role (MORI, 2005).
- Over 55% of deputy head teachers and over 85% of NPQH candidates want to become a head teacher at some stage in the future (again citing MORI, 2005).

Yet, at the same time, the DCSF admits that some particular difficulties remain:

- There is a need to improve how the right people for headship can be identified, trained and encouraged, because a number of deputies and middle leaders are not interested in promotion to head teacher and some candidates see the NPQH as a stepping stone to less senior roles.
- Although head teacher vacancy rates in maintained schools in England have remained low and fairly stable (0.8% in 2005 and 2006), some schools in some areas are facing great difficulties in recruiting, *e.g.* small primary schools, rural schools and faith schools.
- The number of head teachers reaching retirement age each year is set to increase. In 2005, an estimated 60% of head teachers in the maintained sector were aged 50 and over, compared to 40% in 1997.
- The school landscape continues to evolve and we have to be sure that training and development for today and tomorrow will equip school leaders with the skills required to improve standards, ensure equality of opportunity and narrow attainment gaps through initiatives such as the Every Child Matters agenda and the 14-to-19 reforms.

- While workforce reform is having a positive impact overall on the teaching profession, it is a concern that the latest Office of Manpower Economics (OME) survey of the teaching workforce (October 2006) indicates that the average number of hours worked per week by secondary heads has risen from 60.8 hours in 2000 to 65.1 hours in 2006, and for primary heads there was a downward trend from 58.9 hours in 2000 to 52.9 hours in 2005, but then a slight increase to 53.5 hours in 2006.
- Reasons often cited as a disincentive to becoming a head are work-life balance, stress, initiative overload, and less contact time with pupils.

For the DCSF, to strengthen school leadership ranks high among the tools for improving schools and the education system. Within the 5 year strategy focused on raising standards for all, closing the attainment gap and improving 16 and over staying on rates, the Department sees the need to strengthen school leadership to make 'every school a great school' through the leadership development actions spelled out in the schools white paper "Higher Standards, Better Schools for All". These include: effective succession planning; a new and better mix of school leaders; more tailored provision of leadership development programmes; leaders for challenging schools; and national leaders of education.

However, national policy reach is more strategic than action oriented, given the role of local authorities. The 150 local authorities in charge of local administration of state education services show a wide range of performance.

With this view in mind, the policy reforms that are relevant for effective leadership include:

- the introduction of clear standards for school leaders, teachers, pupil achievement and schools in general;
- Ofsted reports and publication of school results;
- the promotion of schools' self evaluations;
- the provision of subsidies, strategies and programmes that schools can access to improve their leadership.

DCSF's reform initiatives and schemes launched during the last couple of years are unusually extensive compared to other countries worldwide. The quantity of individual initiatives, however, does not necessarily say much about their implementation and the effect they have to the quality of schooling for the benefit of the pupils. Obviously in a system with local management of schools, it depends a lot on school leaders' knowledge of these opportunities and their ability to tap this variety of public subsidies and make them work to their benefit. While some school leaders make full use of the initiatives, others see their number and complication as overwhelming and distracting from schools' core mission.

### **3. Defining and conceptualising system leadership in England**

According to David Hopkins, a proponent of the concept of system leadership in England, system leaders are those head teachers who are willing to shoulder system leadership roles: who care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own. If the goal is "every school a great school" then policy and practice has to focus on system improvement. This means that a school head has to be almost as concerned about the success of other schools as about his or her own school. Sustained improvement of schools is not possible unless the whole system is moving forward.

In England, there appears to be an emerging cadre of head teachers who are following this approach and beginning to transform the nature of leadership and educational improvement.

Recent research on system leadership has begun to map the system leadership landscape (see Hopkins and Higham, 2007) and identified significant amount of system leadership activity in England, far more than previously expected.

According to Hopkins (2006), some of the key aspects of system leadership are:

- the moral purpose of system leadership;
- system leadership roles;
- system leadership as adaptive work;
- the domains of system leadership.

At present, in England, there are many possibilities for schools and principals to work with others, at individual and institutional level. Many of these strategies have been developed in recent years in the search for system-wide school improvement, and the National College for School Leadership has played an important role in this area. These roles can be divided into formal roles which have developed through nationally supported programmes; and more informal roles that are locally developed and are far more fluid, ad-hoc and organic. Flexibility is often an important factor in the development of these system leadership roles.

Among the different system leaders' roles are:

- Educational partnerships: Developing and leading a successful educational improvement partnership between several schools, often focused on a set of specific themes that have outcomes reaching beyond the capacity of any one institution. These include partnerships on curriculum design and specialisms; 14-to-19 consortia; behaviour and hard to place students. While many such partnerships are in what is commonly referred to as “soft” organisational collaboratives, some have moved to 'harder' more formalised arrangements in the form of (con)federations (to develop stronger mechanisms for joint governance and accountability) or education improvement partnerships (to formalise the devolution of certain defined delivery responsibilities and resources from their local authority).
- Choosing to lead and improve a school in extremely challenging circumstances and change local contexts by building a culture of success and then sustaining once low achieving schools as high valued added institutions.
- Partnering another school facing difficulties and improving it, either as an executive head of a federation or as the leader of a more informal improvement arrangement. Earlier research on executive heads for the NCSL led to the College's advice on complex schools to the Secretary of State: “there is a growing body of well-documented evidence from around the country that, where a school is in serious trouble, the use of an executive head teacher / partner head teacher and a paired arrangement with that head's successful school can be a particularly effective solution, and is being increasingly widely applied” (see NCSL 2005, p.3).
- Acting as a community leader to broker and shape partnerships and/or networks of wider relationships across local communities to support children's welfare and potential, often through

multi agency work. Such system leadership is rooted firmly in the national Every Child Matters (ECM) and children agendas.

- Working as a change agent or expert leader within the system, identifying best classroom practice and transferring it to support improvement in other schools. This is the widest category and includes:
  - heads working as mentor leaders within networks of schools, combining an aspiration and motivation for other schools to improve with the practical knowledge and guidance for them to do so;
  - heads who are active and effective leaders within more centrally organised system leadership programmes, for instance within the Consultant Leader Programme, School Improvement Partners (SIP) and National Leaders of Education (NLE), trained through the NCSL;
  - heads who with their staff purposely develop exemplary curricula and teaching programmes either for particular groups of students or to develop specific learning outcomes in a form that is transferable to other schools and settings.

The formal and informal roles hold a very significant potential to effect systemic educational improvement. If a sufficient cadre of system leaders were developed and deployed, there would be:

- a wider resource for school improvement: making the most of leaders to transfer best practice and reduce the risk of innovation and change focused on attainment and welfare;
- an authentic response to failing schools (often those least able to attract suitable leaders);
- a means to resolve the emerging challenge of, on the one hand, falling student rolls and hence increasingly non-viable schools and, on the other hand, pressures to sustain educational provision in all localities;
- a sustainable and internal strategy for retaining and developing head teachers as a response to the current and projected shortage (a survey by the General Teaching Council in 2006 warned that 40% of head teacher posts would be filled with difficulty in the coming years).

Ultimately, the test of system leadership is whether it is having an impact where it matters. There is now growing evidence in the English secondary school system that this approach to system leadership is having a positive impact, with a number of schools having improved their examination results under new school leaders (see for example Hopkins and Higham, 2007).

#### **4. System leadership in practice: two particular school approaches**

In the course of the OECD study visit, we visited two particularly inspiring schools demonstrating systemic approaches to school leadership. School leadership is distributed throughout the school and there are different forms of collaboration with other schools and other partners. Moreover, both schools had achieved improved outcomes. This case study provides the basis for a model of how collaboration, federation and system leadership might improve schools.

#### **4.1. Description of the schools' systemic approaches**

##### *A federation of two schools (school setting A)*

School A1 in this recently formed federation had overcome challenging circumstances and transformed itself into a high value-added school, now supporting other schools in similar transformations. It has recently federated with school A2, a school “causing concern” following Ofsted inspection. Before federating with school A1, it was in remedial status and is now in serious weaknesses, somewhat improved but still not achieving expected results. During this four year period there was no progress in the quality of learning, and progress in raising pupils’ aspirations and pupil achievement was disappointingly slow. Consequently, school A2 willingly enlisted school A1's support in its development and transformation into a federation.

School A1 has worked to raise the academic achievement of all pupils by developing a successful school leadership and management approach. This includes leadership distribution across the school, the alignment of standards and a particular model of monitoring and support for student and teacher performance (analysed in the following section). Since 2001, school A1 has supported a number of schools facing challenging circumstances. School A1 is the lead regional school and the local delivery group school for the national school-centred initial teacher training (SCITT).

##### Their profile

*School A1.* School A1 is an 11-to-18 mixed comprehensive school with Specialist Technology College status, which includes a sixth form college and also provides traveller education. There are over 1 800 pupils (some 200 in sixth form), with 7% of minority ethnic backgrounds, and 54 pupils have English as an additional language. School A1 serves a low socio-economic student body with high levels of underperformance. The school area has been designated for social intervention through programmes such as Excellence Cluster, Interlok, Low Attainers Pilot or BIP (listed below). The performance of pupils in the primary sector has required literacy, numeracy and behaviour management strategies to ensure access to learning. The presence of a sixth form on site has allowed students and parents to raise their aspirations for 11-to-18 education and given students opportunities to follow pathways into post-16 and higher education.

*School A1* has been extremely active in reform, combining pedagogical and managerial reforms to respond to its particular challenges. It has adopted different learning models and is developing personalised learning. A monitoring and support system has been quite successful, through a particular use of data that allows for monitoring and interventions to support pupils whose behaviour is affecting their achievement. It has developed an ICT information system that enables the school to promote electronic home/school links. The school is supported by an education welfare officer, among other non-teaching staff.

In addition, school A1 has developed into an “extended school” with integrated services including educational psychologist, nurses, mental health care personnel, specialist teachers, 40 learning and behaviour support assistants, school-based attendance officers, and more. The school now manages the region's local services delivery group, providing extended school services to 23 other schools.

It has made recruitment and retention of high quality staff a priority by:

- creating a teacher training centre to counter the lack of qualified teachers in the area;
- providing professional development during the week to all staff;

- assessing a number of classroom support assistants for the higher level teaching assistant (HLTA) status;
- capacity building at the senior level by participating in the DCSF Trainee Head/ Deputy Programme.

Looking to benefit from different public support and for improvement, the school has engaged with and launched a number of initiatives that focus on collaboration with other schools and with the school system as a whole (Box 4).

**Box 4: School improvement and system leadership initiatives in a particular school**

- Specialist Technology College status: schools with or aspiring to specialist status can receive a wide range of support and partnership links through the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.
- Leading Edge School: the school is recognised for innovative practice and part of the national and regional forum for innovative and 'next' practice support for other schools.
- Enterprise Pathfinder School: there is a strong vocational curriculum; the school pilots for new accreditation and assessment systems; and there are links to and involvement with the local business community.
- Leadership Incentive Grant (LIG) school: the school seeks to stimulate collaborative working between strong and underperforming schools.
- Behaviour Improvement Partnership (BIP) lead school: the school is developing new practice to raise attainment.
- Excellence Cluster (now EiC) lead school: the school works with community schools for pupils age 5-19 to raise aspirations and performance across the region.
- Local Delivery Group (LDG) management: the school promotes partnerships with public services and the voluntary sector to support children and families in need.
- Team around the Child (TAC): the school models good practice from the LDG for the county.
- Low Attainers' Pilot (LAP – school A2 only): targeted support is provided for English and mathematics in key stage 3 to improve attainment and promote active learning.
- School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT): the school has gained accreditation as a training centre to counter the lack of qualified teachers in the area.

This school's results have turned around; key stage 4 (age 14-to-16) results have moved from the lowest quartile in 1988 to the upper quartile in 2006. It is now a 'high value-adding school', ranking in the top 5% in GCSE results among schools serving similar areas. The results are at key stage 4 (examinations at the end of compulsory schooling, usually taken at age 16): 48% of students achieved five 'good' GCSEs (A\*-C) in 2006 (the national average was 50%), 5+A\*-G 88%, 1+A\*-G 98%. This school has a strong, well organised and supportive governing body, which has helped develop its role with school A2 and its ambitions to deliver broader local services.

*School A2.* School A2 is an 11-to-16 comprehensive school with leisure facilities on site. There are 826 students, 4% of whom belong to minority ethnic groups, and 16 students with English as an additional language. Pupils are drawn largely from two of the wards with the highest indices of deprivation for the region and many pupils and their families have English as an additional language (EAL), special educational needs (SEN) or social services support. The students show the full range of ability but there is a higher proportion of underachievement and SEN than in other schools within the town. Pupil aspirations are low, as are outcomes in recent years.

---

***School A1 is a high value-added school; school A2, which is officially described as having serious weaknesses, willingly joined a federation with school A1***

---

Ofsted inspections had placed the school in 'special measures' and then 'serious weaknesses' in recent years because of underperformance, inadequate teaching and learning, and a curriculum not suited to learners' needs. Its reputation had diminished, and with that its recruitment. As a result the school suffered from overstaffing and budget deficits, staff absence and malpractice, and poor student behaviour and attendance.

---

***Schools A1 and A2 are now managed through one governing body, an executive with a principal responsible for both schools, and an associate principal on the site of school A2***

---

#### The federation

Schools A1 and A2 federated and are now managed through one governing body, an executive with a principal responsible for both schools, and an associate principal on the site of school A2 to lead the transformation agenda. The management team, including a trainee head teacher and a former trainee head teacher and vice principals, has joint site responsibilities.

The management and pedagogical model developed in school A1 has been adapted for school A2. In addition, to improve understanding and increase skills, continuing professional development for middle leaders was given a priority. As well as targeted professional development in-house, a large group of staff were identified to undergo training in effective classroom observation. Performance management is more rigorous and sets measurable targets against accountability for the future. Middle leaders' motivation, initiative and commitment have all improved.

The single governing body has focused on monitoring teaching and learning by meeting regularly with designated heads of department and visiting department activities. Governor training ensures they are aware of new initiatives and school development priorities.

#### Some results

- With federated status, progress at school A2 has been strikingly good in this short time. Student achievement has improved, behaviour is better, and the teaching force has been stabilised. In just one year, academic results have increased. At key stage 4, the percentage of pupils at 5+A\*-C is 28% in 2006, up from 16% in 2005; while 5+A\*-G is up to 86% in 2006 from 69% in 2005, and 1+A\*-G 94%.
- The individual reviews for senior managers and restructuring of departments following the curriculum review and staff departures have generated a more effective team and have been cost effective, according to the Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) review.

- Cross-site management has provided expertise and vision at a time of significant change for the school.

#### *Developing system leadership in one school (school setting B)*

Another school the OECD team visited presented showed how school leadership focuses on school improvement by strengthening internal and external leadership, reaching out into the wider community and focusing on system wide school improvement.

#### The school profile

School B is one of the largest schools in the county, with over 2 000 students, 118 teaching staff and 82 support staff. It is an 11-to-18 co-educational mixed comprehensive school. It was awarded specialist technology college status in September 2002, which means that it offers the whole National Curriculum but with an added focus on the technological, scientific, mathematics and ICT curriculum. It has undertaken an extensive and far-reaching refurbishment programme which benefits almost all curriculum areas, and includes a new sixth form block. This has allowed the sixth form numbers to grow to 450.

Around 95% of students are of white British background. Several Asian minority ethnic groups account for the remaining 5%. Students' attainment on entry to the school is slightly higher than the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, or with statements of special educational need is below average.

#### Systemic programmes and initiatives

The school has developed a particular leadership management model based on a six week cycle of evaluation which allows for individual monitoring and support of all students and teachers. Leadership is distributed across a wide range of staff. Specific teams cater to the different needs: supporting, mentoring and guidance for students and teachers; specialised support in information technologies; and support on reforming the workforce (*e.g.*, modifying individuals' and teams' responsibilities).

---

***School B school uses a six week cycle of evaluation which allows for individual monitoring and support of all students and teachers***

---

The school takes part in a number of initiatives:

- Training School: it provides initial teacher training, courses for new entrants into the teaching profession, as well as middle leaders and established leaders. This role also allows the college to recruit talented new teachers as they enter the profession.
- Raising Attainment and Transforming Learning (RATL): it is a support school for this Specialist Schools and Academies Trust project, which involves it in working with other schools and colleges to share good practice. It offers a number of access days each year where colleagues from other schools can visit to see, discuss and compare different approaches to raising pupils' achievement.
- National Leader in Education Support School (NLE): it is a support school designed to allow leading schools and colleges to work with other schools identified by Ofsted inspections as requiring special measures. As a result of these changes many of its aspiring leaders now find themselves with significant development opportunities.

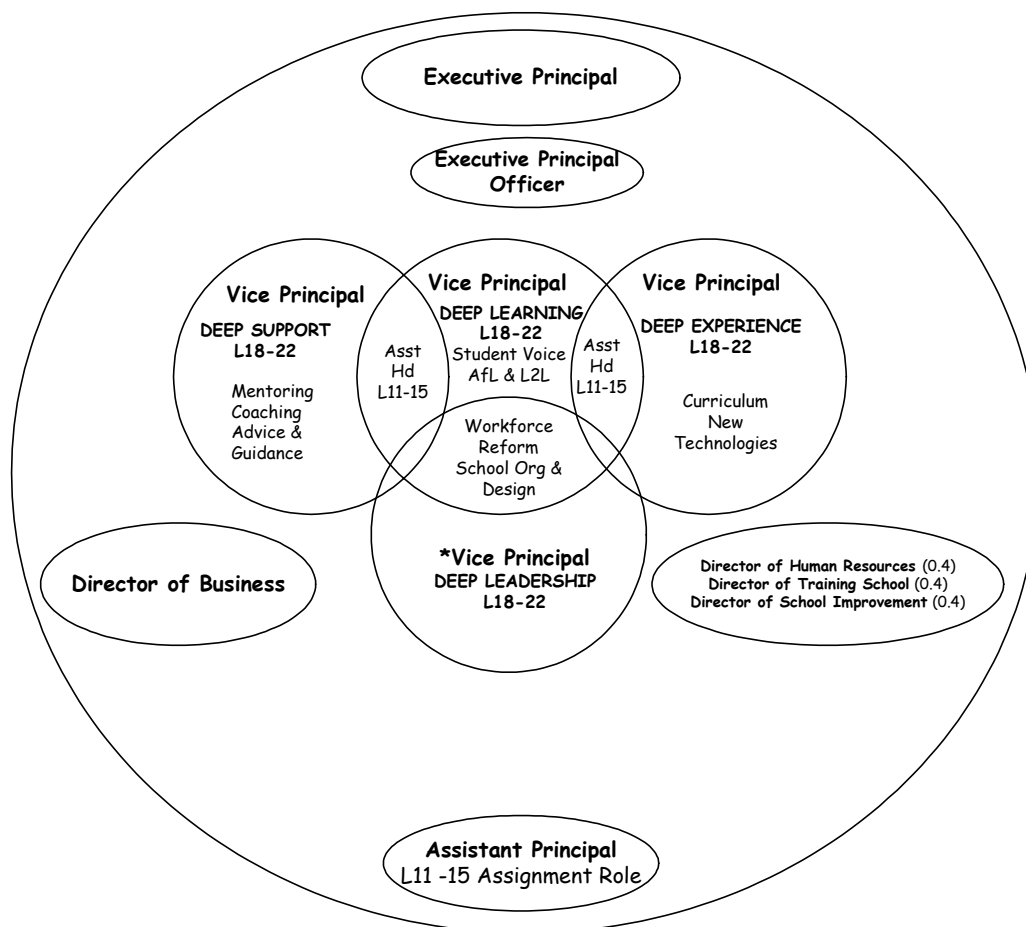
### Leadership and management structure

The school's leadership team has recently been restructured to take into account that it is no longer a single entity which could be managed by a head teacher and staff working solely within the confines of the buildings. The new structure creates an executive principal who is supported by vice principals and assistant principals, which enables the school to pursue its external agenda and allows more scope for career opportunities for a wider range of staff.

The vice principals are responsible for ensuring that the school's standards are maintained and improved. They will also develop international links and take over NLE Support School/RATL roles.

Staff from various levels in the school are involved in deepening and improving its approach to learning, experience, support and leadership (Figure 2). It is considered crucial that some staff members take part in more than one of these activities, to encourage complementarity (the exchange of ideas and themes between areas).

Figure 2: Leadership and management structure in school B



\*Plan for succession  
 Involved in external work of Principal  
 Represent college at official events, meetings, Trust Status etc  
 They will experience the pressures of the role in a safe environment

The terms Principal and Vice Principal are intended to reflect the global understanding of the role and to signal a change to parents, staff and students in terms of the direction and depth to which we set our new context and future development

Some results

Statistics demonstrate the school's success in achieving national standards. The Ofsted inspection of November 2006 rated the school Grade 1, outstanding in all areas: 90% of the pupils met GCSE standards in 2006, in the top 5% nationally for value added; 60% achieved 5 A\* -C (including English and Maths), showing a high value added; A-level (post 16) results also merited a ranking of outstanding.

- Since September 2003, the school has been a DCSF Training School. This has enabled staff to access high quality training and develop their expertise.
- The school is popular with parents, and is over-subscribed.
- Achieving specialist technology status in 2002 helped to improve facilities and raise standards across the curriculum. Investment in information and communications technology (ICT), and in

particular the creation of a “learning zone”, where students can work independently during lessons and after school, has supported students’ learning very well. These developments, increasing students’ independence and collaborative skills, allied to high standards of literacy and numeracy combine to prepare students for life after school.

---

*The OECD review team found that these two school settings illustrate high performance learning communities that are at the heart of system leadership*

---

#### **4.2. Common features of the school settings**

These two school settings provide examples of how school leaders and their school communities are responding to the challenges identified in England. The OECD review team found that they illustrate high performance learning communities that are at the heart of system leadership. We provide an overview of these features below because we think that the internal school leadership processes go hand in hand with the role that system leaders play.

##### *Belief in student capacity to learn*

Effective leadership and school performance rest on a powerful vision of teaching and learning. Both schools pursue clear visions to ensure that every student achieves to the highest level possible.

Inclusion is as important as achievement. The schools believe that their remit must include all children. School A1 is charged with educating children from lower socio-economic background and a dispirited urban environment. The head of school told us: “What drives us is that we are absolutely committed to inclusion.” While he acknowledged that it can have a negative effect on test scores, he will not compromise on this commitment. Both schools not only extend themselves to serve their own students, but also go to great lengths to include children with out-of-school commitments, such as Roma or traveller students who are in and out of town on an irregular basis. Heads and teachers told us that students come first, and that they will do all in their power to guarantee their students’ success.

Administrators, teachers, and staff seem to be confident of their ability to deliver. They get the best personnel through hires or internal development. One head noted that every leader in his school is first and foremost a highly qualified teacher: “It’s the connoisseurship in the classroom that has led to the transformation.” They have put systems in place to focus and manage their efforts: “Praising Stars” and the “Management Matrix” described below are two of these.

Student achievement is not just about cognitive gains. Both schools have comprehensive programmes giving students opportunity for self-expression and development in a wide variety of ways. Sports, drama, community service, and other extra-curricular activities appear to have the same emphasis on commitment and excellence as academic studies. When asked if the focus on learning reduced time for other dimensions of student growth, teachers responded that they did not concentrate solely on cognitive development but on the whole student. “Not to focus on the whole student is to open the door to decline in academic achievement,” is the way one department head put it.

---

*The school leadership teams established targets, measured student and teacher performance, adjusted curriculum and instruction, reallocated teaching resources, provided remediation and support and set new targets*

---

*Alignment of standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment*

National performance standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are aligned in each school's programme. With the national standards in view, we were explained how schools set realistic but challenging performance targets for each student, at each level, in each subject. To do this, schools have considerable flexibility in adapting curriculum to align it with standards in ways most suitable for their students.

To ensure correct alignment, the leadership teams follow rigorous management systems. For the longer term, the school year or beyond, layered leadership and management teams with perspectives crossing year groups, subject areas, and ability groups orchestrate the curriculum, instruction, and testing programme to achieve performance goals. Within the course of the year, these same teams closely monitor student and teacher performance. In a succession of six-week evaluation cycles running through the year, the school leadership teams established targets, measured student and teacher performance, adjusted curriculum and instruction, reallocated teaching resources, provided remediation and support and set new targets. Where schools are joined in partnerships or federations the same management processes are applied.

Members of the school communities used terms like 'autonomous' and 'self-managed' to describe themselves. They had internalised the school performance and accountability culture, its values and exemplary practices. Each of them was able to take initiative, to act on their own to maintain the alignment between performance goals and the school programme intended to produce them. Thus adjustments and corrections in the linkages across standards, curriculum, instruction, and assessment were made daily in countless small, independent decisions that needed no outside direction.

*Reliable monitoring and support for student and teacher performance*

Student learning and development are the core purposes of these schools, and carefully developed management processes concentrate the schools' resources to this end.

School B is described as "driven by data". Through the school's data-based monitoring system, the head can track and pay attention to each one of the 2000-plus students in his school. Student (and teacher) progress is monitored regularly. Every six weeks modifications are made in each student's curriculum and instruction. Students showing exceptional progress are helped to develop further; students in need of help are given extra work and instruction in areas of need. Teachers too receive support and professional development where data show they need it (Box 5).

### **Box 5: Effective school monitoring and support processes**

Both schools visited during the OECD review had very effective processes for monitoring and support of student and school performance using an IT package that allowed it to monitor individual student, classroom, teacher or grade performance. Both schools have teams that follow performance and teams that support the results with appropriate interventions either with students or teachers.

In school B, the data management and monitoring system is called 'Praising Stars'. For each student, specific performance goals are identified for each six-week period, and weekly performance data monitor progress and identify areas of success and need for improvement. A team of non-teaching "learning managers" spend 60% of their time monitoring students and managing instruction. Their findings are discussed every week in meetings of the senior leadership team, which take decisions on adapting curriculum and instruction and developing strategies for learning for the individual student and for student groups and classes. The school has planned flexibility into the curriculum and teacher assignments so special lessons and additional teacher support can be shifted to help students who are not keeping up. Teacher effectiveness is also assessed. Special help is directed at the individual teacher or department that falls below expected results, and more formal professional development can be arranged.

With such a structure in place, the school head told us that his team is capable of massive intervention, observing every classroom teacher using the analysis to push for excellence in every category that is measured.

A similar tool for managing learning and teaching at school setting A is the "Management Matrix". The matrix is an elaborate but accessible depiction of a set of relationships across staff roles and responsibilities, functions (curriculum, teacher training, health, and finance, etc.), and strands covering key ways of managing teaching and learning. The entire school operates according to a comprehensive, clearly spelled out understanding of goals and objectives, responsibilities, and core functions. The matrix is the foundation for an ongoing, systematic dialogue about performance data, analysis, and actions for improvement. It is the framework for a pervasive culture of achievement, inclusion, and distributed leadership enacted in every part of the school.

Clearly defined roles are assigned to the different staff to monitor student learning and development, assess teacher effectiveness, allocate curriculum and instruction where it is most needed for each student, and provide or procure teacher professional development. Each member of the leadership team has responsibility to link with a particular group of teachers and year group, and the entire team works together on areas of special urgency.

- School B's leadership team has three priorities: to direct student performance, to remediate underperforming teachers, and to conduct two day a week interventions with subject-area departments. The head of school reviews progress with the senior leadership team for one half-hour one day a week and for three hours each Thursday. The head and his team also each week do a 'walk around' to observe classroom practice, identifying teachers for praise or help and gauging the impact of instruction on student learning. Individual staff meetings are scheduled as needed.
- At the heart of the support structure are the seven learning managers, who report to the leadership team. Learning managers spend 37 hours a week working in the classrooms with teachers and students identified from the Praising Stars data in the most recent six-week cycle. After analysis of the performance data, they prepare a focused sequence of interventions for those students or teaching groups who are not reaching target grades. A "learning to learn" programme provides remediation for students underachieving in core subjects, and the 'behaviour for learning' programme helps students whose behaviour is causing concern and interfering with their learning.

- Middle leaders are department heads. While they used to play a rather managerial role, now they are leaders responsible for maintaining and raising standards. They monitor pupil performance data, observe teachers (and are themselves observed), give teachers feedback and support, and serve as coaches and mentors.
- Five teachers are given extra pay and reduced teaching loads to serve as assistant head teachers serving on the team. They are supported by four associate assistant heads, usually department heads who rotate on one- or two-year assignments.

These processes contribute to align quality teaching standards, evaluative criteria, feedback, and professional development. This means a shared understanding of what constitutes good teaching and outcomes.

*Flexible curriculum, classroom instruction, and personalised learning*

These schools offer flexible, targeted curriculum and instruction. Both the content of the curriculum and the structure of the school day can be modified to meet emerging needs. Though the environment seems to be highly structured and stable, there is much flexibility and openness to opportunity.

School B, for example, has enhanced student learning opportunity by:

- condensing Key Stage 3 to two years and extending Key Stage 4 to three years;
- revamping its schedule, starting the school day later in response to parental urging and opening up a two-hour block on alternate Tuesdays for curriculum and instruction meetings;
- giving staff an extra three days holiday per year,
- focusing on underperforming students by developing after-school classes and homework clubs, providing help from classroom support assistants, creating a 'learning zone' resource centre, night clubs to provide support instruction, and better communication with parents;
- creating further choice and individualisation in the curriculum through four distinct 'curriculum pathways' and a personalised learning agenda with nine 'gateways' (see Hargreaves, D.H., 2004);
- Broadening its supply through the Trust Status partnership among several schools in the region, which gives students in that community access at one of the participating schools to special studies and specialised diplomas that any one school could not provide.

School A also highlighted that it is always looking for ways to serve students “on the cusp of disengagement”. It seeks to identify students prone to criminality, dropping out, misbehaviour, and underperforming and to provide challenges and support to engage them. A network supports all students, ensuring that they attend regularly, feel a part of the community, and are engaged in their classes. Intervention teams mentor students or provide additional study out of class. The integrated services of the “extended school” meet a range of special needs. Prevention is emphasised; the school tries to create a culture where asking for help is “OK”. School staff told us that they are “creating the maximum amount of flexibility for the child who could not cope with the standard or regular classroom or programme”.

Flexibility in curriculum and instruction is supported by observation of classroom practices, which seemed to be widespread. At school setting A, we were told that an open door policy ensures that there are

frequent visitors to each classroom for observation and comment. A three-member team observes teaching, learning, and behaviour in the classroom.

---

***School A seeks to identify students prone to criminality, dropping out, misbehaviour, and underperforming and to provide challenges and support to engage them***

---

Teachers and department heads at school B described to us the change in teachers' attitudes toward observation that had taken place in the past five or six years. Once, the idea of being observed would have raised their hackles. Now teachers are open to it; they expect and want to be observed. Teachers are observed by their head of department at least once every half-term, and are also seen by their mentors. Classrooms are also observed weekly by the touring senior leadership team. Where observations indicate the need for help, peer observers, coaches, and Advanced Skills Teachers can provide constructive intervention.

---

***Once, the idea of being observed by colleagues or school leaders in class would have raised teachers' hackles. Now teachers are open to it; they expect and want to be observed***

---

#### *Leadership development and leadership distribution*

Leadership in both schools is provided through a richly textured fabric of formal and informal roles and responsibilities. In fact, leadership development in these schools is not a separate activity but an essential element of the school's work to promote students' achievement and well-being. The schools had different structures for organising and focusing the work of leaders and for identifying, developing, and making best use of leadership talent among teachers, staff, and administrators.

In school setting B, for example, leadership and management tasks are distributed across an estimated 30 individuals serving on the senior leadership team (SLT), middle managers, learning managers, and the management team. These are augmented by teacher leaders serving as Advanced Skills Teachers and others who teach in the Training School and who volunteer to serve on school inspection teams and bring back valuable knowledge and experience. Some heads of department are invited to serve on the SLT, bringing important contributions and taking valuable leadership experience. These roles are rotated so many are given exposure and opportunity to develop.

The school takes risks and reaches far to identify and create opportunity for leaders to develop. When the learning manager role was established, the head gradually promoted non-teachers from other roles, including classroom aides and parent volunteers. Some in the school said this approach wouldn't work but it has been a success. The two assistant head teachers we interviewed described how they matured in other roles in the school, were given increasing levels of decision-making responsibility in lesser roles, and then grew into the assistant head role from which they were invited to serve a rotating term on SLT. Cross-training and shared responsibilities are a valuable result: "We know each other's business. We can step in for each other and not lose a beat. In our environment with the momentum and urgency of the press for achievement, this is essential."

Promising teachers and staff can be developed through the Developing Leaders Programme. Participants stress that the leadership is distributed in a structure that evolves as circumstances dictate. One person described it as cone-shaped, smaller at the top and bigger at the bottom but all the time expanding at both ends. One assistant head teacher was at one time also a head of year and had the job of managing the heads of year. These were difficult roles for her and for them, as both had both teaching as well as management duties. The school's response was to eliminate the heads of year and create the team of seven learning managers described above.

A variety of training programmes help foster leadership capacity in teachers and staff who show promise or inclination at different levels: aspiring heads, developing leaders, middle leaders and established leaders.

These schools are the victims of their success, seen by other schools as training grounds for their own future leaders. However, they see losing staff promoted to positions in other schools as a source of pride rather than distress, and the benefits in reputation and morale and effectiveness are said to outweigh any loss.

#### ***4.3. System leadership in practice***

It is the English government's view that achieving its core education priorities requires meeting key systems conditions. First, each school must work with partners such as another school, a local college, or an employer institution. Second, because projections show that there will not be enough well-qualified heads in the coming years, the most effective school leaders will have to share their expertise with other schools. Heads committed to serving in a system leadership capacity can use a number of government programmes designed to foster school improvement through partnering arrangements and shared leadership of various sorts. School A and school B have done this.

Partnering and the sharing of leadership come in many forms. Here we describe several kinds of school collaborations and partnerships – often in combination – involving school A and school B.

Under the federation between school A1 and school A2, school A1's leadership and proven systems were extended to school A2. School A1's head teacher first assumed authority over school A2. School A2's head welcomed the help and signed on as deputy. Over several challenging months, the new leadership duo introduced school A1's vision of change, adopted its management matrix, replaced low performing teachers, and built up small successes creating a “can-do” culture. The leadership team at school A1 was able to cope with its head's absence at school A2. The governing bodies have been merged, and soon the schools will be reorganised as two Academies, one serving ages 11 to 14 and the other 15 to 19. Leaders from both schools point out that school A1 surrendered any superior or dominant role and left room for its partner to blossom. This was made possible by the shared understanding and support for common vision across both schools.

Additional testimony for the efficacy of federations came from our meeting with a director of children's services at a local authority, which showed that federations allow for pooling and broadening of curricula. Systems and leadership can be transferred from one school to another without reinventing the wheel or imposing outside change on the school. A federation is more attractive to candidates than a single struggling school, so teacher recruitment is easier. Tackling tough gaps in achievement can be helped by aggregated data and joint strategies. Such collaboration can also be accomplished in 'soft' federations involving no formal budgetary or governance integration; over time as they succeed and the relationship grows, federations that bring in new partners and funding will help institutionalise the partnership and sustain change.

School B had also taken advantage of a number of opportunities for working and collaborating with other schools. A special grant enabled the head and four other school heads to meet regularly, to share students in immersion programmes offered by the schools, and even to share staff. A structure called Learning Gateways provides the means for identifying places and opportunities for the schools to collaborate.

**Box 6: Benefits of collaboration**

The collaborating head teachers spoke enthusiastically about the benefits of collaboration. They told us that it makes no sense to operate as islands, when they can pool resources for the benefits of their students. Sharing resources and ideas helps them face the many demands on their time and energy, as mutual support helps them cope with hard times. Their varied perspectives are useful in finding ways to work through complex problems. One of the heads “loves data”; another “hates it,” and leans on her colleague for help with statistics. In exchange, she offers expertise in workforce development. Such collaboration cannot be forced; it must grow voluntarily as trust and common vision develop. Because the success of collaboration rests on trusting relationships developed over time, it’s important that heads remain in their positions long enough to build those relationships.

---

***A special grant enabled the head of school B and four other school heads to meet regularly, to share students in immersion programmes offered by the schools, and even to share staff***

---

Five schools in the region also collaborate in the Leading Edge Partnership. Each of these schools is a specialist school, meaning that each has adopted a particular academic focus in which it has specialised. School B, for example, has developed technology as its specialism. Trust Status is conferred by the government on schools that create partnerships with foundations or other private and public entities (businesses, universities) to operate as independent state schools. State funding is the same as for other schools but Trust schools have the long-term benefits of sustained partnership with a particular focus such as school improvement. School B and its school partners are considering applying for Trust status to help all of them to take advantage of the individual school specialisms, contributing higher levels of expertise and resources in areas like business studies or technology, and permitting students to cross-register in courses across the partnership.

Both schools are recognised for their leadership practices and are able to share and transfer experience as lead schools in different areas (Box 4), such as Excellence Cluster lead schools, Raising Attainment and Transforming Learning (RATL) schools, or as National Leader in Education support schools.

Interviewees, but also research and experience from other school contexts, give evidence of numerous advantages of collaboration. Among them are: reduction teachers’ feelings of isolation; shared responsibility for students’ learning, development, and achievement; effective learning processes; the awareness of being part of a teaching and learning community; greater acceptance of continuing professional development; greater professional satisfaction; and motivation to contribute to school development processes.

Federations can also save costs through sharing of equipment and of personnel, *e.g.* in cleaning and catering, and teaching staff (*e.g.* supply teachers expert staff in specific subject areas). Students benefit from specific courses that could not have been offered by the schools individually (*e.g.* evening sessions). Collaboration among schools sometimes enables them to benefit from funded programmes that they would not have had access to individually. Finally, by creating knowledge pools through the collaboration of experts, and by creating a culture of exchange and feedback, their practices help improve quality.

---

***Benefits of federations include: cost savings through sharing of equipment and personnel; access to a wider range of courses for students; and a culture of knowledge exchange and feedback, which can help improve quality***

---

However, fruitful collaboration has a number of pre-requisites. Among them are the participation of staff in decision making, a feeling of ownership, suitable timetables (offering time for communication and

exchange), the voluntary involvement of the stakeholders, the willingness of the individual to get involved in change, and above all, mutual respect and acceptance of each other's competences.

#### **4.4. Different layers of leadership: individual, distributed, and system**

These cases demonstrate ways in which school leaders can shift from management to leadership. We see in them concrete illustration of the practices and characteristics identified formally in the research literature on leadership in the UK (see PriceWaterhouseCooper, 2007; Matthews, and.; HayGroup, 2002) and more broadly.

##### *Professional leadership*

The leaders of both schools we visited were professional leaders. Each had a strong vision of the school—its purpose and outcomes, values, and character—and had managed to persuade others to follow. At the same time, they demonstrated a commitment to distributing leadership through empowerment, trust, sharing, delegation, and creating opportunities for development of others. Our visits provided examples of the pursuit of their goals and seemingly endless supply of energy. Both were advocates for their visions and remarkable change agents.

---

***In both schools we saw extensive groupings of leaders reaching well down into the school, opportunities for formal professional development, and a strong emphasis on the development of a deep cadre of formal and informal leaders from within***

---

These leaders practised what researchers have defined as strong leadership (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). Their visions are achievable and motivating, they *set direction*. Then the leaders go beyond inspiring and motivating; they *develop people*. They expend a great deal of their time and energy helping others grow professionally by creating opportunity, delegating, giving feedback, coaching, and providing formal training. Recognising the synergy that must exist between workers and organisation, they have worked hard to *redesign the organisation*. Both *core technology*, the technical processes concerning effective teaching and learning, and the *structure and processes*, the framework of roles and responsibilities, time and space, and standard operating procedures, have been reshaped to support the goals of student learning.

A further characterisation of the principal's role emphasises strategic leadership. Their work is strategic in two dimensions:

- working with the school community to delineate a clear vision and mission for the school and to align the operation of the school to serve the vision and mission;
- managing the school's relationship with its environment (school district or municipality, other schools, parents and community, business community, research and knowledge resources, and sources of external funding and technical assistance), primarily through collaborations to obtain or align with resources in the larger environment to help the school achieve its mission.

Strategic leadership in this sense is directed at obtaining from the environment those resources and support that are necessary for the school's success. The more systemic dimension of leadership that aims to export the school's expertise and resources to support the larger system will be explored below.

*Distributed leadership and internal leadership development*

It does not seem possible to have effective system leadership without a foundation of effective leadership distributed throughout the school. By distributed leadership we mean the allocation of formal and informal leadership roles and responsibilities to members of the school community (teachers and staff primarily, but parents, community members and students as well) to take advantage of expertise in the pursuit of the school's mission. Thus in both schools we saw extensive groupings of leaders reaching well down into the school, opportunities for formal professional development, and a strong emphasis on the development of a deep cadre of formal and informal leaders from within.

In school B, for example, leadership and management tasks are distributed across an estimated 30 individuals serving on the SLT, middle managers, learning managers, and the management team, as described in the previous section. There seemed to be a striking density of leadership throughout the organisation. Staff were integrally involved because they appreciated that they were important in the organisation. The effects of this approach to distributed leadership seem to include a reduction of workload and stress for the individual, a fostering of quality through the feedback systems in place, and engagement to create everyone's commitment.

Heads of school and others stressed the importance of respect and support for those taking leadership risks in their own leadership and in developing it in others. At the same time, all were held accountable, expected to do their best at all times and to learn from mistakes. Failure was tolerated as a necessary part of learning.

*System leadership*

System leaders are said to find that it is not possible to be fully effective if they do not treat their school as one part of a larger system. The larger system includes the parents and community the school serves and other schools in and beyond the community, as well as the Ministry and other organisations aiming to inspire and support school improvement. To judge from school settings A and B, each school and its leader(s) take an approach to system leadership that draws on its particular strengths and abilities. While there is no single formula for success at system leadership, there are common ingredients.

---

***A school is part of a larger system which includes the parents and community the school serves, other schools in and beyond the community, the Ministry and other organisations***

---

The Hay Group's (2002) study of system leadership (which includes school setting A) identifies leadership qualities and systems that account for successful partnerships. One set of characteristics seems to speak especially to the notion of system leadership:

- Continually promote the vision of successful education.
- Think beyond the immediate canvas (of school A1 and school A2).
- Believe that anything is possible.
- Respect the system but do not be limited by it.
- Grow staff and involve them on this larger canvas.

System leaders appear to exhibit many of the same qualities and practices they exercise in their own schools. However, they apply them on a larger scale.

System leaders have a view of the way their schools fit into and are affected by the larger system. The principals of school A1 and school B are teachers and coaches of change. As transformational leaders (see Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; 2005), they are dedicated to supporting the community in the quest to reach a vision for that community. Seeking to create collaborative school cultures, they teach, or arrange for others to teach, the skills and dispositions needed for the community's new work. They create the supportive emotional and intellectual environment and provide the coaching the community needs.

System leaders have achieved success in their own schools, and their results and methods have been vetted against benchmarks and research-based practice. No two systems are identical, and no one system can be successful simply by adopting another school's successful practices (see Berman and McLaughlin, 1978; McLaughlin, 1990). Successful practices must be adapted in and to the receiving context. More than the skill of replication, then, the system leader needs what Portin and colleagues (2003) have identified as a particular form of contextual literacy and problem-solving capacity, as well as skill in transformational and adaptive practices. The OECD team was struck by the comprehensive, fully elaborated systems in use at school A1 and school B not only for their own operation but also for managing their partnerships with other schools.

As a final observation about system leadership, it seemed to the team that the principals we met with were dedicated to what Elmore (2006) has termed “the practice of improvement”. School heads occupy a lonely position; practitioners frequently mention the physical, emotional, and mental isolation of the job. It can be easy to seek refuge in the certainties of given structures and long-established practices. Heads reported to us that their partnerships helped them to challenge assumptions and set aside things that didn't work. The new perspectives and emotional support of partnerships can thus help in rethinking the work of schools and leadership and bringing new mental models and approaches, sometimes posing uncomfortable threats to current practice, to bear.

## **5. The English approach: food for thought**

In England, there have been many changes for schools in recent years. Much responsibility has been transferred to them framed in a system of standards, assessment, evaluation and accountability. The recent government five year strategy focuses on improving standards for all, closing the achievement gap, and promoting choice and opportunity among a diverse student body by preventing dropouts and preparing all students for a successful transition to work or further education. To attain these objectives, many different programmes and approaches have been set into motion for schools. A focus on leadership has also been at the core of reform. The creation of the NCSL and the different training and development programmes available for all levels of leadership have contributed to a more professional culture of school leadership. Many opportunities for cooperation and collaboration are working towards ensuring that “every school is a great school”.

---

*The creation of the NCSL and the different training and development programmes available for all levels of leadership have contributed to a more professional culture of school leadership*

---

### **5.1. Strengths**

The systemic agenda has been permeating the English school system and from what the OECD team was able to see, it is having a positive impact on leadership and on school performance.

*A broad policy framework guides large-scale reform in education*

Levin (2001) has observed that three strategies typically constitute contemporary large-scale, governmental reform programmes: decentralisation, increased testing and centralised curriculum, and

public choice and other market mechanisms. However effective such strategies may be on their own, additional elements are needed. A balanced reciprocal relationship must exist between accountability and support for reform (Elmore, 2000, 2006), which implies that support for the change process as well as efforts to learn from it are essential (see Berman and McLaughlin, 1978; McLaughlin, 1989). Education policy must originate in the practice of teaching (Elmore and McLaughlin, 1988).

The English approach combining decentralisation and accountability, supporting infrastructure, and incentives for local innovation and leadership supported by targeted funding seems to the visiting team to exemplify much of the best of current wisdom about large-scale school reform. A comprehensive policy framework grounded on state-of-the-art research provides coherent direction, incentives, capacity building and support for broad-based, systemic change. Refinements in policy based on cycles of implementation and feedback seemed to have produced increasingly sophisticated and responsive practices. This comprehensive reform framework should be continued in its present broad outlines.

*System leadership is an effective mechanism for reaching key policy aims*

System leadership is helping to boost school performance, support reforms across schools, spread leadership expertise more broadly, and provide for leadership succession. System leadership seems to be an especially effective tool for managing in environments of overload and fragmentation that are characteristic of all contemporary complex social systems. Our observations of the system leaders confirm Fullan's (2000) description of the three "stories" describing how coherence is brought to a disjointed system. Effective schools change their internal dynamics by functioning as collaborative schools (the "inside story"), deal with the forces that press on them from outside by forming partnerships (the "inside-outside story"), and benefit from the organisation of an "external infrastructure of reform" among agencies beyond the school (the "outside-inside story"). These stories are vividly portrayed in our two case schools' workings as high performance learning communities, in their extensive relationships with their environments through partnerships and networks, and their interactions with the extensive infrastructure of support for reform comprising the SSAT, NCSL, other organisations, and a variety of targeted funding and other initiatives. System leadership succeeds by coordinating three domains—the high performance learning community of the school, the school's immediate environment including community, other schools, and corporations, for example, and the larger "external reform infrastructure" (see Fullan, 1999, 2000).

When we refer to system leaders or leadership, we should emphasise that we mean less the actions of individual leaders than the combination of the actions of individuals and groups of leaders in the context of a highly supportive infrastructure.

The schools visited had achieved impressive results in student and school performance, fostering improvement in federated schools, and transferring skilled personnel and innovative practice to the broader system. We saw evidence that these results have been substantially facilitated by recent English policy initiatives. Such anecdotal evidence is echoed more solidly in a variety of evaluations and reports brought to the visiting team's attention (see, for example, Matthews, n.d.; Matthews *et al.*, 2006; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007; Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, 2008).

*System leaders seem to portray the characteristics of high performing leadership*

System leadership seemed to the OECD team to characterise not just a cadre of leaders "willing to shoulder system leadership roles" but rather to define the ideal of practice for all school leaders. The attitudes and values, the skills and dispositions, and the collaborative, systemic practices of "system leaders" are required of all school leaders who will work in the system that is intended to be put in place under the current reforms.

---

*The attitudes and values, the skills and dispositions, and the collaborative, systemic practices of “system leaders” are required of all school leaders*

---

The common positive characteristics we found in the case studies we visited were:

- *Core purpose of school.* Both schools have a clear focus on the core purpose of school, namely teaching and learning. Every effort made by people involved in the school is expected to fit this focus.
- *Outcome- and performance orientation.* Both schools are focused on school outcome and pupils' attainment. They aim not only at cognitive achievements but at more holistic outcomes, as cognitive, emotional and social outcomes are interdependent and only achieved in a reciprocal process in addressing them comprehensively. Both schools focus on high performance using a challenging learning-centred model based on a strong and shared belief that every pupil can learn.
- *Individual approach to improve learning outcomes through intensive use of data.* Both schools have a pervasive use of data; they use a rigorous approach of systematically and regularly collecting data from all pupils across all subject areas. In both, information is revisited every six weeks. The database provides the possibility to analyse individual developments and to identify needs of action.
- *Evaluation and assessment.* The schools have a culture of constant assessment. In both schools classrooms are open for collegial and senior visits. Teachers are ready to be observed and to get feedback. Assessment in these schools does not stop with the pupils but includes the teachers' teaching/instruction. There is a feedback system about the work of management and leadership, too. Both schools seem to have established a system of monitoring and feedback involving the whole school.
- *Resource-oriented approach.* The schools aim to use evaluation and assessment as a basis for positive reinforcement of the individual achievements of both pupils and staff, leading to further improvement. This positive resource-orientation seems to be a necessary requirement for learning and change processes.
- *Professional development.* In both schools, professional development of staff is high on the agenda. The professional development is most often needs-oriented in-house training. They also try to develop and enlarge the school's leadership capacity through leadership experiences linked to training and development opportunities. This mixed approach of development and practical experience seems to have sustainable effects.
- *Cooperation and collaboration.* In both school settings, 'cooperation and collaboration' seem to be very important. The schools' leaders aim to empower people within the school, supporting work in teams, among the pupils as well as the staff.

*The reforms are contributing to build different types of leadership capacity across the system*

In order fully to appreciate the effectiveness and potential of the English policy framework, it is necessary to understand two broad conditions of contemporary social systems. First, leadership operates in a complex social system characterised by overload and extreme fragmentation (Fullan, 1999; 2000), in a strategic environment characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Knowlton, 2003). Second, the nature of the work of education systems is intensive (Thompson, 1967) and self-

organising (Fullan, 2000). Each leadership act or pedagogical decision produces a new set of conditions for which a new set of responses is needed, much as the rock climber's choice in solving one problem presented by the rock face creates a new situation with new problems to be worked out. Such systems can only be controlled to a limited extent. Beyond that, incentives, capacity, and support are needed to engender innovation and improvement and in particular to link them in ongoing cycles of learning and improvement.

Systemic leadership can ensure a distribution of leadership throughout school and larger system levels and by stimulating the development of the schools' and system's learning communities.

Systemic reform can be thought of as a form of distributed leadership carried out at the system level. A considerable list of new roles is developing for system leaders, and many parts of the system have roles to play and the expertise and capacity to carry them out. A shared understanding of the direction of the whole system and the place of individual parts in the overall system fosters a process of ongoing coordination of efforts characterised by initiative, distributed decision-making, local experimentation, pervasive and timely communication, and self-organised improvement.

The particular power of system leadership is that it ameliorates or overcomes the "overload and extreme fragmentation" characteristic of complex social systems including education. Only strategic leadership can manage systems volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity.

One implication of seeing system leadership as a powerful form of distributed leadership at the system level is that both additive and concertive dimensions (Gronn, 2002) should be nourished. Most emphasis currently seems to be on the additive side, that is, on defining and fitting leaders for new roles as system leaders. Over time, the emphasis should shift to the concertive side, that is, to creating widespread common understanding of the system purpose and direction, encouraging initiative and experimentation, promoting communication and feedback throughout the system, and strengthening the skills and capacity of all leaders potentially to serve as system leaders.

Systemic leadership also implies learning communities. A learning community may be thought of as a setting that makes "deliberate use of individual, group, and system learning to embed new thinking and practices and continuously renew and transform the organisation in ways that support shared aims" (Collinson & Cook, 2006, p. 8). Elements of a learning community encountered in this case include leadership as the "practice of improvement" (Elmore, 2000, 2006), based on a disposition to challenge regularities of schooling; professional norms of collegiality and experimentation (Little, 1982), professional community (Louis *et al.*, 1996; 1997); communication and continuous improvement around progress in reaching objectives; and a balance of accountability and support (Elmore, 2000; 2006). The distribution of leadership that orchestrates the learning is both a cause and consequence of the functions of the learning community.

---

***Systemic leadership fosters initiative, distributed decision-making, local experimentation, pervasive and timely communication, and self-organised improvement***

---

### *New paradigms of leadership and schooling*

Not only do systemic leadership, distributed leadership, and learning organisations promise more effective forms of leadership, but implicit within these leadership and school practices is to be found a new logic of school effectiveness and social innovation.

Contemporary education must respond to a new set of requirements in which ongoing and rapid change replaces sameness, individualisation and personalisation supplant uniform programmes, and

teacher autonomy yields to professional teacher community. The new pedagogy of deep learning, development of higher order thinking skills, and teaching for understanding requires flexibility, creativity, and inspired experimentation in teaching and learning (Sims, 2006). Resources and work processes formerly managed through hierarchical control systems must now be directed through shared vision and organisational learning. According to system thinker Peter Senge (2000), this change has occurred along four dimensions, from:

- organisations as machines to organisations as living systems;
- fragmentation to relatedness;
- deficit to developmental thinking;
- acceptance of what is to questioning of what is, why, and what else could be.

---

***Contemporary education is characterised by ongoing and rapid change, personalisation and professional teacher community***

---

Distributed leadership is intrinsic to these new dimensions and modes of schooling. While the elaboration of formal roles is one aspect of distributed leadership, its more powerful aspect is to embody and enable collective, emergent activity at the core of school learning communities. Systemic leadership may start in the individual school but extends to broader levels of the education system including other schools and governance levels.

Learning organisations like the schools we visited show that where shared understanding of mission and goals, distribution of work, and abundant communication are at play, quality of decision-making and coordination of teaching and learning far surpass what is possible under a control regime.

Finally, systemic leadership implies the transference of capacity rather than scaling up of products and innovations. Because “going to scale” runs headlong into the same conditions of overload and fragmentation, that limit centrally mandated reform, what must be moved from one place to another, from the more to the less successful sites, is capacity and not products or particular innovations. Capacity means understanding the objectives, values, and principles of effective practice, of relevant knowledge, skills and dispositions, and of distributed work within a learning community, all supported by resources to help the system through the adaptive process. Systemic leadership is a powerful tool for building and distributing capacity in the system.

---

***Systemic leadership is a powerful tool for building and distributing capacity in the system***

---

## ***5.2. Towards further progress***

The visiting team also identified several topics where further attention may lead to greater sustainability of the systemic approach to school improvement.

### ***Balance continuous improvement and maintenance***

The government of the English education system has a strong framework for large-scale education reform, which appears to be working. At the same time, the sheer number of initiatives and programmes and the speed at which schools are expected to implement them may be counterproductive. True improvement results from a balance of making best use of innovative ideas and concepts on the one hand and maintaining proven ones on the other.

Focus should be on making improvements to the current framework on the basis of experience and feedback. Care should be taken to limit introduction of new initiatives that increase the overload and fragmentation experienced by school leaders and communities. For the schools themselves, an important task is to carefully consider what they should maintain in order not to run the risk of losing something valuable and effective while making efforts to keep up with all these innovations.

*Continue to adjust the balance between accountability and school autonomy*

It is important that reform support complements standards, testing, and accountability; experience will suggest ways in which the balance needs to be adjusted. For example, introducing school self-evaluation and improvement planning has been greeted as a positive development. Greater emphasis on systematic self-evaluation and less on external Ofsted evaluation, and continuing to refine the targeting of external evaluations seems to be warranted.

*Strengthen the capacity of governing bodies and local authorities to support school improvement*

School governing bodies are of uneven capacity and appear to have a mixed record of success in supporting school improvement. Training, capacity building, and networking can improve their ability to meet national policy goals as well as local priorities.

Local authorities have lost some of their traditional roles and gained broad new responsibilities for school improvement planning and extended services, among others. While there is need to respect the authorities' distinct regional character, there is also a need to reduce variations in quality and capacity, and to ensure that all agencies can carry out their remits at a high level of performance.

*Emphasise leadership development at the school level*

The visiting team was impressed at the two case study schools' success in developing leadership internally. These new leaders fuel local school improvement, and also contribute to improvements in partnered or networked schools; many then serve as higher-level leaders in yet other schools. Some of this school-level leadership development is conducted in collaboration with the NCSL and/or SSAT. These evidently highly effective forms of leadership development have the potential to ameliorate the anticipated leadership succession problem.

*Make more explicit use of principles of high performance learning communities*

The case study schools exemplify high performance learning organisations. Learning communities combine strong formal leadership, distributed leadership, powerful systems focusing the work of the organisation on quality teaching and learning, teacher professional community, and modes of communication and continuous learning that foster steady improvements in performance. These factors interact to create capacity for high performance. The job of the leader and the focus of the larger system should be to develop such capacity. Teachers, governing bodies, local authorities, and community leaders as well as school leaders should understand the principles and operation of high performance learning organisations and have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to make their schools function as high performance learning organisations.

*Balance the sense of urgency for reform with a realistic understanding of the time needed for successful change*

Some UK experts told the visiting team that individual underperforming schools can be turned around in one year. Fullan (1999) states that reform of an elementary school ordinarily takes about three years and that, depending on size, around six years are needed at the secondary level. Large-scale, second-order

system change, where fundamental values and beliefs must change, may take a full generation. While some successes can be achieved in the short term, there will be harder nuts to crack that resist short-term results. Levin (2001) encourages system leaders to acknowledge the magnitude of the task and to work for small, achievable wins that buoy spirits, confirm policy directions, and generate learning needed for cracking the harder cases.

*Include training for systemic leadership in the different stages of teacher and leadership training*

Training for systemic leadership should start with teacher education and continue in school leader preparation and training and thereafter during professional development for teachers and other leaders. System leaders, distributed leadership, and learning organisations accomplish levels of performance that are not possible in settings where these elements are lacking. Training programmes should be redeveloped: reorganising their conventional content under these newer concepts; and introducing new behaviours, skills, and dispositions entailed in these processes.

*Develop new forms of accountability and financial support for system leadership.*

Modes of accountability and financing suited to conventional leadership and schooling may not be suited to systemic leadership. Where the efforts of more than one leader and indeed an entire school community are responsible for the successes (and failures) of the school or federation, accountability must be shared. Incentives and rewards for performance, as well as sanctions, will be most effective and fair when they apply to all who are responsible for school performance.

By the same token, methods of supporting systemic leadership may need to be reconsidered both to ensure that those who bear greater burdens or take greater responsibility are suitably compensated and that systems that share and benefit from the contributions of system leaders are paying fairly.

*Use system leadership to enhance the move to collaboration instead of competition?*

The times of an extremely competition-oriented relationship among schools seem to be over. The rather market-driven competition in the education sector typical of England for some time was disapproved of by many practitioners and educationalists. There are challenges in converting a competitive culture to one of collaboration. But a new widening of perspective and a focus on mutual responsibility and collaboration among schools are most welcome from an educational point of view and can contribute to change the educational landscape to make “every school a great school.”

---

*A new widening of perspective and a focus on mutual responsibility and collaboration among schools can help to make “every school a great school.”*

---

## REFERENCES

- Barber, M. (2001), “Large-scale Education Reform in England: A Work in Progress”, paper prepared for the School Development conference, Tartu, Estonia.
- Berman, P. and M. McLaughlin (1978), Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change, Vol. VIII, Implementing and Sustaining Innovations, R-1589/8-HEW, report prepared for the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.
- Collinson, V. and T. Cook (2006), *Organizational Learning: Improving Learning, Teaching, and Leading in School Systems*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- DCSF (Department of Children, Schools, and Families) (2007a), The Standards Site, The National Strategies Primary, viewed 14 September 2007 at [www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/about/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/about/).
- DCSF (2007b), The Standards Site, The National Strategies Secondary Key Stage 3, viewed 14 September 2007 at <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/about/>.
- DCSF (2007c), Statutory Guidance for Schools Causing Concern, viewed 15 July 15 at <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/documents/2007SCCGuidance.doc>.
- DCSF (2007d). Support for Schools Causing Concern: Contributions from National Strategies Programmes, 2006-2007, viewed 15 July 15, 2007 at <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/documents/nssup.doc>.
- DfES (Department for Education and Skills ) (2004), National Standards for Headteachers, reference 0083/2004, Department for Education and Skills.
- Elmore, R. (2006), “Leadership as the Practice of Improvement”, paper prepared for the *International Conference on Perspectives on Leadership for Systemic Improvement*, sponsored by the OECD Improving School Leadership Activity and HSBC, 6 July, London, England. (Chapter 2 of this publication)
- Elmore, R. (2000), Building a New Structure for School Leadership, The Albert Shanker Institute.
- Elmore, R. and M. McLaughlin (1988), *Steady Work: Policy, Practice, and the Reform of American Education*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.
- Fullan, M. (1999), *Change Forces: The Sequel*, Falmer Press, London.
- Fullan, M. (2000), “The Three Stories of Education Reform”, *Phi Delta Kappan*, April, pp. 581-584.
- Gronn, P. (2002), “Distributed Leadership”, in Leithwood, K. and P. Hallinger (eds.), *Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration*, Springer International Handbooks of Education, vol. 8, Springer, New York, NY, pp. 653-696.

Hargreaves, D.H. (2004), *Personalising learning: Next steps in working laterally*, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Hay Group (2002), *Maverick, Breakthrough Leadership that Transforms Schools, An Exploratory Study by the Hay Group*, [www.transforminglearning.co.uk/research](http://www.transforminglearning.co.uk/research).

Hopkins, D. (2006), paper presented at the *International Conference on Perspectives on Leadership for Systemic Improvement*, sponsored by the OECD Improving School Leadership Activity and HSBC, 6 July, London, England. (Chapter 3 of this publication)

Hopkins, D. and R. Higham, R. (2007), System leadership: mapping the landscape, *School Leadership & Management*, 27(2), pp. 147–166.

Huber, S.G. (1997), *Headteachers' Views on Headship and Training: A Comparison with the NPQH*, School of Education, University of Cambridge, Cambridge.

Knowlton, W. (2003), Developing Strategic Leaders: Executive Assessment and Development, PowerPoint presentation, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defence University, Fort McNair, Washington, DC.

Levin, B. (2001), *Reforming Education: From Origins to Outcomes*, RoutledgeFalmer, London.

Leithwood, K. and D. Jantzi (1990), “Transformational leadership: how principals can help reform school cultures”, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 11 (4), pages 249 – 280.

Leithwood, K. and D. Jantzi (2005), “Transformational leadership”, in B. Davies (ed.), *The Essentials of School Leadership*, Paul Chapman Publishing and Corwin Press, London, pp. 31-43.

Leithwood, K. and C. Riehl (2003), *What We Know About Successful School Leadership*, Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA.

Little, J. (1982), “Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions for school success”, *American Educational Research Journal*, 19 (3), pp.325-340.

Louis, K., H. Marks and D. Kruse (1996), “School-wide professional community”, in Newmann, F. and Associates (eds.), *Authentic Achievement: Restructuring Schools for Intellectual Quality*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA.

Louis, K., H. Marks and D. Kruse (1997), “Teachers’ professional community in restructuring schools”, *American Educational Research Journal*, 33 (4), pp. 757-798.

Matthews, P. (n.d.), *Attributes of the First National Leaders of Education in England: What do they bring to the role?*, National College for School Leadership, Nottingham.

Matthews, P., P. Scammons, Q. Gu, C. Day and P. Smith (2006), *Supporting leadership and securing quality: An evaluation of the impact of aspects of the London Leadership Strategy*, National College for School Leadership, Nottingham.

McLaughlin, M. (1990), “The RAND Change Agent Study Ten Years Later: Macro Perspectives and Micro Realities”, paper based on address given at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, March 27-30, 1989, Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching, Report No. CRC-P89-108.

- Portin, B., P. Schneider, M. DeArmond, L. Grundlachet (2003), *Making Sense of Leading Schools: A Study of the School Principalship*, Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, Seattle, Washington.
- PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) (2007), *Independent Study into School Leadership: Main Report*, Department for Education and Skills, London, England.
- Senge, P. (2000), *Systems Change in Education, Reflections*, Society for Organizational Learning, 1 (3).
- Sims, E. (2006), *Deep learning – 1*, Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, London.
- SSAT (Specialist Schools and Academies Trust) (2008), *The Long and Short of School Improvement: Summary of the Evaluation Report on the Raising Achievement Transforming Learning Project of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust*, SSAT, London.
- Thompson, J. (1967), *Organizations in Action: Social Science Bases of Administrative Theory*, McGraw Hill, New York.

**ANNEX 1: ENGLAND STUDY VISIT PROGRAMME****UK Innovative case study visit programme, 30 October - 2 November 2006****Monday, 30 October, London, Department for Education and Skills**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Post</b>	<b>Notes</b>
10.00-11.00am	Laura Cunningham	Team Leader Leadership Policy Team, DfES	
11.00-12.00pm	Peter Wanless	Director School Standards Groups, DfES	Wider view of system reform on improving standards
12.00-1.15pm	LUNCH		
1.15pm-2.00pm	Peter Mathews	Ex Ofsted Inspector and Consultant (London Challenge, Primary Strategy)	
2.00-3.00pm	David Crossley  Sir Ian Hall	Specialist Schools and Academics Trust Headteacher Training and Future Leaders Programme	
3.00pm-3.45pm	Toby Salt	Strategic Director for School Leadership Development, NCSL	Overview of NCSL. Different things to influence leadership
3.45pm-4.30pm	John Dunford	General Secretary, Association of School and College Leaders	
4.30pm - 5.15pm	Ralph Tabberer	Director General Schools Directorate DfES	Delivering strategies for improving education.

**Tuesday, 31 October, Outwood Grange College, Wakefield, W. Yorkshire**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Post</b>
8.30 – 9.30am	Headteacher
9.30 – 10.30am	Headteachers of Wakefield Schools
10.30 – 11.00am	Assistant Heads
11.00 – 11.30	Heads of Department
11.30 – 12.00pm	Associate Assistant Heads
12.30 – 1.00pm	Parent Governors. Student council members
1.00 – 1.30pm	Developing young leaders (SSAT)
1.30 – 2.00pm	Community representatives
2.00 – 2.30pm	Chair of Governors. Vice-Chair of Governors
2.30 – 3.15pm	Head of Training School. Consultant to Senior Leadership Team

**Wednesday, 1 November, Federation of Chalvedon School and Sixth Form College and Barstable School in Basildon, Essex**

8.30	Introductory presentation and discussion with Principal
9.15	Tour of Chalvedon with retired VP
9.55	Discussion with pupils and students
10.15	Principal's leadership behaviours –discussion with Management Consultant
11.00	Early collaboration; Trainee Heads Programme; Local Delivery; EEBP – presentation and discussion by/with Associate Principal
11.45	The Matrix – presentation by the Federative SMT
12.30	Governance – discussion with the Chair of Governors
12.50	Lunch
1.20	LEA perspective – discussion with a School Improvement Partner
1.40	Teaching and non-teaching staff. – discussion with retired VP, partner company representative, caretaker, catering employee
2.00	Travel to Barstable Tour of Barstable with Assoc. Princip.
2.50	Discussion with pupils
3.10	Academies Programme

**Thursday, 2 November**

8.15 - 9:15	Frankie Sulke, Director of Children Services for Lewisham Local Authority	Combined post of Director of Education and of Children Services: to clarify innovation at the local authority level and system reform.
-------------	---	--

**List of abbreviations**

ARU	Anglia Ruskin University
EAL	English as an additional Language (provision for children whose first language is not English)
ECDL	European Computer driving License
ECM	Every child matters
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
FFT	Fisher Family Trust
GT	Graduate Trainee
HLTA	Higher Level Teaching assistant
LAP	Learning Assistant Programme
MA	Multi Agency
MidYIS scores	Middle Year information system scores (a test to develop ability, a measure which relies on pupils general experiences and their ability to acquire knowledge and solve problems rather than what they are been taught at school)
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PANDA	Performance AND Assessment
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
QL	Quantum Learning
SEN	Special Education Needs
SSCo	School Sports Coordinators