

Leadership, Including Headship

POSITION PAPER

'You can't improve schools without leaders'¹

1. Effective school leadership is one of the keys to improving quality and standards in our education system. Leadership at all levels, from classroom to whole school as well as locally and nationally, is a main strand of the School Effectiveness Framework. Better leadership offers the potential for improved learning and wellbeing for our children, and, in the current context, for improved international comparisons.
2. The importance of leadership is underlined by its inclusion as a main theme of the current Assembly Government Review of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).
3. We know that leadership directly impacts on learning and learners;

..there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership²

Evidence from Estyn's inspection reports shows that schools with good and outstanding leaders are nearly all good and outstanding schools. Schools needing significant improvement or special measures to improve are nearly all those that have shortcomings in leadership.³ (p. 2)
4. There is a wealth of literature available on educational leadership and it is a concept which is continually being reframed. This paper focuses on the practicalities of developing leadership in the schools of Wales.
5. In particular, it focuses on:
 - building school leadership capacity at all levels of the school and within the teaching profession;
 - considering the challenges of the additional roles faced by modern headteachers;
 - suggesting improvements to the preparation & selection of, and support systems for headteachers.

¹ McKinsey & Company. (2010). Capturing the leadership premium: How the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future

² McKinsey and Company. (2007): How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top

³ Estyn (2010): The impact of the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) programme on headship.

6. The paper also touches on specific issues which impact negatively on the perceptions of the role of headship.
7. This paper was in part motivated by a response to the Assembly Government's research into Headship (2009)⁴ and initially developed by a Task and Finish Group, the majority of whom were serving or former headteachers. It has been refined following extensive discussions with Local Authority headteacher groups throughout Wales, and teacher unions.
8. We hope that this paper will serve to initiate a conversation with headteachers, teachers, school governors and other stakeholders about the present and the future for leadership in our schools, as well as feeding into the current CPD Review being undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Effective leadership

9. Much has been written about the skill sets of effective leaders, for example, the School Effectiveness Framework summarises the main characteristics of leadership as being visionary and strategic, collaborative and deploying resources to improve children's learning and wellbeing.
10. Although there is no single blueprint for effective leadership, the recent McKinsey report (2010) summarises the key elements of good leadership which have been consistently identified through recent research, as follows:

Practices	Beliefs, attitudes and personal attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a shared vision and sense of purpose • Setting high expectations for performance • Role modelling behaviours and practices • Designing and managing the teaching and learning program • Establishing effective teams within the school staff, and distributing leadership among the school staff • Understanding and developing people • Protecting teachers from issues which would distract them from their work • Establishing school routines and norms of behaviour • Monitoring performance • Connecting the school to parents and the community • Recognizing and rewarding achievement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused on student achievement: puts children ahead of personal or political interests • Resilient and persistent in goals, but adaptable to context and people • Willing to develop a deep understanding of people and context • Willing to take risks and challenge accepted beliefs and behaviours • Self-aware and able to learn • Optimistic and enthusiastic <p>(page 6.)⁵</p>

⁴ Welsh Assembly Government, Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (2009) Research into Headship.

⁵ McKinsey & Company. (2010). Capturing the leadership premium: How the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future

11. The McKinsey report goes on to outline the key roles that school leaders play:

All principals, and particularly high performers, are motivated mainly by their ability to make a difference.

High-performing principals focus more on instructional leadership and developing teachers. They see their biggest challenges as improving teaching and curriculum, and they believe that their ability to coach others and support their development is the most important skill of a good school leader.

High-performing principals are distinguished less by who they are, and more by what they do... They work the same hours as other principals, but spend more time working with the people in their school.

High-performing principals find supporting the improvement of other schools and leaders attractive and do this more frequently than other principals.⁶

(pp 7 and 8)

Building leadership capacity

12. The GTCW believes that leadership skills should be fostered, practised, developed and recognised throughout a teacher's career, notwithstanding any aspiration to a formal leadership role. This has implications at school, local and national levels.
13. All teachers require and demonstrate leadership skills throughout their careers. "Leadership in the classroom requires practitioners to lead the implementation of pedagogy, curriculum innovation and knowledge about learning..." (SEF p13). Teachers are required to be leaders of learning, to inspire, build trust and motivate. They are accountable from the moment they embark on their careers. Most, if not all, teachers will have experience of leading teams of colleagues, teaching assistants or other multi-professional teams from the start of their careers.
14. At whole school level, senior leaders need to develop school cultures to facilitate the growth of their leaders. This is because we know that good schools nurture good leaders and that schools work better where there is a culture of shared leadership.⁷
15. At national level, systems and policies need to be in place which develop leadership capacity and underpin and help drive the creation of the school cultures referred to above. Leadership skills and attributes need to feature in all national professional standards, so that leadership can be developed incrementally through a teacher's career via high quality, nationally agreed programmes (SEF p14). This would also help school senior leadership teams and governing bodies to identify and develop leadership at all levels regardless of teachers' formal roles.

⁶ McKinsey & Company. (2010). Capturing the leadership premium: How the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future

⁷ Day, C. Sammons, P. Hopkins, D. Harris, A. Leithwood, K. Quing Gu, Brown, E. Ahtarigou, E. Kington, A. (2009). The impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes. DCSF, NCSL

16. However, national standards for QTS and Induction, as set out, currently do not do this. Leadership qualities are only explicit within the headship standards. The GTCW therefore advocates a holistic review of all professional standards to ensure that leadership development takes place incrementally as part of a continuum from Initial Teacher Education and Training onwards, including the crucial role of middle leadership in schools.
17. A focus on leadership within the standards should be accompanied by appropriate professional development programmes available nationally in order to support leadership development, including leadership at classroom level. There should be a specific hierarchy of leadership skills development programmes available within the continuum.
18. Evidence also shows that effective middle leadership in schools is essential to drive improvement and supply the system with future headteachers.

*..an effective middle tier..is essential if all schools (not just some schools) are to be great schools,*⁸(page 28)

19. Both the Assembly Government research into headship (2009)⁹ and Estyn's report on NPQH (2010) point to the need for a structured national programme of professional development in the middle years of a teacher's career. Estyn goes further in recommending a qualification for senior leadership as a natural precursor for NPQH.

*The evidence suggests that there is an important shortcoming in continuing professional development in Wales. There is no mandatory qualification for teachers after the initial teaching years of Newly Qualified Teacher and Early Professional Development levels until the NPQH.*¹⁰(p.5)

20. In discussions, headteachers were supportive of a non-mandatory middle leader qualification, in particular, Chartered Teacher received a lot of support.
21. The GTCW believes that the vacuum in nationally available, quality assured professional development programmes for the vast majority of teachers between Induction/Early Professional Development and Headship needs to be addressed urgently. We understand that local authorities are committed to developing middle level leader programmes so that all teachers in Wales will be able to access these opportunities in due course. Given this, it is essential that such programmes are subject to national quality assurance arrangements and that there is sufficient funding to enable professional development to take place.

Recommendations

- ***leadership skills and attributes should be developed throughout a teacher's career, forming a continuum of leadership;***
- ***national and school systems need to support a leadership continuum, including:***

⁸ McKinsey & Company. (2010). Capturing the leadership premium: How the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future

⁹ Welsh Assembly Government, Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (2009) Research into Headship.

¹⁰ Estyn (2010): The impact of the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) programme on headship.

- ***clear and coherent national teaching standards which explicitly refer to leadership skills from QTS onwards, including at middle leader level;***
- ***quality assured, nationally available professional development provision with a focus on leadership skills.***

The changing role of headship

22. The central role of the headteacher as lead practitioner is to focus on leading teaching and learning. Headteachers, in the main, believe that this is and should be their core role. However, government and society is asking more of them than ever before and there is a tension between their evolving roles and what modern headteachers believe their job to be.
23. The role of headteacher has become much more outward facing. Additional expectations include developing schools within communities and contributing to social regeneration, working with and leading multi-service teams of professionals, and leading or participating in partnerships, consortia or federations of schools and other learning settings. One of the greatest challenges for headteachers today is the requirement for system leadership, of working for improvement not only in their own schools but across the education system as a whole.¹¹
24. While headteachers desire to be engaged strategically in wider change and in the development of thinking on the future of schools and learning, there is, nevertheless, a tension felt with their core responsibility. Delegating responsibilities within a distributed leadership approach is the key to resolving the challenges of the evolving role. Primary headteachers though, have less opportunity to share their responsibility with other personnel and are often not able to call on the range of individual expertise available to secondary headteachers. Nevertheless, primary headteachers feel that this too could be addressed if leadership was developed more systematically from initial teacher education onwards.
25. This can have a negative impact on perceptions of headship by those who might otherwise aspire to lead a school and the headteachers' view was that this perception has reduced the number of applicants for headship posts. Although distributed leadership has enabled members of senior leadership teams to experience facets of the headteacher's role, some are wary of bearing the ultimate responsibility and accountability borne by the headteacher. Some senior leaders may also feel under-prepared in terms of their experience of the additional roles of modern headteachers.
26. Yet for those headteachers in post or for those teachers who do aspire to headship, their potential impact on pupils' life chances is the single most rewarding aspect of, or motivation for, the role. As one headteacher put it, *'It's the best job in the world'*. Headteachers acknowledge that they can play their part in addressing recruitment concerns by focusing more on the positive rewarding aspects of the role.
27. Headteachers themselves and the Assembly Government need to take action to address recruitment concerns over headship. Professional and government

¹¹ Hargreaves, D. (2010): Creating a self-improving school system. (NCSL)

responses need to challenge the perception that the headteacher's job is all about 'bells, buildings, budgets and buses' and rather focus on the impact that their leadership has on learning and pupils' futures.

Recommendations

- ***The Assembly Government should consider a general campaign to support recruitment to headship from within the profession.***

Preparation for headship – the NPQH

28. A natural step on from a leadership continuum involving better middle leadership preparation is ensuring continued appropriate preparation for headship.
29. Council believes that the mandatory requirement introduced in 2005 for all new headteachers to hold the NPQH was an excellent move. Just as teachers require a qualification which focuses on the knowledge, understanding and practical skills needed to teach effectively, so the crucial responsibilities placed on school leaders demand that they have particular attributes, skills and experiences. The mandatory headship requirement should be retained, although the standard itself now needs updating and revision.
30. However, the content of the NPQH programme needed revision. Council wished to see greater emphasis on people skills and on recognising and developing leadership in others which is the core of sustainable leadership. Further, the programme needed to be more individualised with an emphasis on filling gaps in the individual skills, experience and qualities already possessed. In discussion with headteachers, networking and opportunities to discuss issues with other senior leaders were considered to be the most valuable part of the programme.
31. During the development of this paper, headteachers told us that they did not support an 'assessment only' route to the NPQH. They believed that it was essential that systems of support were put in place, either locally or centrally, to provide support for prospective headteachers. However, rather than a uniform taught programme for all candidates, it should focus on coaching and mentoring and include opportunities for senior leaders to experience leadership approaches of different school leaders. There should also be a national approach to quality assurance of the support systems. Council endorses this view.
32. In England, the NCSL is retaining the NPQH but making the programme more focused on key skills of effective leaders and building on the particular experiences of the senior leaders involved.
33. Although the national contract for the delivery of NPQH has come to an end, the Council was concerned about the appropriateness and reliability of the selection process of NPQH candidates. The Assembly Government research (2009) also highlighted questions of variability in selection procedures across local authorities in Wales.
34. Whether future systems of support are delivered locally e.g. by consortia or administered centrally, in the interests of fairness and in order to select the best candidates, the GTCW would strongly endorse the introduction of a

criteria based national selection system for those ready to avail themselves of the systems of support.

35. If future systems of support are delivered locally, then further thinking will be needed to ensure that there is a standardised approach to the assessment against the national headship standards. This could be through a national assessment panel.

Recommendation

Council recommends:

- ***the retention of a mandatory but revised standard for headship;***
- ***quality assured systems of support for senior leaders aspiring to headship focused on coaching and mentoring and the provision of opportunities to experience different school leadership approaches;***
- ***national criteria based systems of selection for prospective headteachers;***
- ***a national approach to assessment against the headship standards.***

Selection to headteacher posts

36. Governing bodies of a school are often most exposed when seeking to appoint a new headteacher. The person that they have been relying on as their chief source of advice i.e. the headteacher who is being replaced, is no longer available to them. Many governing bodies face the challenge lacking confidence and with trepidation.

Selecting school leaders is one of the most important decisions for an education system. Ensuring that selection committees have the skills and capabilities required to make the optimum decision is therefore crucial.

¹²(page 28)

37. Council believes that governors would welcome the views of a neutral, serving headteacher from outside the local authority to offer advice to the panel during the selection process as well as a 360 degree review of shortlisted candidates from within their present school. In our discussions with headteacher groups during the development of this paper, this view was more prevalent amongst secondary headteachers where there was a feeling that LA advisors generally lacked previous experience as secondary headteachers. This view was not echoed as strongly by primary headteachers where it was felt that LA advice did draw on such prior experience.

¹² McKinsey & Company. (2010). Capturing the leadership premium: How the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future

Recommendation

- **Council is of the view that headteacher selection procedures would be improved by the involvement of a neutral serving headteacher, working with the LA, to advise the recruitment panel.**

Support for serving headteachers

38. It is often stated that we now have the best qualified and most effective generation of headteachers. The Council also acknowledges that more is being asked of headteachers than ever before. It is incumbent upon society to support and nurture the best leadership talent, throughout a teacher's career including beyond appointment to headship.

39. If we are to keep headteachers as highly effective leaders, then the present ad hoc arrangements need to improve. The LPSH was valued as an opportunity to reflect on development and performance. However, in the absence of a replacement programme, a more structured approach with greater clarity on the roles of external reviewers, local authority link advisers and system leaders would benefit headteachers and facilitate reflection on their leadership.

40. For serving headteachers, governors, local authorities and national governments, an appreciation of the importance of maintaining healthy work-life balance and dedicated time for practising and developing leadership skills would also contribute to a supportive culture for our school leaders.

*Sustainable leadership systems know how to take care of their leaders and how to get leaders to take care of themselves. Unless reformers and policy-makers care for leader's' personal and professional selves, they will engineer short-term gains only by mortgaging the entire future of leadership.*¹³(p.8)

41. Serving headteachers also report that formal support such as mentoring by more experienced headteachers as well as both formal and ad hoc networking have also been beneficial in providing support and time to reflect on their own performance and development. New headteachers stated that they would also benefit from mentor support being in place from appointment, rather than from commencement of the role. In time, headteachers believe that the mentor relationship becomes one of partnership to aid self-reflection and to offer advice when needed.

*School systems which have succeeded in producing consistently good school leaders use a combination of formal training, apprenticeship, mentoring and networking of principals to help new and aspiring school leaders to develop the practical skills they need to do the job well.*¹⁴(p. 83)

*There is good evidence that leaders who engage in formal programs are more effective, particularly when the training they receive is of a high quality.*¹⁵

¹³ Hargreaves, A. and Fink, D. (2003). The seven principles of sustainable leadership. Educational Leadership

¹⁴ Whelan, F. (2009): Lessons learned: how good policies produce better schools.

¹⁵ McKinsey & Company. (2010). Capturing the leadership premium: How the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future

Recommendations

- ***There is a need for greater formal and national support for serving headteachers in Wales. A programme of structured professional development with an emphasis on reflection should form a core part of this.***
- ***Council believes that there is a case for extending the mentoring period for newly appointed headteachers into a career-long approach. This mentoring should be available from appointment to, rather than commencement of, the post.***
- ***Council advocates an entitlement to support from within professional learning communities of headteachers and other leaders.***