

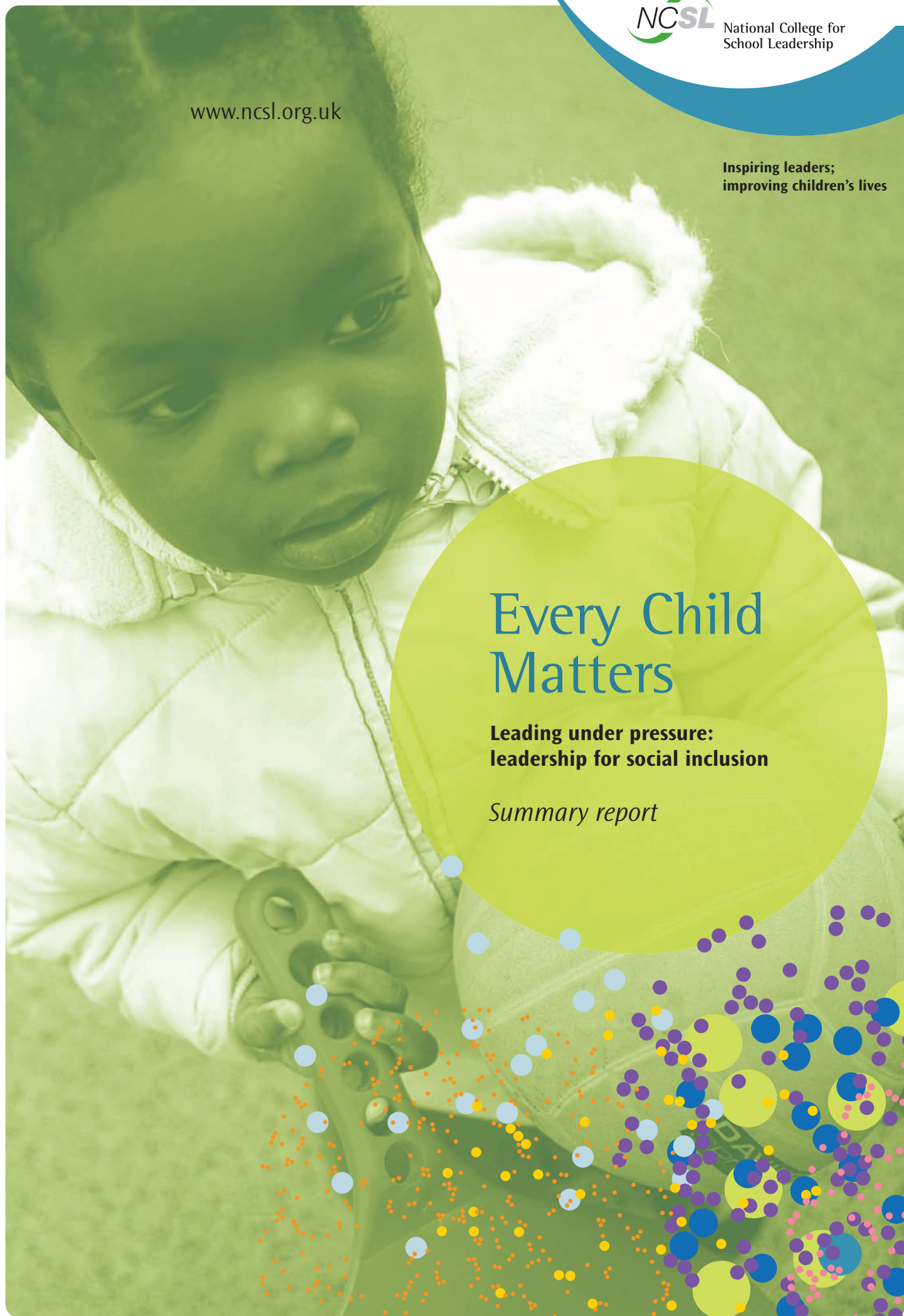
www.ncsl.org.uk

Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

Every Child Matters

**Leading under pressure:
leadership for social inclusion**

Summary report



Authors: Daniel Muijs, Mel Ainscow, Alan Dyson, Carlo Raffo, Sue Goldrick, Kirstin Kerr, Clare Lennie and Susie Miles, *Centre for Equity in Education, The University of Manchester*

While a lot is known about leadership and school effectiveness, there has traditionally been a tendency to generalise findings from effectiveness research across contexts in a way that does not take into account issues of social inclusion or the context of schools serving disadvantaged communities. In this study, we looked at leadership issues specifically in relation to social inclusion, through a series of six case studies in three districts showing high levels of disadvantage. In these schools, we interviewed the head, senior managers, middle managers, classroom teachers, pupils and where possible, parents.

Findings indicated that schools' views on social inclusion could be mapped around three main concerns:

- 1. Improving achievement and qualifications for all social and ethnic groups.**
- 2. Overcoming barriers to learning existing within particular groups.**
- 3. Enhancing other capacities and skills of children from disadvantaged groups.**

All schools in this study showed elements of all three viewpoints, but some were far more strongly oriented towards one of these foci than to others. All schools were concerned with improving achievement, but while some saw this as their only focus, others added a concern with overcoming barriers to learning. The former schools tended to work mainly on within school factors, creating an orderly climate for learning and clear, consistent procedures on teaching and learning. The latter tended to be more strongly involved in activities intended to act on external school factors that impact on learning, investing in activities like parental literacy and pupils' health and emotional well-being.

In a third type of school the emphasis, as well as on achievement, was on additional factors that were seen to aid social inclusion, such as culture and social skills. In these schools, a lot of attention was given to activities that widen experiences and to developing social skills that were seen as important to allowing pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds to be fully integrated into society and the labour market.

The orientation of schools to these three concerns was related to their interaction with community and non-school agencies. Schools that were very achievement-oriented (type I schools) tended to be less oriented towards the community. Many type I schools saw the school as a fortress or cathedral, aiming to keep out negative community influences, such as gang culture. Schools with an orientation towards overcoming barriers to learning (type II schools) tended to work quite closely with agencies such as social services, health services and Connexions to address health, social and emotional barriers to learning that the school could not deal with on its own. Schools with a strong focus on additional capacities (type III schools) saw themselves most strongly as being at the heart of the community and working with community groups.

As well as the type of school in terms of social inclusion, the importance of the school's context is related to school-community interaction. Those schools that were most closely linked to their community served ethnically and religiously homogeneous populations. Although there were socio-economic disadvantages, there was also significant social and cultural capital, even if this cultural capital was not always that valued within the school system. It was far harder for schools to be linked to the community where it had little sense of identity and possessed very limited social capital, or where schools served such diverse and varied groups in terms of ethnicity and religion that the question 'what community?' arises.

The main factor that influenced leadership in these schools is the extreme pressure schools were under. In all cases, the standards and accountability agenda combined with the social disadvantage in the area meant that pressure to perform at adequate levels was unrelenting. It also meant that schools constantly faced dilemmas, such as the tension between the standards agenda and social inclusion. Solving these dilemmas was a key leadership task. Leadership was strongly engaged with meaning making around such issues as:

- **What kind of school shall we be?**
- **How to lead staff under pressure?**

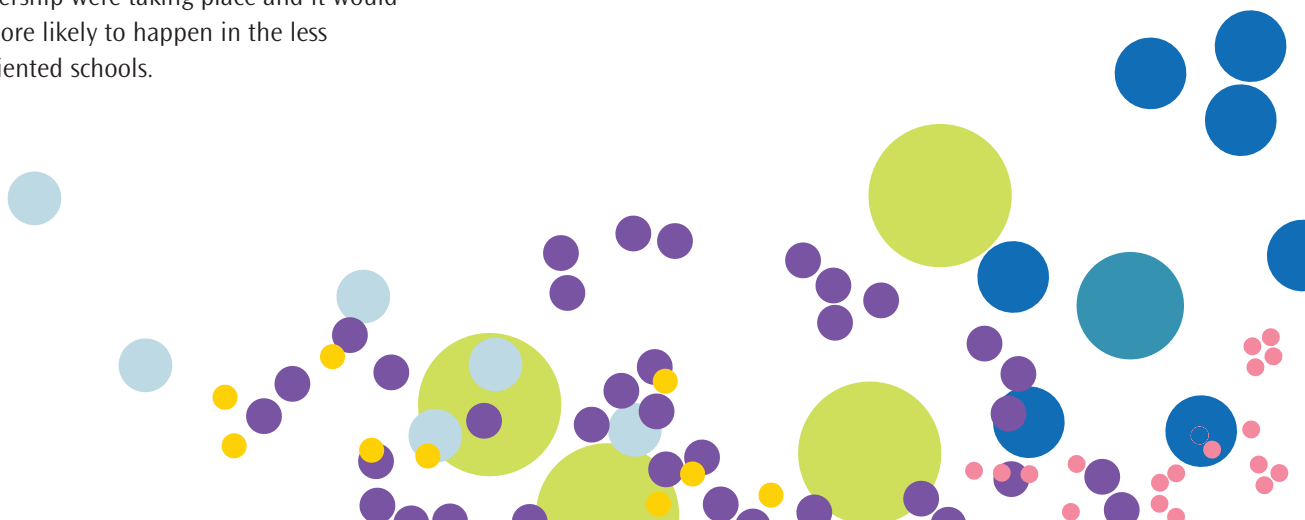
Creating a common meaning was something all heads have done in these schools, through combinations of imposition, staff changes, negotiation and discussion.

In terms of leadership, the importance of the role of the head was obvious in all these schools. In all cases the head was the meaning-maker, whose vision on social inclusion was that of the school. Furthermore, it was clear that the heads in these schools generally exercised strong directive leadership and were only belatedly, if at all, moving towards more distributed forms of leadership. This emphasis on strong leadership, especially when heads first came into the school, was linked to the strong pressure schools and leaders were under in these challenging circumstances. Schools serving these disadvantaged communities are constantly under threat (often literally), so ensuring the survival of the school through making sure that processes are put in place to 'turn it around' is essential. Strong leadership from the head appears to be necessary in these circumstances. In some of these schools, moves towards distributed leadership were taking place and it would appear this is more likely to happen in the less achievement-oriented schools.

School leaders at all levels had taken part in forms of leadership development, most commonly NPQH, and this was generally considered useful, though the extent to which this type of leadership development had been sufficiently contextualised for these particular schools was disputed. Many respondents expressed a preference for forms of mentoring and experiential leadership development when it came to enhancing leadership for social inclusion.

The key issue for leadership development in these schools was the extent to which mechanisms could be built-in to help heads lead under pressure and aid with issues of succession and context. The importance of these issues means that leadership development needs to take place at least partly in the contexts that heads are going to lead. This links leadership development closely to succession planning. Building in a period of pre-headship work in the schools would allow potential school leaders time to adapt to the context. Mentoring, shadowing and preparation meetings could support this process.

In some cases, this could potentially happen in the school to be taken over. However, not all schools have the capacity to provide strong leadership development and the context of the area as a whole may be ignored in an overly school-based approach. Networks of schools, such as federations, may be the way forward in providing the context for this type of leadership preparation. However, in order to fulfil social inclusion goals, such networks should include agencies outside of the school, such as social services, as well as agencies working within the school.



Further Information

For printed copies of this publication, please visit **www.ncsl.org.uk/publications** and complete an order form. It is also available to download for free from this address, together with a full report and literature review.

Printed on environmentally friendly paper

**National College for
School Leadership**
Triumph Road
Nottingham NG8 1DH

T: 0845 609 0009
F: 0115 872 2001
E: enquiries@ncsl.org.uk
W: www.ncsl.org.uk