NCSL National College for School Leadership

Research Associate Report

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Rethinking middle leadership roles in secondary schools

This report examines how schools have shifted the focus of middle leaders from management to leadership

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Overview

This case study is based on an internal review of one secondary school's pastoral and curriculum leadership.

The guiding research questions were:

- How have shifts in pastoral and curriculum leadership impacted on staff and their relationship with senior leaders?
- In what ways can these roles be developed to further enhance teaching and learning?
- How do staff in traditional middle management roles successfully negotiate the transition from management to leadership?

The research process

The research took place during the spring term of 2005. All middle managers completed a detailed diary of their daily activities for a week; in this way coverage of a complete half term was acquired for both heads of house (HOH) and heads of faculty (HOF). In the week following this each middle manager took part in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45 minutes.

The context

Ashfield School is a 2,400-strong technology college located in the East Midlands. It was one of the first purpose-built comprehensives in Nottinghamshire. It has a staff of 160 that is spilt between a very stable group of people who have spent the majority of their working life at Ashfield and a very large number of recently qualified staff. A very high proportion of middle and senior leaders fall into the first group. (See Appendix 1 for the management structure of the school.) Rapid expansion over the past few years has led to an increase in both student and staff numbers. The school structure from Year 7–11 is currently based around eight faculties (English, Maths, Science, Technology, Creative Arts, Humanities, Modern Languages and PE) and six houses. The school also has a rapidly expanding post-16 centre that currently has 385 students.

Like all other schools Ashfield School has undergone many changes since the 1988 Education Act and the pace of change shows no sign of slowing. The school became a technology college in 1998 and results have steadily increased from 32% in 1999 to 46% 5 A*–C grades in 2004. The school has 14.3% free school meals, which is around the national average.

Statistical data for Ashfield 2004					
SATs All school comparison	English	C	SATs Similar intake comparison by prior attainment	English	A
	Maths	D		Maths	C
	Science	D		Science	B
	All core	C		All core	B
GCSE All school comparison	5 A*–C	C	GCSE Similar intake comparison by prior attainment	5 A*–C	A
	5 A*–G	B		5 A*–G	A
	1+ G	A		1+ G	A*

The school has tried to maintain a balance between embracing new initiatives and allowing time for consolidation and review. Ashfield School is a very vibrant place with a range of new buildings to support developments within the classroom. While any improvements and development at Ashfield School are down to the collective efforts of all staff, the changing leadership roles within the school have clearly had a pivotal effect. Again, in common with many schools, Ashfield has been moving through changes in the leadership and management of the school. The senior management team underwent change and review in 2001 and has become a leadership team with re-designated job descriptions to reflect their key role in developing teaching and learning and a move away from the more traditional administration roles that they previously fulfilled. In an allied process the middle management team has also experienced much change in the scope and requirements of their role. However, a review and evaluation of the roles of middle managers has not been carried out.

School structure

Ashfield School is structured around eight faculties and six houses plus a post-16 centre. This creates two distinct groups of people: HOF and HOH. All staff within the school have responsibility to both groups as class teachers and tutors. The two groups are very different to each other and while they both work for the collective advancement of the students and the school and come together at school management meetings, by and large they operate as distinct entities.

Heads of house

Each of the six HOH in the main school has overall responsibility for the welfare and development of 400 students from Years 7–11. The head of post-16 has responsibility for all post-16 students within the school. This group has been in this post ranging from 30 to 2 years. Taking out the longest serving member of this team the average number of years in post is 5. Six of these staff have followed a pastoral career path, often gaining their position as HOH very early in their teaching careers. All staff bar one were promoted from within the school.

Each HOH has a deputy and a tutor team of 12.

Heads of faculty

Each of the eight HOF has overall responsibility for the leadership and management of their subject area throughout Key Stages 3, 4 and 5. This group consists of eight men who have been in post ranging from 20 to 2 years. Seven members have been in post for 12 years or more. Taking out the shortest serving member of this team the average number of years in post is 16.5. All of these staff followed a curriculum career path, working their way through a variety of responsibilities and often schools, before gaining the post as HOF at Ashfield.

Each HOF has a deputy and a range of other staff within their team with specific responsibility points. Faculties range in size from 8 to 16 full-time members of teaching staff.

Impact of shifts in pastoral and curriculum leadership on middle leaders

At Ashfield School all HOH/HOF are on four management points with an additional allowance of £1,002, and parity is maintained with non-contact periods with all teaching 21/30 periods per week. The majority of HOH received much of their training on the job via their previous roles as deputy HOH within the school. HOF received their training through the various responsibility posts they had such as head of subject or head of department.

Very few of the middle managers have any extensive leadership or management training, with HOH having had more training than HOF. Indeed four HOF and one HOH had no training at all, with the majority of the training being out-of-school courses lasting a single day or less. Only three people had completed any qualifications in leadership and management and two of these were based outside of the education field. This matches the general findings from Wise and Bennett (2003) in which they commented that many middle managers had not undergone any extensive leadership and management training. However, in comparison with the findings of Wise and Bennett, the HOF in Ashfield in particular compare much less favourably than the HOH. (See Appendix 2 for comparison figures.) This year, the school has, however, embarked on 'Leading from the Middle' training with six middle managers enrolled. Little comment was made on the influence of this training and this may be due to the fact that it is still ongoing and has therefore not become embedded into practice.

Shifts in the role of head of house

Their traditional role

Even seven years ago the HOH held a very traditional pastoral role, whereby they were responsible for the welfare of the students and student discipline throughout the school. Their role has variously been described as a "tampax issuing, nose wiping, bottom-wiping role". A reoccurring description was one of a "firefighter" who merely waited and reacted to events as they occurred. HOH were also viewed as the main enforcers of discipline throughout the school, acting as troubleshooters, dealing with problems as they arose. In fact the six houses were previously described as operating as six schools in miniature, with the HOH acting as head of their own school operating within differing parameters.

Tracking and monitoring academic performance

A huge shift in emphasis was reported from all HOH. The key turning point appears to have been around six years ago when it was decided that the role needed to move much more towards tracking and monitoring academic performance, a move that preceded the Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) debate by a number of years. Indeed five of the seven staff have been appointed since this change and therefore their understanding of the job that they took on should have fully reflected this change. The descriptions used to describe the role of HOH today included: "the whole welfare of the students including monitoring and mentoring and tracking data"; "responsible for academic progress and achievement"; "focus on teaching and learning, tracking and supporting academic progress"; "raise standards of achievement"; and "academic focus on target setting". Many HOH commented that they felt that their jobs were now much more proactive and that they could structure and plan for the support and intervention strategies that needed to be adopted for individuals based on the wealth of tracking data that they now had access to: "Majority of those [student conversations] are to do with academic progression"; "It is

far more possible now to structure our day"; "The key question is what are you adding to student academic progress?".

Impetus for change

The impetus for this change appears to have come from a number of fronts including: the whole school review carried out by the arrival of a new headteacher; a desire to have all houses working to a common strategy; a desire by the HOH and HOF to re-designate their roles so that discipline was shared between them; and to allow HOH to share in the academic target setting.

Other impetus for change included:

- a desire to set in place a whole school behaviour policy that included a variety of layers of action rather than moving straight to sending students to HOH;
- adoption of Bromcom to allow attendance and related data to be collected each lesson;
- initial development of predictive and tracking data, such as CATs tests, and regular collection of Effort and Attainment grades, along with advancing technology that allowed effective collection, distribution and use of such data;
- a desire to allow all staff to focus on teaching and learning within individual classrooms that required HOH to incur less interruption to their teaching.

Clearly all of these changes also had an impact on the role of HOF as they had to take on board more of the responsibility for behaviour within their areas and throughout the whole school.

Impact on the head of house

All HOH acknowledged the academic monitoring and tracking focus of the role that they had today. Indeed for the majority of the staff it was the first aspect of their role that they mentioned when asked to describe their current role. However, the job description of a HOH is still more orientated towards discipline and attendance monitoring rather than academic tracking. Equally, while this academic focus was clearly evident in the interviews and is obviously at the forefront of the majority of HOH beliefs about their role, the log of weekly activities displayed a very different emphasis in the majority of cases. The vast majority of time was spent on the more traditional activities associated with a pastoral role, with a considerably smaller amount of time spent on tracking and supporting academic performance in most cases during the diary weeks. A number of HOH commented on this throughout the interviews: "I try to be strategic but still end up reactive"; "But inevitably are crises that happen"; "It is reactive, but it is inevitable in a house of 400 plus"; "An event can occur that throws all of the planned work out of the window"; "[I would] love it to be more proactive, strategic and planned and that is what I think we strive for, the reality is, sadly, that it isn't, there are crises that have to be dealt with"; and "I do try to make that the focus of my role – supporting academic achievement".

There very clearly is a rhetoric-reality gap between what the HOH now understand what their role should focus primarily on and what the majority of them actually face on a day-to-day basis. All of the HOH discussed the role that they aspired to but all were at a loss to suggest how that could be achieved fully at the present time using the present systems.

Despite the best efforts of the HOH to focus on the entire range of students and issues, the majority of the students spoken to during any one day were for discipline issues, for example, following up incidents, signing and discussing reports, and the

majority of parents spoken to were to follow up behaviour issues. A number of HOH commented that they did try to speak to students who were doing particularly well or to try to make time to telephone the parents of such students. This aspiration was mentioned by a number of people in relation to the Effort and Attainment grade collections. However, they often felt that more negative aspects that they needed to follow up overtook such aims.

In contrast to a number of HOF, no HOH discussed their role in terms of an annual cycle of key events. When asked to describe a yearly overview it became evident that the global planning and structuring of the role of HOH has become more directed by key whole school events designed to support academic achievement. For example, the cycle of Effort and Attainment grade collections, the creation and support of the Year 11 mentoring groups and contact with the parents of these students, along with targeted support for particular year groups at certain points such as an increased focus on Year 9s in the second half of the spring term leading into SATs. However, the individual responses to these events was felt to vary across the houses with little uniformity of procedures evident. It was also commented on by two HOH that the main focus of their attention was directed towards Key Stage 4, possibly to the detriment of Key Stage 3.

The 'in-classroom monitoring and support' that did occur during the diary weeks was focused particularly on the Year 11 critical groups (those students identified for additional support towards their GCSEs). Only one HOH reported that they supported and worked with tutors within the classroom during the week they completed the diary; this HOH also worked with a variety of students within classrooms during the week. However, this person did comment that this was only possible because it had been "a good week"; the classroom support could easily have been derailed if an event had flared up during the week.

Therefore, while monitoring and mentoring were stated as the primary parts of the role today, all HOH acknowledged that this only proved to be the case if events of a more traditional pastoral nature did not occur during the course of the week. All of them were at pains to stress that such reactive pastoral support was essential to teaching and learning, in that it allowed students space to diffuse problems so that they were able to function effectively within a classroom setting:

> "I do feel though, that generally … the pastoral role can so easily be marginalised and pushed out with all the emphasis on academic achievement and target setting and all the rest of it … you've got to have students who are happy, who feel that they are valued, who feel that there are people they can speak to … won't get achievement just by sitting them in a room and testing them on one day if they are unhappy, sad, can't talk about things. I think that achievement is a social issue as well."

The central importance that they attached to the pastoral role was evident in the discussions about what they regarded as success in their role. Most HOH did mention in passing some element of data assessment, for example attendance figures or GCSE grades achieved. But far more discussion was devoted to more qualitative aspects of the role such as the quality of the relationship they had with students; if students felt able to discuss issues with them; if they felt that students would tell them the truth; or if they were able to prevent the same problem reoccurring with a particular student.

The weekly diaries of all HOH reflect a very time-pressured day in which they are bombarded with students at every minute, interspersed with telephone calls to parents. The highest number of recorded calls was 39 while the average number of recorded calls home was 22, and this probably under-estimates the figure as many diaries merely recorded that a number of calls were made in a given period rather

than stating how many were actually made. Three HOH commented that the role was not good for their health and that it was not a role to do for a long period of time. Indeed key points in the day such as break time and lunchtime that teachers often regard as non-contact points are actually the most busy and pressurised for the HOH. Going to the toilet and eating lunch were often events that were sacrificed! This then had a knock-on effect for their ability to get lessons organised and to get to the next lesson on time. Additional tasks that appeared to be the responsibility of the HOH, such as setting up and clearing away furniture for assemblies, also put pressure on their preparation and teaching time. This lack of time precludes any opportunity for prolonged reflection and much of the day appears to run via "thinking on their feet".

Support for changed role

Many HOH acknowledged that a lot of additional systems were now in place and that HOF did take on many behaviour issues. For example the school support system should now ensure that any students referred in lesson time are taken to the HOF rather than directly to the HOH, as was the norm. The majority of events should now be dealt with at a classroom level, with more serious issues going to HOF via a lesson-by-lesson named faculty support person. Ultimately if the system works properly only the most serious issues would then get referred on to HOH. However, this partnership was not felt to be uniformly applied by staff or across the faculties. One HOH commented that staff reaction to events varied between faculties: "there may be a lack of clarity about faculty policies, or there could be a lack of a faculty policy".

Individual staff appeared to have a tendency to bypass many of the systems and often go directly to the HOH. HOH reported throughout the day that they were stopped by staff in the corridor, telephoned and even had lessons interrupted by staff to report sometimes quite minor issues. A number of HOH commented that they did try to refer these people back through the correct system but that some staff appeared to take offence at such requests. Equally it appeared that HOH by and large did react to these direct approaches, thereby reinforcing in the minds of staff that this was actually the quickest and easiest way to pass an issue on. This not only meant that HOH took charge of an issue straight away but also resulted in additional work for them in that rather than the class teacher logging an issue it became the responsibility of the HOH.

Despite the desire to ensure that all staff could focus on classroom teaching there is still a tendency for HOH to have the vast majority of their lessons interrupted for one reason or another, by both staff and students. A number of HOH were noting down as unusual if they had a lesson that was not interrupted. While the nature of any middle manager role requires that some interruptions will occur, a disproportionate number seem to fall on HOH. Some of these interruptions were accounted for by the necessity for HOH to sign uniform notes and to see all students who felt sick, tasks that may be able to be performed by others outside of the classroom. HOH also reported being in the classroom less than HOF over the course of half a term. This is accounted for by the number of exclusion meetings that HOH attended that by necessity took them out of the classroom, along with meetings with parents, external agencies and other events that pulled them out of their classes, sometimes at very short notice. One HOH commented, "I would have to say that having me as a teacher probably puts students at a disadvantage". Whereas another mentioned, "I am rarely in the classroom before 9am". However, another noted that, "we are classroom teachers first and foremost, that's what the bulk of our salary is for, being in a classroom with classes".

Diminishing pastoral role of tutors

HOH commented that the decreasing tutor time had lessened the ability of the tutor to take a more lead role in dealing with issues. However, it was also acknowledged that the role of tutor at Ashfield had never been the first point of contact; the role of tutor was universally felt to be declining in importance. Since 2003 tutor time has been cut by 55 minutes a week to make space for the guidance programme. This was specifically referred to by all HOH as: "lost tutor knowledge"; "it takes tutors far longer to get to know the Year 7s"; "we have stripped away a layer"; "the role of the tutor has been marginalised"; and "tutors have a lot less knowledge of tutor group or what is going on in the lives of students". This perceived marginalisation of the tutor's role was a concern to many HOH. A number felt strongly that the role of the tutor required a higher profile, and that more training was required to ensure that people felt comfortable in the role.

The performance management system may indeed have reinforced this lack of pastoral priority. This system is run through a faculty line management system and therefore even HOH will have their reviews with their HOF leading, in reality, to the majority of targets focused on faculty teaching and learning, rather than supporting teaching and learning through the tutor role. Two HOH commented that pastoral professional development was focused only on those who expressed a keen interest rather than being of general availability and that this was an area that they felt they should perhaps get more involved in. The only other professional development activities carried out by tutors related to the development of the role of student mentor.

Two HOH did mention that the new guidance arrangements (a curriculum programme occurring each week for all students) had given mentoring an increased importance as timetabled time was now set aside for this to occur, rather than relying solely on staff goodwill at lunchtime. However, the wider Year 11 mentoring programme also continues to occur outside of guidance or other directed time although the arrangements for such mentoring appeared to vary greatly between houses.

Many of the things that HOH were asking tutors to do appeared to run on goodwill rather than a clearly defined tutor job description or allocated directed time. For example, the house meeting time is not a fixed, clearly defined part of a teacher's directed time but rather varies from house to house. However, key weekly information to staff continues to be passed though HOH via a weekly briefing with the leadership team that suggests that the school continues to regard this route an effective one for getting information to all staff.

Team leadership

In stark contrast to the HOF, HOH did not have the leadership and management of a team as a primary driving force of the role that they described or indeed of their daily activities. This was born out by their comments on their role concept. The literature describes the position of middle managers as ambiguous – neither a class teacher nor a member of the leadership team – but various descriptions include that of a 'player manager' and a 'buffer' between staff and leadership team. However, only one HOH was happy to accept the idea of a 'player manager', discussing instead their direct role with the students, again pointing to a lack of a team of staff to direct. Two HOH were reasonably happy with the concept of a 'buffer' but they translated this to mean a 'buffer' between students and staff or students and parents. One HOH did comment elsewhere that he saw his role as one of a communicator of school policy. No HOH acknowledged directly any role in ensuring that staff followed through school policies.

In addition to tutor time the guidance programme did not appear to allow for HOH to take a team leadership role. The HOH role was that of a logistical overseer, predominantly in relation to student organisation, for example, ensuring that students were in the right place and that particular students were able to access information in what were often very different groups using different teaching styles to that which they were used to.

A reoccurring theme throughout the interviews and logs of HOH is the fact that they appear to work very much in isolation. The role of the deputy HOH was referred to by a number of HOH, usually in relation to the fact that there were logistical problems in working closely together, often due to lack of time to meet and discuss issues. This time pressure was compounded by the fact that often the HOH and deputy HOH did not have any mutual non-contact time: "there is no pastoral awareness when the timetable is constructed, it is a complete fluke if you get any non contact that corresponds".

Head of house as high profile role

Despite many comments that the tutor role appeared to be diminishing in importance and a uniform concern that the new TLR points may have a detrimental impact on the importance of the pastoral role, all HOH commented that their role was very high profile within and outside of the school. Parents and students see HOH as the first point of call and as a fount of all knowledge, as indeed do the school staff and leadership team, which many felt was a reason why some school and faculty procedures were not followed, with staff directly passing issues to HOH in the corridor or during lesson time. HOH commented that they were still called into action to deal with whole school issues and that as a team they were regarded as 'enforcers' of whole school discipline: "Whenever major crises happen it's always the HOH who are summoned"; "We are called upon to man the battle stations".

Despite the change in job focus it may be that the school as a whole and indeed the HOH themselves have a tendency to slip back into seeing HOH as key discipline figures rather than as leaders of teaching and learning. This is particularly evident at certain points in the school day such as lunch and break times, assemblies and after school, with a HOH being on bus duty every night. Much of this reliance appears to be connected with the immense knowledge of the student body that the HOH have; however, such reliance also reinforces the notion to both staff and students that HOH deal with all student and particularly all discipline issues.

The HOH did regard themselves as being in a privileged and powerful position in the eyes of the students and their parents: "Students do think that the HOH is one of the most important people in school"; "Students think that we are omnipotent". In this way it was felt that they had a great deal of influence over the student in terms of behaviour and someone to whom the student would feel able to turn. HOH and HOF commented that students regarded the HOH as the second most important person in school to the headteacher. A number of people also commented that the role of HOF was largely invisible to a large number of students and their parents. However, the knock-on effect was that most issues relating to a student tended to be channelled though the HOH, an increasingly difficult task with numbers of 400 plus students within a house.

Whole school role

Unlike the HOF, the HOH did not comment specifically on whether their role had altered to take on board a greater whole school perspective. HOH clearly do have a requirement to consider all issues relating to the age groups that they focus on,

whether this be 11–16 or 16–19. As such they are key gatekeepers through which most whole school decisions need to be discussed with before successful implementation can occur. Many HOH are also members of strategic groups having a whole school involvement via this avenue.

Distributed leadership

HOH did not appear to have many uniform procedures across the houses and the course of many events was left to their individual professional judgement. This provided the HOH with a great deal of autonomy and indeed was the aspect that appealed about the role to a number of them, but this has meant that the desire to have one set of systems throughout the school does not yet appear to have been achieved. HOH are still very autonomous in their actions and decision making and feel that their actions would be fully supported by the leadership team. However, it was felt that sometimes they experienced a lack of strategic direction. This again compounded the isolation of the role. One result of this working very much in isolation was that the HOH did look to each other for support and advice, much more so than the HOF. In this way some systems were seen to be becoming more uniform because they shared working practices and ideas with each other, although this was often in a more ad hoc, informal rather than a planned way. This informal support network appeared to offer the only avenue for reflection on a daily basis. Little mention was made of the relationship between the HOH and their line manager. However, two HOH did comment on the fortnightly meeting that they had individually with the headteacher.

What would enable a head of house to carry out their role more effectively?

More administration/clerical support: all HOH acknowledged the increasing administrative support that they now received but four of the group felt that a dedicated person who could work with them on a more continuous and individual basis would be the most efficient and effective way of working. Allied to this was an improved incident-recording system whereby incidents could be logged centrally.

Two deputies: due to the increasing numbers of students this was felt by four HOH to be a useful way forward. Indeed two people commented that a non-teaching deputy might provide a much wider to solution to many issues such as being required during lesson time. It was felt strongly by some that a teaching background was required in order to sympathise fully with the demands of students within a classroom setting compared to a counselling session on a one-to-one basis.

Enhanced tutor role: four HOH mentioned the role of tutors either in relation to training staff so that they were able to deal with more parental issues or enhancing the role so that tutors became the first point of contact both inside and outside of school.

Less teaching: this was split, with two HOH suggesting less teaching and two commenting that the current teaching load enabled them to maintain credibility within the classroom and to have a good understanding of the current issues facing both staff and students. One HOH suggested that deputies should have more non-contact time. Also allied to this was the suggestion that the spread of the teaching load could be redistributed to allow an even spread through the week and that HOH and deputy HOH should have some mutual non-contact time built into the timetable. A non-teaching deputy was a solution to this issue.

More non-teaching support: this related to both the needs for additional external agency support along with additional internal support. All of the external agencies

that HOH had to deal with were felt to be under-staffed or resourced, which put pressure back onto HOH. Internal support suggestions included a full-time school first aider or nurse who could send students home without referring to HOH, as well as more information technology (IT) technician support. Also allied to this was the suggestion for greater support in areas such as furniture moving that HOH did at least twice a week and often more.

Creation of more houses: three HOH commented specifically on the increasing numbers of students within each house resulting in the inability to get to know every student. One suggestion to overcome this issue was that of creating a further two houses, thereby reducing the numbers in each.

Structured training in leadership and management: while all HOH acknowledged that any specific training that they felt would be useful was available to them, it was felt that more structured and a whole school strategic approach to the training of all HOH would be beneficial. Two HOH commented on the fact that they had received no formal training before gaining the position of HOH, relying instead on their on-the-job training as deputy HOH.

Shifts in the role of head of faculty

Due to the length of time in post for the majority of HOF, going back to the role that they first took on causes two major difficulties. Firstly, that there is a danger that initial roles would be misremembered, and secondly, that there would have been a greater number and range of changes. HOF were therefore asked to predominantly concentrate on more recent changes, particularly the six/seven-year span that the HOH focused on.

Their traditional role

The majority of HOF commented that their role had initially been much more restricted, focusing mainly around the direct leadership of a single subject, along with a primary focus on their own classes: "The role was dominated by my own personal classes, what altered was the number of evening meetings"; "The bulk of the time was teaching and non-contact was administration"; "It seemed as though I had more time to mark and prepare work"; "In the past there was one change in thirty years, now it is much quicker"; and "It was an administration rather than a leadership role".

In contrast the role today was universally described as being much expanded in size, range and pace: "Much bigger role"; "The role has expanded and is much more focused on development … new things, new ideas"; "Greater whole school strategic input"; "Far more responsibility for the whole game"; "Greater piece of the action in initiating school change"; "The role is much more curriculum development based"; "Far more interaction with students both positive and negative"; "Role is to create a learning environment for all"; and "Far greater emphasis on leadership role, rather than just administration".

Rather than focusing on one key shift in the role, as HOH largely did, HOF reported a much wider range of changes that they felt had impacted on their role. These areas of change were not universally commented on by the HOF but included:

- the impact of the National Curriculum and changing examination and assessment demands;
- the development of the behaviour policy that had given HOF far more responsibility for behavioural management within their area;
- a much greater role in the professional development of their team, particularly with regard to performance management;

- a greater responsibility for teaching and learning, particularly with regard to the increased use of classroom observation;
- a greater whole school role including specific whole school responsibilities along with some greater input into strategic development;
- increasingly the requirement to manage change for themselves and their team.

Impetus for change

The impetus for change again appears to have come from a variety of sources, both internal and external. HOF predominately commented on external factors driving changes within their role such as ever-changing examination and assessment requirements along with shifting government directives. Internal drivers of change included the arrival of a new head but were more likely to be described as change coming from within the HOF or middle management group itself. Although it was commented that perhaps some issues that they believed were led by HOF were in fact probably initially encouraged by the leadership team.

Behaviour policy

Four HOF directly commented on the shift in emphasis with regard to behavioural and monitoring issues. This was commented on or referred to by all HOF at some point even if it was not identified as a key role change. This would suggest that all were aware of such a shift in role emphasis but that this has had varying degrees of impact on each individual's role requirements and tasks. Those who did comment directly on this saw it as a fundamental change to their role, working practices and relationship with HOH: "Previously there was a clear distinction, HOF – academic, HOH – pastoral, now roles have fused, with HOH taking on tracking and academic progress and HOF taking on a greater discipline role". By and large the HOF felt that this was the right way to proceed in that it shared out responsibility for behavioural issues rather than forcing all such issues into the hands of a small number of people: "If a child regularly forgot a pen it became a HOH problem … quite rightly a lot of these things now have been filtered out at faculty level and hopefully then HOH can concentrate on discipline issues that are quite fundamental to a child's success or failure in school generally".

The benefits to HOF were also commented on in that they felt it gave the HOH a greater role in directly supporting student progress within the classroom. A number of HOF also commented that the working arrangements allowed for a more united approach from the faculties and houses: "Because the HOF tend to deal with discipline rather than going to HOH I think that students are beginning to realise that HOH and HOF do play a similar role within the school"; "We now have shared care".

While the change was mainly felt to be positive, a few negative issues were raised. These included the fact that HOF may not be aware of the full background of a particular student and that this may mean that inappropriate action was taken. Along with the problems of communication within the school that meant HOF may not be aware of issues or actions other HOF were taking; the issue of increased interruptions to lessons was also commented on by many HOF [although those who did express this concern stated that it was a much bigger problem for HOH]. By and large HOF regarded the responsibility for behaviour and discipline in their areas as a key part of their role but in no way could the group be described as following identical procedures in this area. According to the diary records the time spent on such activities during the week also varied greatly between HOF.

Even with the described changes the HOF largely appeared to operate within the parameters that the HOH would still be the main port of call and have ultimate

responsibility for an individual student. The school systems were also felt to lead in this direction particularly with the courses of action open to pastoral and faculty heads: "HOH get a different perspective and also have sanctions that they can bring in straight away, such as send them home, which I cannot do". However, a number of HOF commented on the greater direct contact with parents that they now had, although the diaries reflected that this was not a huge commitment, with only eight reported telephone calls to parents over the half term compared to 155 for HOH. The HOF comments and diaries appeared to back up the HOH assertions that the response to behavioural matters varied dramatically between faculties.

Team leadership

The area of role change that was given far more priority by HOF was that of the increased demand placed on their leadership abilities within their teams. While HOH spent the vast majority of their non-teaching time with students and parents HOF spent the majority of non-teaching time talking to and working with faculty staff. A number of HOF appeared acutely aware of their increased responsibilities to support and assist the teaching staff in a whole range of areas. Team building and team support were the central features of the role that they described: "I am far more aware of my overall responsibility, my role within the faculty and towards students but also to whole welfare and staff development"; "The number one priority is the kids but the greatest asset is staff". The interactions with staff varied between passing comments and brief interactions in the corridor to much longer one-to-one sessions working on specific issues. This was also an aspect of the role that HOF commented could not, on the whole, be planned for but rather was often a reactive action taken as and when issues arose, for example: "intended to mark … but spent 45 minutes discussing coursework with a member of staff". A reoccurring reactive issue for the morning was the necessity to ensure that work for absent colleagues was appropriately set for each class and that full support was provided for cover teachers. The key non-contact points in the day such as before and after school and lunchtime were often spent liaising with staff and working through specific issues.

A number of HOF felt that they had a much greater role now in encouraging staff development, whether this be through team teaching, classroom observations, informal or formal discussions or strategies for empowering staff to take more responsibility for their own work. The fact that HOF were now challenged more about how they managed teams was mentioned, particularly with regard to the annual faculty reviews held with the headteacher and the faculty line manager.

The role of performance management was mentioned by a number of HOF. It was felt to have formalised activities that some felt had previously been carried out but in a more informal ad hoc manner. Staff now had a clearly defined annual structure with time built in to reflect and to raise issues with the HOF: "To make a difference between the maelstrom of the day to day … and setting aside some quality time to reflect on, and talk with people about, their developments … the performance management cycle is on the calendar so that at least gives a focus". The increased demands on HOF created by performance management were also mentioned but it was felt that the benefits outweighed the costs.

Elements of success in their role were also linked directly to the development of the faculty team. For example, success was "if staff felt that they were being supported and that an interest was being taken in the job that there're doing and the efforts that they are putting in"; "If I am running a fulfilled, successful team"; and "If staff are developed to the full".

Teaching and learning

A number of HOF directly mentioned support and monitoring of teaching and learning as an increased part of their role. Comments included that they felt more accountable for the teaching and learning across the whole faculty and that they were more aware of the need to allow the sharing of good practice. The vast majority of support and monitoring of staff took place outside the classroom. Although the aim of getting into a wide range of classes to support both staff and students was highlighted within discussions, only three HOF recorded within their diary week going into classrooms to offer such support. Direct observations of teaching and learning were even less evident, with only three such occurrences during the half term. All who discussed this issue were at pains to stress observation and in-classroom support as positive tools rather than crude monitoring tools, in that such work within the classroom allowed for the sharing of good practice and for developing skills through team teaching.

Despite many HOF reporting an increased importance in this area it did not appear to be occurring as a regular weekly feature, again highlighting a reality-rhetoric gap. Two HOF stated that this was an area within their role that required a higher profile in that, with the exception of timetabled annual performance management observations, currently any other in-classroom work had to take place during non-contact periods. Therefore only certain periods were available to begin with and such work would be sacrificed if other more 'urgent' events cropped up. This difficulty in supporting students and staff had been highlighted during this academic year when a particular focus was placed on a group of Year 11 critical students. A number of HOF discussed their desire to actively support and monitor these students, yet felt that logistical difficulties prevented this from occurring with as much regularity as they would wish. However, this difficulty has been addressed via a whole school approach for the next academic year. All faculties have been allocated four timetabled support periods per week from September. One HOF in particular discussed at length how these periods were to be utilised within their faculty to allow for sustained support by particular members of staff throughout the year. This was felt to directly address the problems identified and to provide a clear school priority about the importance of supporting and developing teaching and learning from within the classroom. It was also noted that each faculty had worked in isolation on the use and allocation of the support periods and that greater discussion between the HOF may have allowed for the sharing of ideas and good practice and may have allowed for a greater commonality of approach.

All HOF were passionate about their subject area and were anxious to support teaching and learning developments. Four HOF in particular were at pains to stress how important they felt that it was for them to remain within the classroom to ensure that ideas were firmly rooted within the classroom experience. It was seen to be a fine balance between giving people the time they required to develop teaching and learning while still maintaining credibility as a classroom teacher. The background of the majority of HOF within Ashfield as career HOF (those who have made a deliberate and conscious decision to develop their career within a particular role rather than seeking other roles) would seem to be the driving force behind this perspective.

Curriculum development

Curriculum development was an area of the role that was felt to be vital, yet could often be pushed out by more routine matters. Three HOF reported in their diaries engaging directly with some form of curriculum development during the week. However, others commented on the lack of quality time that they felt was available to allow such work to occur as a regular part of the working week, although the linking of more routine events such as stock ordering as a vital component of curriculum development was made by one HOF. It may be that many more developmental

events are occurring through the week but are not directly regarded as such. Also within faculties curriculum development is often devolved to a wide range of others rather than being the sole preserve of the HOF.

Administration

The administrative element of the role certainly appeared to have changed although HOF were not unanimous in their interpretation of this. The general feeling seemed to be that some routine administration had gone, yet appeared to have been replaced with a whole raft of additional requirements. Some of this seemed to be related to the growing size of the school, which meant that some HOF commented that they never felt on top of the requests for information, which they often felt was required on a very tight deadline: "Can be so overburdened with admin and paperwork – it's hard to get to the development of teaching and learning". The majority of the HOF received no direct clerical or administrative help, although all acknowledged that work could be requested to go through the office. However, much clerical work was done themselves as they felt that it was quicker and easier than explaining to others what needed to be done.

External factors

HOF did report a perceived increase of external influence in their role. Many changes were being created from outside of the school and they had to try to keep up to date with ever-shifting requirements, particularly with regard to examinations and courses. In many ways HOF were constantly forced to look outside of the school and maintain an external perspective to their role. To this end examination results were a central part of the role concept that the HOF held – most HOF mentioned increasing results as a key part of the success criteria that they used for their role.

Whole school role

The majority of HOF reported that they now felt they had a greater role in whole school issues and that a corresponding shift had occurred within the relationship between the leadership team and the middle managers. This whole school role was seen to involve a greater ability to put forward ideas and to take charge of initiative development rather than having initiatives passed down that they then had to drive through. The dialogue with the leadership team was seen now to be more two-way, rather than top-down.

One such area of work that was commented on was strategic group membership. This was seen as a way of working with colleagues from across the school and leading certain initiatives: "Students see me in a different light – maybe helps to be seen as a middle manager and not just as a head of subject". The work that had been done to gain technology status was seen as one area where HOF had taken an initiative alongside the leadership team in order to meet the external requirements. It had also placed a requirement to look at faculty issues in a more whole school strategic manner. The creation of smaller working groups within the curriculum group, with the aim that HOF would take the initiative in key developmental areas of the school strategic plan, was also discussed by a number of individuals. HOF appeared to have appreciated the ability to set their own agendas and to work directly with other HOF. However, while the principle of such a system was welcomed, little comment was made about any outcome.

The increased whole school role, while regarded as a way of influencing matters beyond the narrow confines of the faculty and professionally rewarding, was not universally welcomed. Even those HOF who felt that this whole school role was very important and that it allowed for greater job satisfaction commented that it required

greater effort, in that such initiatives were often added on top of existing role requirements. Therefore, by taking on a greater whole school role some attention and effort became diverted away from teaching and learning within the faculty. Conversely some HOF also felt that their role had not really moved towards a greater whole school strategic input and they could not identify any such aspects within their current role.

Distributed leadership

Some HOF felt that the management system had become flatter and that it was moving further in this direction: "Think they [leadership team] have a strong belief in leadership from the middle". This was borne out by the belief of the HOF that the leadership team was happy to support any initiatives that they had and that they were available when needed. The HOF, while not appearing to have as much autonomy in their daily course of actions as HOH, did appear to exercise a great deal of independence within faculty issues. They were happy to take day-to-day decisions and felt that the leadership team would back these up: "I think they invest a lot of trust and faith in us and give us as much support as they think we need in order to carry out that responsibility". However, there was also a feeling that the HOF could be come overburdened at certain points in the year and that sometimes there was a perceived lack of recognition from the leadership team of the demands that were placed on individuals.

Management of change

A final key area of development in the role that was mentioned was that of the ability to manage change for themselves and their team. All HOF had commented on a wide range of changes that they felt had impacted on their role in recent years; in turn they saw as a central part of their role the ability to ensure that they supported their team in adapting to these changes. This ability was also regarded as being essential over the next few years as the school embarks on a range of potentially far-reaching initiatives particularly focusing on vocational subjects. One HOF commented on a perceived lack of preparation to manage such change effectively. This can be linked back to a widespread lack of recent leadership and management training among HOF. It was felt that while training was readily available if requests were made, little whole school provision was offered to ensure that all HOF accessed a structured programme of training geared towards the particular aims of the school strategic plan. HOF often appeared to direct faculty members towards further training and professional development, possibly at the expense of their own development . Individual performance management interviews with faculty line managers may not pick up professional development needs that focus on a more whole school basis.

The desire to manage change effectively was also evident in the role concept that HOF described. In contrast to the HOH, HOF were on the whole happy to accept the concept of 'player manager'. All of those who addressed this question felt that it reflected the role they had in that they felt strongly that they could lead by example: "We are on the front line, you're having to contribute your bit, you face the same problems as everybody else, and therefore it makes you sharply aware of what the problems are and then you're trying to coordinate a strategy that everybody uses to become more effective"; "Everything that you ask them to do you do that little bit more". A number of HOF did comment on the middle position that they felt they occupied as people whose responsibility was to reflect whole school decisions and procedures even if they did not fully match their own beliefs. Again, in contrast to HOH, they did comment on and perceive a responsibility to ensure that members of their team followed whole school policies.

What would enable heads of faculty to carry out their role more

effectively?

More administration/clerical support: all HOF commented that the thing that would ensure that they could fulfil their role more effectively was faculty-specific non-teaching support. Tasks included in this were those of an administrative nature but also the idea of a non-teaching person who could deal with certain faculty issues as and when they arose. The concept of a faculty technician was referred to frequently, a person who could work with the HOF on a more continuous and individual basis. However, HOF would require support and training to ensure that any such person was used to maximum effect.

Improved communication systems: as the school continues to expand the logistics of keeping in contact with people grows. A working email system used by all or equivalent was suggested.

More time for developing teaching and learning: this was described in various ways as quality thinking time, time for staff to share good practice and for development, along with more timetabled time to allow observation to be a regular part of a week. Two HOF commented that the school was getting to the point that the staff could not effectively use the amount of resources that they now had available to them. (A fact that will amaze many other schools.) There was an urgent need for time to allow people to learn how to effectively use such resources within the classroom. Despite the request for more time, the HOF were split as to how this could be arranged. Some felt that less teaching was an answer but the majority felt that the current teaching load was a key part of their middle management role in that it kept them rooted in the classroom. One suggestion was for HOF to not have sole responsibility for a tutor group. This would create a space where HOF could access students from across the school. A further suggestion was for faculties to have more control over their time to allow them to focus on teaching and learning rather than finding faculty meeting time and INSET time had been pre-allocated to set issues.

Improved ICT: both to assist in the administration of the faculty and the school, but also to ensure that high quality teaching and learning using ICT could take place. The increased provision of ICT technicians was also included here.

Greater flexibility in point allocation: three HOF felt that a greater number of faculty points would be useful to allow specific responsibilities to receive financial reward, particularly in view of the expansion of students and staff numbers. The ability for HOF to be more flexible in the allocation of points within their faculty was also felt to be a way forward rather than a more rigid whole school system that did not appear to suit the needs of all faculties.

Further training/dissemination of training: this was particularly mentioned as training in relation to whole school strategic issues such as the move towards vocational education and further developing teaching and learning. It was felt to be important that any such training targeted all HOF. It was also highlighted that mechanisms for sharing the outcomes of individual training between HOF or across faculties were not highly developed. This resulted in some lost opportunities and/or knowledge.

Negotiating the transition from management to leadership

It is apparent that the pastoral and curriculum roles at Ashfield School have undergone widespread development and change over the past few years. Many of the issues facing Ashfield and the middle managers reflect the national findings on the topic. The National College for School Leadership (NCSL) thinkpiece on *Middle level leaders* by Dr Tony Bush highlights and discusses many of the points raised in this case study; for example, the increasing importance of managing teams, the swing from managing resources to managing people, along with highlighting the major difficulty in creating the necessary quality time to allow such events to occur. The conclusion from this work that middle level leaders have undergone changed attitudes rather than necessarily changed actions would seem to be reinforced by the findings from Ashfield. Many of the practical suggestions put forward in the NCSL publication *The heart of the matter* (Martin and Williams 2003) mirror the findings from this evaluation. These include the increased focus on learning and teaching and the desire to generate positive relationships within teams. Many of the other strategies for improvement suggested in this document are those that the personnel within Ashfield wished to adopt, such as creating more time for collaboration and distributing leadership via team building. The study of leadership in 21 secondary schools as part of the Learning Centred Leadership resources highlights schools who are maybe further down the path of middle leadership but that nevertheless must have begun with many of the same discussions and changes in role that are in evidence at Ashfield.

What is apparent is that middle managers at Ashfield do not regard themselves as middle leaders; nor do they feel that the leadership team or the staff regard them in their present roles as middle leaders. Some of this may be a vocabulary discussion that may not in itself be important but very few of those interviewed were happy to use the term 'middle leader'. If the school wishes to embrace fully the notion of a middle leadership team driving forward teaching and learning initiatives it may be considered necessary to move to this terminology.

The research at Ashfield also highlights the fact that many of the changes that were being described were of the gradual evolutionary type rather than a pre-planned shift in job descriptions. As such many developments are not uniformly applied across the school. It may be that the TLR review would be an ideal opportunity to have a whole-scale look at the job descriptions and beliefs that people have about their role, as well as allowing the school to consider what expectations it has of such post holders and whether these expectations are realistic and meet the current needs of the school. This review would allow for a reassessment of role requirements in light of the expanded school numbers. It would also allow an in-depth discussion to take place as to exactly what is expected of each role and allow post holders and the leadership team to reassess their priorities in light of the whole school strategy to ensure greater uniformity.

There is clearly a reality-rhetoric gap at the moment between what the majority believes that the roles they fulfil should focus on and what they are faced with on a day-to-day basis. To some extent this may always be the case; events will always occur within school that require immediate action. However, it may be in reviewing job descriptions that a greater balance between intention and action can be achieved.

It is also apparent that the HOH and HOF operate very much as distinct entities, often only interacting in their own roles as faculty teacher or tutor. A lack of perception exists between the two groups as to the exact nature and requirements of each role particularly in terms of any recent changes. However, some recent initiatives within the school have led to greater team working such as the drive on

punctuality and the Year 9 and 10 interviews. Such cooperative working should only enhance the level of understanding of the roles and ensure a more cohesive approach.

The relationship between the leadership team and the middle leaders also appears to be an area requiring review, as again any changes here were felt to be of an evolutionary kind. It may be that a more formal review would allow for greater clarity in the operation of a leadership and middle leadership team as well as refocusing the purpose and expectations of the line management system.

The continued professional development of the middle leaders is an area that needs to be considered. The impact of the first cohort of 'Leading from the Middle' training, which involved both pastoral and curriculum leaders, should be evident in the following months. It may be that this would provide an ideal training opportunity and that it could be made available to all middle leaders over the next few years. There is also a wealth of material regarding middle leadership being produced currently at NCSL that could effectively be used by Ashfield.

Developing the roles into the future

What next steps does Ashfield need to take to continue the movement from middle management to middle leadership in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning?

Below, the perspectives of two experienced heads who have led innovative developments in their own pastoral and curriculum structures are described.

Commentary from Paul Grant, Headteacher of Robert Clack Comprehensive School

Robert Clack is a comprehensive school in Dagenham with 1,700 students, 300 of whom are in post-16. The school has 36% free school meals and 30% special educational needs (SEN). In 2003 the school became a specialist school for science. There has been a substantial increase in higher grade passes particularly in the past two years. Ofsted comment that "the quality of leadership and management at all levels … is very good".

Paul commented that there seemed to be many similarities between Robert Clack and Ashfield in terms of middle leadership and recent developments within these roles. He felt that the phenomenon of career faculty and pastoral heads was one that would be familiar in many schools.

One solution at Robert Clack to the issue of middle leaders and pastoral staff in particular incurring interruption to their teaching was that of the creation of a pupil referral unit and/or a learning support centre. At Robert Clack the existence of these two areas allows for a supervised location for students to be taken to before further support or investigation can be instigated. In this way teaching staff are not routinely interrupted and quality time can be given to finding a solution to an issue rather than trying to quickly come up with a temporary solution.

The issue of a diminishing tutor role was again one that resonated with events at Robert Clack. Paul commented that while tutors were "encouraged to become actively involved" in issues, this was becoming more problematic. Issues surrounding the remodelling agenda have impacted greatly on many of the roles traditionally assigned to the tutor. Paul felt that direct tutor involvement in many student issues would become "an ever-decreasing part of a teacher's role", and that such issues in some schools are becoming more likely to be devolved to non-teaching staff or to external agencies.

Paul concurred with the view that two deputy HOH may well provide a way forward to some of the issues highlighted by the case study; however, he stressed that such a role often runs the danger of "lacking clarity of purpose". He felt that pastoral assistants in particular required very clear role expectations in order to allow them to be as effective as possible.

One way that Robert Clack aims to focus whole school attention on pastoral issues and behaviour management in particular is through the existence of a pastoral committee. The pastoral committee initially met weekly until embedded and now meets every three weeks and is chaired by Paul. All leadership team members, heads of year, head of SEN, learning support leaders and learning mentors attend this group with the aim of distributing the support that is provided. In this way the pastoral role is less likely to become isolated within the hands of a few individuals. A further advantage of this group in Paul's view was that it reinforced the idea that "behaviour management is everybody's concern", from each member of the school

leadership team, through the pastoral and department heads, along with all teaching staff and support staff. Paul commented that such a system relied heavily on the working relationship between the heads of year and the SEN team. In this way inconsistencies in approach across the school were felt to be reduced.

In relation to faculty heads it was apparent that many of the issues surrounding the generation of capacity to allow events such as supporting teaching and learning within classrooms were the same at Ashfield and Robert Clack. Paul felt that an issue for all school leaders was how this increased capacity would be most effectively used, monitored and evaluated.

In terms of the debate about the concept of middle leader, as at Ashfield, this was not a term used at Robert Clack. Rather such staff carry the titles of head of year and head of department. Paul put forward the interesting notion that the terminology of 'middle leader' could have a negative effect on many of the people who held such positions, particularly on the 'career' pastoral and faculty heads. The concept of 'middle' as an aspirational goal for teachers early in their career is clear. However, Paul felt that such terminology ran the danger of acting as a de-motivator for those further into their careers that have made a conscious decision to remain in one particular post.

In relation to the creation of distributed leadership Paul felt that the relatively small size of the leadership teams at Ashfield (seven members) and Robert Clack (five members) offered greater opportunity for other members of staff to take lead roles for particular issues. He argued that a very large leadership team ran the risk of disempowering others and creating top-down management at the very time when many people were looking to a more distributed style.

Commentary from Mr. J. Baumber, Executive Principle, The Brook Learning Partnership

The Brook Learning Partnership encompasses two schools. The first, Rivington and Blackrod High School, is an 11–18, 2,000-student technology college with training school status. The second, Ladybridge High School, is an 11–16, 700-student, new school. The catchment and student profile of the two schools differs radically. In 2004 Rivington and Blackrod High school achieved 52% 5 A*–C GCSE grades. John Baumber is the Executive Principle of both schools; in 2003 Ofsted commented "the Headteacher gives inspirational leadership to his school".

The approach of The Brook Learning Partnership to leadership and middle leadership in particular, appears to be very innovative and provides a working exemplification of many of the ideas that the present case study and other research into middle leadership has highlighted.

John commented that he believed that a move away from the traditional roles of pastoral and curriculum head had been achieved by radically altering the roles of senior leaders. At Rivington and Blackrod the assistant headteacher role has been transformed to one of director of learning, responsible for ensuring that the school mission statement is achieved and for the quality of teaching and learning within a given area. The role is to support the heads of department. This occurs through regular meetings, which are used to talk about what is being achieved and to uncover what, if any, further support is required. The role of director of learning changes in response to individual need, for example, moving along the continuum of support to intervention and back again as required. In this way John felt strongly that greater authority was given to the head of department: "Key role is not taking power away – it's a sort of subsidiary mode whereby decisions and leadership should be as close as possible to where the action actually is".

Time has been spent within the schools developing the capacity of individuals to take on leadership roles. There is a requirement that all heads of department, when appointed, take part in a year-long bespoke middle leadership programme. This involves a series of six inputs led by an external consultant, covering all aspects of leadership from visioning, to thinking strategically and through to implementation. One of the programme's strengths was felt to be the use of trained facilitators to meet and work with the individuals during this key first year of appointment. The programme was felt by John to "facilitate a view of working as a middle leader".

Such leadership capacity is also extended via in-house professional development programmes for emergent leaders. Any member of staff taking on a new responsibility post is required to undergo some sort of training within the first two years of post.

Indeed the focus on lifelong learning runs throughout the whole partnership. Both schools have as part of a teacher's weekly timetable periods specifically allocated to continuing professional development. At Ladybridge this takes the form of Tuesday afternoons whereby students take part in the University of the Third Age, enabling school-wide professional development time. At Rivington and Blackrod all teachers have one period a week allocated to individually tailored professional development. In this way John argued that teachers had the time to reflect on initiatives and allowed them to become fully embedded within practice.

Additional support for heads of department in moving teaching and learning forward is provided by the 10 advanced skills teachers, who lead not on subjects but rather on key learning areas, such as emotional intelligence, thinking skills and post-16 learning styles. The aim is that each department consists of a group of people who share good practice rather than dealing with administration.

John's belief about leadership is that "you have got to free people up so that they can actually take control". Each head of department is empowered to make decisions regarding the organisation and operation of their area. For example, departments are free to allocate responsibility allowances in a manner that reflects the individual needs, rather than operating on a fixed, whole school policy – the Science department has recently advertised for a 'science magician'. John stated that "I am very happy for people to be very creative in the way they run their departments, as long as the outcomes are there, I don't mind how they structure them". Such a belief, John argues, requires a philosophical leap for headteachers, leadership teams and middle leaders.

Such empowerment is enhanced through the effective use of lines of accountability. John commented that it was very rare that any innovative leadership ideas would be rejected; rather, clear review dates and targets would be set to allow the department to evaluate the initiative in order to assess the impact. Self-evaluation appeared to be a very strong theme running throughout The Brook Learning Partnership. Individuals and departments are constantly required to reflect on what is happening and to make adjustments in light of the findings.

It was clear that John felt that distributed leadership was the logical solution to effectively running a large school and eventually to the overall success of the Learning Partnership: "On a day-to-day basis it is a constant surprise to me when I go and talk to them [heads of department] about what they are doing, which I think is a good measure of distributed leadership".

In terms of pastoral responsibility within the school again a very different model from the traditional pastoral head and assistant leading a team of form tutors was in

evidence. A number of directors of learning have within their role Key Stage responsibility. Each year group also has a senior learning co-coordinator and a non-teaching senior support coordinator. Additional support is also provided for the Key Stage 4 students who follow more personalised learning pathways, for example those on an accelerated programme and those following a work-based learning programme. The role of the non-teacher is "to be behaviour coaches, mentors, to deal with all of those things that's its impossible to do if you are teaching 20 periods as well as being head of year".

In addition staff do not have the role of form tutor. Rather, each member of staff takes on the role of learning coordinator for a number of students, having as part of their timetable two periods per week dedicated for one-to-one mentoring. In this way the intention is to make sure that every learning coordinator is dealing with the lower-level issues that arise, identifying barriers to learning and taking the time necessary to mentor and work with students. John felt that this system addressed the traditional problematic scenario whereby a head of year was left trying to react to all issues as they arose: "We have tried to move the focus for those people to learning and not behaviour, behaviour may be one of the things that prevents the learning but that is the focus".

The Brook Learning Partnership appears to have tackled many of the issues raised within the case study, coming up with a range of innovative ideas centred on the notion of distributed leadership in order to enhance teaching and learning .

In conclusion

This study shows that these schools aim to focus on the learning and well being of every child. In order to do this they have remodelled such that:

- Subject and pastoral responsibilities become more integrated, in order to minimise the disruption of learning for the majority, and to deal proactively with (low level) barriers to learning and behaviour problems.
- More difficult behaviour problems have dedicated provision, with senior staff centrally involved in pastoral/behaviour provision, and supported behaviour management viewed as 'everyone's' concern – 'shared care'.
- Leadership development is provided to support senior and middle leaders in developing the appropriate skills and expertise.

The influence of senior leaders in shifting the focus of all middle leaders from management to leadership is central to this transformation.

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Appendix 1: Management structure

Leadership team

Headteacher

Deputy head
(curriculum/finance)

Assistant headteachers

Student welfare	Student achievement	Assessment manager	Estates manager	Staff development

Middle managers

Heads of house	**Post-16**	**Cross-curriculum**	**Head of faculty**
Byron	Head of post-16	Cross-phase	Modern Languages
Thoroton		SEN	Maths
Trent		Work-related curriculum manager	Social Studies
Hargreaves		IT	PE
Chesterfield		Student programme coordinator	Expressive and Performing Arts
Coates		Guidance coordinator	English
		Community	Science
			Humanities
			Technology

Appendix 2: Types of training undertaken in leadership and management – a comparison of findings from Wise and Bennett (2003) and Ashfield head of faculty/head of house

Type of training	Percentage of responses claiming to have completed training in this way (some respondents will have indicated more than one)		
	Wise and Bennett (2003)	Ashfield HOF	Ashfield HOH
No leadership and management training	12.4	50.0	14.3
School-based training of less than one day	21.8	12.5	42.8
School-based training of one day or more	29.0	0	0
School-based training as part of an INSET day	32.3	25.0	28.6
Out of school course for less than one day	39.5	25.0	57.1
Out of school course for one day or more	45.5	37.5	42.8
Part of a qualification course at less than masters level	12.2	0	28.6
Part of a qualification course at masters level or higher	15.4	0	0
Other types	3.4	0	14.3