National College for School Leadership

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New Models of Headship - full report

Secondary or special school executive heads

A study of heads who are leading two or more secondary or special schools

Contents

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1. Introduction and parameters of the study

1.1 Introduction: summary of key messages

The concept of 'system leadership' is increasingly seen as a critical element in sustainable, system-wide educational reform and, as a growing number of school leaders extend their sphere of influence beyond the immediate environment of their own school, there is a developing picture of the various forms that 'system leadership' might take.

This study aims to contribute to that emerging picture, by studying the work of a small number of secondary/special school heads who have taken on the 'executive' responsibility for more than one school. We recognise that this is only one manifestation of 'executive headship' and are seeking to gain further insights into this area of school leadership. The relationship between the schools in this study was in a supportive capacity in all but one instance.

In his leaflet for the Innovation Unit, 'Systems Thinkers in Action: Moving beyond the standards plateau' (DfES, 2004), Michael Fullan has articulated the importance of school leaders acting as agents of change for the system, through collective commitment and the opportunity to engage in a wider arena. Such engagement might come through forms of focused lateral networking or by undertaking specific capacity-building roles, such as primary strategy leaders, but in Fullan's terms, the important factor is the opportunity for people to interact beyond their own situation in order to change the context for getting things done (Fullan, 2004, 11).

The background, approach and key questions for the study are outlined in later sections; here we simply highlight some of the emerging themes that seem to have policy relevance or that give rise to further enquiries.

These themes fall into two broad categories:

- strategic or contextual issues, including the pre-conditions, contextual factors and requirements of the various parties involved in such an arrangement
- operational issues – principally the common factors we found in how the heads practise their executive leadership

Strategic/contextual issues

The first, and potentially most significant of these is the characteristics shared by the heads themselves. Whilst all rejected the notion of 'hero leadership', most exhibited qualities of drive, determination, self-confidence and strength of personality that are often associated with that model. All had fascinating stories and very personal approaches, as well as a strong track record of success. Whilst this is unsurprising, it does raise questions about how widely we might expect this model to spread.

The second issue relates to the readiness of their own school. Whilst it might be an obvious argument that there needs to be capacity within their own school for them to take on a wider brief, this assumes even greater significance in light of the fact that all heads have seen the task as a

team or school responsibility and have therefore involved other people from their own school – sometimes a large number of others.

The latter point provides a link with the third key finding, namely that the heads needed to adopt a team approach and, even more importantly, work with people they know. In all but one instance, they all either took a person or team with them, or they brought in someone they knew to work with. We outline the reasons for and merits of this approach in the report, but raise the issue here not just as a critical factor for success, but also a potential resource issue.

The fourth strategic issue relates to the negotiation phase prior to taking up the role. All the heads engaged in strong negotiations and set very specific conditions for their involvement. These might relate to people, other resources, accountability processes and so on. Whilst this finding tells us something about the people involved, it also suggests the importance of all parties being clear about necessary pre-conditions at the outset and investing some time in negotiating the precise parameters of arrangement at that stage.

Part of the negotiation for many related to the time-limited nature of their involvement: the importance of time-limits and exit strategies emerged as a further strategic theme in this study.

The final common theme, which should not be under-estimated, relates to 'moral purpose', the mindset brought to the task by the individuals concerned. We highlight elsewhere factors relating to ego or flattery, but although the heads often acknowledged these as a part of their motivation, it was clear that they all shared a broader vision, an ability to see a bigger picture and a sense of contributing to the good of young people generally, rather than seeking the advantage of their own school alone. This commitment to serving a broader purpose seems to establish the viewpoint that the work not only needs doing, but that it can be done.

Operational issues

The practice of the role is dealt with in section three of this report. Once again, there are some common features, which include:

- focus on short-term improvement and capacity-building (and the tensions between the two)
- importance of the executive head working at the strategic level and on the boundaries of the school, rather than on daily running (again, this creates some tensions)
- team approach and the 'adopted school' model
- focus on teaching and learning and staff development (or staff changes)
- accountability issues

The study's conclusions, though tentative owing to the study's scope, can be found in the final section of the report. Alongside these, we raise some questions around emerging issues which merit further strategic debate between policymakers and those engaged in an executive leadership capacity.

1.2 Background

Although the term 'executive head' has a number of meanings, it appears to be a concept that has come of age. A preliminary review of the field, undertaken during autumn 2004, by NCSL's Research Group identified more than 25 headteachers who held such a title.

The role of the executive head is often, but not wholly, associated with federations or linking of schools. A number of the executive heads identified in our review work within 'hard' Department for Education and Skills (DfES) federations[1], whilst others work within federated school systems outside the DfES scheme.

A recent review of school federations for the DfES (Potter 2004:3) noted that "the term school federations embraces many variants on the concept of inter school working". Although the DfES funds and approves 35 federations, there are many more examples of federated schools that range between informal partnerships to single multi-site schools, some of which have their origins in TVEI (Technical and Vocational Education Initiative) initiatives from the late 1980s, whilst others are rooted in EAZs (Education Action Zones), LIG (Leadership Incentive Grant) collaboratives, and families of schools.

In general, federations can be separated into either self-determined federations or support federations. Self-determined federations are based upon voluntary collaboration in which schools share goals and the perception that joint working facilitates the achievement of these. Support federations are characterised by an association between a successful school and one or more struggling schools. Such federations may or may not be permanent arrangements and are often brokered by a Local Education Authority (LEA), the DfES or both.

Arrangements for executive headship currently comprise:

- running two schools as one under a single head, which may or may not be a permanent arrangement
- the development of a family of schools, a brand, each with its own headteacher, under the oversight of an executive head, which is a permanent arrangement
- the cloning of excellent schools, which is a permanent arrangement
- satellite schools: extensive support including key staff is provided by the lead partner for a limited period; the partner school retains autonomy, including after the contract comes to an end

All the executive heads in this study operate within one of these variants of support federations – although it should be acknowledged that distinctions between these categories are sometimes unclear. Our focus was almost exclusively on schools within the last category.

1 Federations funded and approved by the DfES within the constructs of the 2002 Education Act.

1.3 Methodology

The aim of this study is to investigate the ways in which executive headship contributes to school improvement and system leadership.

The overarching research questions for the project were:

- In what ways does executive headship build leadership capacity?
- What can our sample of eight individuals tell us about developing system level leadership?
- Is this approach to leadership transferable?
- As a feature of 'system leadership', what does executive headship offer?
- What conditions are necessary for success?
- What does the work of executive headship involve?

A team from the College's research department investigated these questions through semi-structured interviews with eight executive heads in English schools. Interviews took place predominantly within heads' offices and lasted up to two hours. The interview schedule (included as an appendix) formed the basis for fluid conversations between each executive head and two members of the NCSL Research Group. The NCSL team comprised of two former headteachers and two experienced researchers.

1.4 Terminology

There is a range of terms associated with executive headship and federated schools. Throughout this report we refer to the leader with executive powers over more than one school as the 'executive head'.

We refer to the executive head's original school as the 'lead school'. Other schools within the support federation are described as 'partner' or 'adopted' schools.

2. Setting up the partnership

This section explores the circumstance and conditions surrounding the appointment of an executive headteacher:

- The pairing
  - Partner school circumstances
  - State of readiness of executive head
  - How approaches are made
- Motivation for involvement
- Setting the agenda and developing the agreement
  - Pre-conditions
- Accountability

2.1 The pairing

All but one of the executive heads in this study was approached to take on the role in response to significant weakness, or loss of confidence in the 'partner' school. In some circumstances the association was linked with reorganisation, and/or a move to create an academy to replace the failing school. Almost all approaches therefore came from the LEA, although there was also DfES involvement in some cases.

One common factor was that, for most of the partner schools, the situation was so extreme that, without some strategic support involving substantial leadership capacity, necessary changes would be unachievable, particularly within the necessary timescales.

For some of the respondents, the approach to them came on the back of other external or consultancy work they had performed. Three had worked with more than one other school in an executive or consultancy capacity prior to the current commitment; others had established a reputation for success in a school of similar context and were one of a number in their LEA who were asked to consider the opportunity.

One respondent considered that:

> There are insufficient heads with the ability to perform in extreme situations (under pressure from the LEA, DfES etc to improve failing schools within a short timescale).

and that those who can are therefore likely to be requested to provide the 'breathing space' for others to make changes in a somewhat more protected environment. In the words of one respondent, this enabled the executive head to 'borrow trust' from the school and its community.

Although another referred to 'the grubby world of networking' as a contributory factor to their selection, it was clear that there was an acknowledgement of the importance of their own reputation, as providing a sense of confidence, both for the LEA and other stakeholders.

As one respondent expressed it:

> The executive head must be related to a high performing school, must have the credibility and experience to achieve the seriously high levels of improvement needed at under-performing schools.

Not only that, several referred to the fact that they had local knowledge, networks, or connections that they could put to good use ('call in favours') and that they saw this as an important dimension not only in their selection, but also in the sustainability of the improvements.

However, all respondents were careful to point out that they had taken time to consider the proposal in relation to the specific partner school. One had taken his existing leadership team to look at the school before considering and agreeing. Another had not personally visited the school beforehand, but had sent in a team to prepare a report which he then considered with them. This arrangement enabled him to retain objective optimism unmuddied by direct observation.

The pre-conditions for involvement related both to the respondents' personal capacities, records, reputations and state of professional readiness; and to the readiness of their own schools.

Several commented on the need for capacity in their current school, for widely dispersed leadership, a leadership team in which they had absolute confidence, and staff who were themselves professionally ready to take on a new challenge, either in their own school during the new arrangement, or in the partner school. Internal capacity within the lead school was a pre-requisite for the success of the partner school model.

2.2 Motivation for involvement

A number of reasons were given for taking on an executive role. Certainly, for a number, there was a strong altruistic drive. Two executive heads made the following observations, in relation to the situation at the partner school:

> To do nothing was not an option.

> The situation in… is so poor somebody's got to do something about it.

A number also referred to the need for new challenges and/or the need for more development/fulfilment opportunities beyond their own headship. One reflected how the executive headship had provided:

> …a feeling of not having 'lost it' – that a quality team was put in place who have delivered a better quality education…actually changed a few lives.

More than one respondent perceived the opportunity that executive headship brought as a way to help redefine the traditional career path of heads. In particular, according to this respondent, it was a way of preventing good heads from leaving to become Ofsted inspectors. For another, it was a way of staying 'at the cutting edge' and refreshing the lead school and self with new experiences.

Flattery might be said to play a part, however. Whilst explicitly denouncing the concept of 'superhead and disliking the terms, 'white charger leadership' and 'the cavalry', **a number of respondents acknowledged the sense of self which the approach to take on an executive role either conferred or enhanced**. One referred to the fact that their credibility is an important factor, and that the partner school gains by association with that reputation:

> This is about personal credibility – essentially about their trust in you being able to find the right path. Building credibility is like putting money in the bank – you have to save it.

Having said that, more than one respondent was explicit about 'doing it for the kids', and that the only reason for involvement, or, indeed reason for recognition, was pupils' achievement. Another executive head was:

> …driven by a strong desire to help increase social cohesion and equality of outcome.

Two of the respondents were explicit in their reference to 'fifth-level' leadership (Collins, 2001) and saw their personal fulfilment, and motivation for this work, coming from helping others to achieve their potential. Their own growth had been supported through specific attention to developing others and the motivation had therefore been the hope of 'reflected glory' through their achievements.

The financial incentive, although mentioned by some as part of the conditions for their taking on the role, where applicable, did not emerge as the prime reason for their participation. More common, was reference to the benefits that might accrue to the lead school – with one of the executive heads utilising an audit system to monitor such benefits.

2.3 Setting the agenda and developing the agreement

- Pre-conditions
  - a team approach
  - who leaves
  - resources
  - freedom to act
  - time limits

It is in the way that **the executive heads have set conditions for their involvement;** be these about their own school, about how they will work, about money, or about with whom they will or will not work, that the group of respondents show very strong convergence.

Without exception, they were explicit about certain things they would, or would not accept. In some cases, this involved some hard-edged negotiating.

The first and probably most important was that none of them have been prepared to work alone, or, indeed, without a well-known or trusted colleague or team. **The commitment to working with known and trusted people is a powerful and recurrent theme:**

> It needed a team approach. The team would need to know and trust one another. They would do things the way I wanted things done.

or

> 'This place is in a mess, let's send in an experienced head'. Well that's fine, but the[DfES] timescales are so short now… that I'm going to need someone else to do it.
>
> I said I would only do it if one of my deputies could be executive deputy head, because of the way we work together. We complement each other very well.

Such an insistence of working with known people, or building a team approach, was perceived by the respondents as achieving the following:

- It reduces the time needed to establish working relationships – by working in already proven and trusted combinations, it enables swifter progress.
- It makes the notions of school-to-school partnering, or the concept of an 'adopted school' much more of a possibility. It engages widespread commitment to success in both schools.
- Given the challenging nature of the work, it provides more 'comfort', makes the task more enjoyable and rewarding.
- It helps share the workload.
- It supports replication, where, for example, an executive head has undertaken the role in more than one school and has worked with the same associate head in each partnership.

The second common condition, and for many a condition as important as the one above, was about *who leaves*. Several of the respondents were explicit that one or more of the following would need to leave for them to become involved, or stay involved – the head of the partner school, a member of the leadership team of the partner school, or the chair of governors of the partner school. For more than one respondent, although they started working with a head 'in situ', that person did not stay. Over and above the explicit conditions, therefore, there is an issue of supplementary impact from their involvement, or 'fallout'.

As noted above, all but one of the respondents referred to the importance of working with someone they knew and trusted as the partner school head (or associate or acting head). This finding, although it emerged as part of a very small-scale study, could be highly significant. All the respondents saw leadership as critical and recognised that their role was laden with sensitivities. None more so, it could be said, than the 'usurping' of others' powers. We found no examples where the executive head worked successfully with a head who had been in post before their arrival, although one stated that if he were to carry out such a role again he would like that opportunity. One executive head worked with an associate head who was not previously known by them but was specifically recommended by the LEA. Both these conditions have been dependent on *a co-operative LEA*. For example, in one LEA, the prospective executive head, having met the senior team of the partner school, declared that s/he would not undertake the role if the existing deputy stayed in place. As a consequence, a secondment, followed by a move from the school was arranged for this staff member.

Two issues over which a number of the interviewees had been dogmatic in their setting of terms were resources and freedom to act. The first issue of resources was linked strongly to the heads' perception of the need to both enact change quickly and build capacity. 'Quick wins cost money', and capacity requires the involvement of a number of people over time. As one respondent put it:

> 'If you want this to happen, then we need £x,00,000 from you.' You can't do interventions without the necessary resources. I don't believe people who say you can.

Another referred to cash arrangements that were made to ensure that both schools could be well supported during the period and another explained that conditions for taking on an executive role included:

> ...sufficient financial resources, the school improvement fund and management fees.

Two of the interviewees spoke about resources in respect of their own remuneration (although others mentioned payments for their services going to their own school). One was unequivocal in their views:

> If you're not getting paid for it you're stupid, because this is about knowledge management …capital is in people's knowledge…I think I sell knowledge. I don't see any reason why an (executive head) shouldn't be well paid for what they're doing…CEOs of big companies don't do it for nothing. Just because we're in education, why should we?

The issue of executive freedom was as significant as resourcing, if not more so. Most respondents had sought and obtained well-understood agreement from both LEAs and governors that they must have freedom of action. In relation to governors, one said:

> I'm going to make them go through…what they want (for the school) and then I'm going to say, 'OK, it's your school, you've told me what you want; now effectively…let me get on with it.' And it's critical to have that freedom of action, especially if you want action quickly.

Another phrased it thus:

> What you can't do is make someone accountable in that timescale and then build in lots of checks and balances. If you're saying your head's on the block you have to have the freedom to actually implement. If you have the freedom you can accept the consequences. One without the other wouldn't be fair.

A final point of negotiation was about the time-limited nature of the arrangement. Although the executive heads varied in the length of time they are engaged for, from one year to three on average, they were all quite clear that a timescale and an exit strategy needed to be agreed at the outset.

> My exit strategy begins on day one. My job is to build the capacity of the new team...

2.4 Accountability

The freedom to act was closely linked to accountability. Once again, there was a strong convergence from the respondents, who welcomed the sense of responsibility from the role:

> Schools are not a democracy – at the end of the day I have to take responsibility for everything that happens.

> I don't want this to sound macho, but you've got to live by the sword and die by the sword. If you take authority and responsibility and it all goes wrong, I've got to put my hand up and say it's failed…I can't hide behind an LEA or another group of people.

> …the buck stops absolutely at my door.

They recognised their accountabilities to the employing LEA, the governors, or the DfES, and a number had set up or operated detailed and systematic reporting systems to these stakeholders.

Their chief accountabilities were to the students, to the community and to themselves. One head expressed his sense of accountability to the children thus:

> As I said to the staff, 'Four years ago somebody promised those Year 6 kids something.'

Another said that he was determined that the pupils should leave their school feeling proud of it and achieving their best set of results, something which had been missing for years. Yet another framed their team's purpose as a two year project to "provide stability and to give the school back to the governors". It was not about taking the school over but moving it forward.

The accountability to self was related to professional pride, reputation and record of success. One said that having taken time out for an extended period, he considered himself accountable for tangible improvements. He recognised that the role held 'professional risks' if he failed. Another said:

> It's also very important that you have a stake in what you're doing…our reputations are on the line…we have a stake in being successful.

Another highlighted the moral imperative behind the work, by referring more than once to accountability to the public "because it's public money".

3. The practice of executive headship

This section describes how the role of executive headship is enacted by those interviewed, within their individual contexts. It includes sub-sections relating to:

- Purpose
  - re-culturing and rapid improvement
  - capacity building
- Strategic versus operational
  - tensions
- Improving the partner school
  - school-to-school links
  - intuitive versus structured auditing
  - establishing the climate for learning
  - improving standards in learning and teaching
  - deciding on appropriate support provision
- Performing the tasks – relationships with:
  - associate heads
  - other leaders
  - new colleagues

3.1 Purpose of the executive head

3.1.1 Rapid improvement

All of the executive heads viewed the purpose of their involvement to be a capacity-building role with a prime responsibility to develop a leadership team capable of transforming practice and outcomes within the partner school. Whilst problem-solving was a significant part of their role, their responsibilities extended to developing, through coaching, the capacity of key staff to solve problems themselves, within a distributed model.

As the partner schools were predominantly seen to be failing or at least without effective leadership, the executive heads' remit was to initiate and develop the capacity for change so that key performance indicators such as results, attendance and behaviour improved to an acceptable or better level.

There was a clear statement from those interviewed that executive headship, for them, was not about 'super-headship'. They saw this as an individual pursuit in which a wide range of roles was assumed. This was viewed to be neither a practical or sustainable model, whereas a team-based approach ensured appropriate distribution of roles and a model in which each team member could operate effectively and be buffered from matters that would otherwise divert their attention from their core purpose.

> I don't believe super-heads exist and I think that one person going in anywhere can't effect the change that's necessary.
>
> What executive headship isn't is a super-head role. If I was seen as the head of any of these schools…I would see that as failure.

Key behaviours associated with executive headship were seen to be those relating to re-culturing:

- modelling desired behaviours/practice and challenging unacceptable practice and attitudes
- embedding positive and purposeful relationships across and beyond the school
- having vision

as well as capacity-building:

- leadership and staff team development, including coaching and mentoring
- restructuring of school systems, eg staffing, curriculum
- resource-chasing
- network creation

3.1.2 Strategic versus operational

For many of the executive heads interviewed, maintaining a strategic, as opposed to an operational mode, was the desired approach. Crucial to the achievement of this objective was ensuring that the team structure, and most especially the role of the associate head, supported and enabled this.

Fundamental was the acknowledgement that to use their skills most effectively to improve the school and build capacity, they needed to be distanced from day-to-day management responsibilities. Several recognised that, in challenging circumstances, "the day-to-day can get in the way of holding a strategic vision". There were tensions within this, however. Most notably, that within the early days a more hands-on approach was required to establish and begin to embed the new cultural expectations, eg of pupil behaviour. Some executive heads spoke of walking the corridors, speaking to pupils, setting out the ground rules and modelling their reinforcement in order to support the efforts of the associate head or other team members. As systems implemented became the norm, so these executive heads were able to step back from these roles. One executive head described how her role evolved over time to one that was more strategic:

> They don't need me in my hands-on role like they did last year.

In addition, there was evidence that certain elements of the management role normally assumed by a headteacher were taken on by the executive head. This was ostensibly to take the pressure off the associate head from having to be involved in difficult, sometimes protracted matters such as staff competency and union negotiations, as well as, in some cases, the plethora of administrative matters usually found within the headteacher's domain:

> I would deal with everything else that wasn't fronting the kids, fronting the class – I would deal with HMI, DfES. I would deal with finance, buildings, headteachers' meetings: all that 'stuff'.

However, when such administrative tasks became over-burdensome, most executive heads were able to delegate responsibilities, eg bringing in a newly retired headteacher to project-manage a PFI bid.

More than one executive head used the term 'clout' as something they perceived they possessed and used in dealing with a variety of external agencies. These agencies frequently extended beyond those with whom liaison was essential, eg the DfES or LEA, to include those contacts whom the executive head considered could potentially contribute something positive towards the school. Examples of the latter included using the press and television to promote the school's achievements. Knowing whom to contact for assistance and having the 'clout' to request or even demand this was also evident.

The division of responsibilities was frequently reciprocal: the executive head was buffered from the day-to-day issues by the associate head, and the associate head was buffered from the strategic or complex issues, eg negotiations with professional associations by the executive head.

There was significant variation in how such roles and responsibilities were delineated however. One executive head made a conscious decision to undertake some teaching ostensibly to model his expectations to the school's existing senior managers that their role was not confined to an office. However, the same executive head also delegated financial matters to a business manager from industry so that this was an area he did not have to deal with in detail. Another executive head cited that he had a lot less paperwork, which enabled him to free time to remain strategic in what he was doing:

> I'm able to deploy myself a lot more flexibly and I can take more of an overview.

Direct coaching of the associate head was essential as it built their personal capacity to fulfil their role and responsibilities. It also contributed to the delineation of roles as the increased capacity of the associate head meant that the executive head was able to proportionately free more of their time to deal with strategic issues:

> I ask the questions of the principals. Once we've worked the problem through coaching the principal owns it. The coaching is fundamental to building their capacity so they don't pester me all the time; they have the confidence to get on with their job.

3.1.3 Improving the partner school

Ensuring that the schools to which the executive heads were appointed reached a certain level of achievement was paramount given the poor results in the majority of partner schools. Achieving this within DfES timescales was also seen to be a significant challenge by more than one executive head. Reaching a benchmark was viewed thus as the achievement of a standard that was not, in some executive heads' words, 'rocket science' but fundamentally straightforward, though hard work:

> To run a good school is not rocket science – to run a very good school is rocket science because it's about tweaking, but to get the basics right, to get a good, strong dependable

> school…that is pretty straightforward. It's not complicated it's just basics on behaviour, basics on teacher behaviour, concentrating on putting the kids first, concentrating on essentials.

One executive head described the role as achieving a point at which it moves onto better things:

> It's about taking schools that aren't performing and getting them onto a tipping point – there's never a finished article – but getting them over the brow so they're sliding on to something fantastic.

More than one head found it difficult to understand why the schools had not put basic systems in place to achieve the benchmark:

> In terms of your day to day actions it's not rocket science…and you can't help yourself thinking, 'I can't believe you haven't done this.'

In the same school comparisons with the lead school were made, not to:

> …ram it down their throats but to make the point they're not serving the kids and it's not the kids' fault, so it's almost helping them to evaluate, rather than me evaluate, because when you walk into a school like that, the things are so blatantly obvious.

Surprisingly, most executive heads did not have a very structured auditing process. More than one saw the determining of a strategic direction for the school as an uncomplicated, almost intuitive process. Extensive action planning was not required so much as focused action on the ground aimed at standards issues. A number of executive heads spoke of 'knowing' as they walked around the school what needed to be done.

One executive head described diagnosis of need as 'dead easy' as there was no concept of classroom etiquette, with children moving in and out of lessons, poor attendance, as well as the lowest set of A-C results in the country. Another countered an existing senior manager's stance that he could not act on improvements (as the executive head had not re-written the improvement plan) with, *"Yes, we have got an improvement plan…it's called results, behaviour, attendance."* Another sat with her team and pulled out the key points from the Ofsted monitoring report, eg 'no strategic vision' to produce a series of one-line, precise actions that replaced the existing, over-extensive improvement plan:

> You have to have a clear view of what needs to be done. You need to be able to look at the evidence that you've got and very quickly sum up, like we did – line by line.
>
> You have to have the confidence to say, 'we are not spending hours and hours writing elaborate plans [when] actually what's required is action'.

For other executive heads, however, diagnosis of needs was a systematic process undertaken within a definite structure, and therefore in contrast with the intuitive response of others. For one executive head, diagnosis of key tasks was completed using the Continuous School Improvement model. This tool was used by all individuals in the school to assess the issues at both department and school level and comparing the outcomes with those from other schools. Using this approach allowed the team to take ownership of the issues and findings from the tool feed directly into the school improvement plan. The approach was viewed by this executive head as objective and replicable and, for him, a non-negotiable system that had been applied successfully on more than one occasion.

This particular process moved on to challenging the school to develop its vision, through consulting with a wide range of stakeholders. The intention of this was to win hearts and minds and begin to enable staff to consider the issues and start developing the solutions to these. There were some non-negotiable aspects of the vision however, the central theme of which was the pursuit of "World Class Learning Outcomes". The audit and visioning process combined was expected to take around four weeks.

Another executive head developed his system around the IQEA principles, with the five elements of the change process being: curriculum, teaching and learning, parental involvement, financial management and staff development. Yet another based his approach on the 'John Harvey Jones' model of diagnosis to identify the key issues within the school – a subjective process, reliant on the expertise of the executive head, rather than through a formal and explicit diagnostic model. The final model of diagnosis we found was based on an audit of knowledge, organisational and social capital. This approach sought to answer the questions:

> Does the school have the knowledge to solve its problems and is it captured? Is it organised to share this knowledge? Do the staff have the social skills to share this knowledge?

An inevitable part of taking over what were largely failing schools was the replacement of existing staff, with outgoing staff leaving substantially as a result of their own personal choice or following competency procedures. In some cases this resulted in the existing head leaving, as they found working with the executive head too problematic. The re-shaping of staff structures, often to accommodate incoming leadership team members from the lead school, or executive head connections, had a similar impact.

In one school staffing issues were far more extensive with 27 of the 34 teaching staff being placed on capability proceedings within a term after a substantial initial assessment of teaching quality. The need for the executive head to establish productive links with professional associations was understandably a feature of more than one school.

Improvement priority identification was, for many executive heads however, determined by them and the team they assembled. Time pressures and the lack of existing school self-review in the partner school, meant that the route they chose for the achievement of improved standards did not allow for extensive consultation. There was much less emphasis, in most cases, on building consensus than is the accepted orthodoxy.

The development of vision was not consistent across the schools. The schools could be placed on a continuum of operation defined at one end by an inclusive, broad consultative approach, and at the other with what could be summarised as a more didactic approach.

The action-led agenda put into place by the executive heads and their teams sought, in general, to strike a balance between:

- delivering quick wins
- implementing robust systems in a small number of key areas at an early stage, and
- developing medium to long-term strategies aimed at sustainability and capacity-building

The role of the leadership team in the achievement of these objectives was crucial, and setting these objectives and establishing commitment to these demanded much of the executive heads' time, especially in the early days when dissent and resistance were at their most pronounced.

Meeting challenge, dealing with conflict, remaining focused on pupil entitlement, developing trusting staff relationships, and investing in in-house staff development were key points that emerged from the interviews. There was an acknowledgement that re-culturing needed to accommodate a range of staff members' viewpoints, from those who were resistant to those who were appreciative of the investment now being made in them as professionals, whilst recognising that time pressures called for driven change rather than extended consultation.

Re-culturing for many executive heads centred on propounding the issue of pupil entitlement and public accountability; this moved the focus for the pace and extent of change towards what was in the pupils' best interests and what the public deserved from the services to which they contributed financially, and away from criticism of staff and the school's existing practices:

Executive heads spoke of a "one agenda" school, or "bringing a clinical focus – results, results, results, results – a single direction in a complex organisation".

3.1.4 School-to-school links

A number of the executive heads described the relationship between their own school and the second school as one of adoption. Their strategic role was therefore to look at how their own school could most effectively support and build capacity within the adopted school.

The close proximity of the schools in the following example caused the executive head's strategic view to extend to a vision in which the schools would be viewed as complementary - co-existing with equal standing as they both served the same community and it was community capacity that should be paramount. This altruistic community-focused outlook contests the 'schools in competition' mode of operation:

> I still think the executive head role is helping both schools thinking strategically, not just individually but with a collaborative view. While we've got the school-to-school partnership we need to be thinking how we can both gain from that. What do they think they can get from me…and that's also me using my networks and connections.
>
> As an executive head, what I can do is look strategically across both schools and look at their needs and look at what the area needs and how we can use the resources of both schools to benefit the wider community, and to not worry about who's where in the league tables and admissions, because what I realised is both schools can survive.

The use of lead school staff to support developments within the adopted school was integral to change in some instances. This was in addition to the use of key leadership staff as part of the adopted school's new leadership team. Examples of this were:

- taking the maths team to the adopted school to raise standards:

  > That's not the ideal because it's not really building capacity, it's a takeover…but it's whether you're prepared to sacrifice something. So is it formative? No. Capacity building? No. It's 'the maths is so poor somebody's got to do something about it'.

- taking a team of LSAs to work on a one-to-one basis with Year 11 pupils to change a culture of non-achievement to one of potential achievement

- employing lead teaching staff to operate an after-school 'catch-up' programme for Year 11 pupils – 30 per cent of pupils opted in to this opportunity

- using three members of the lead school's science team to support teaching and learning in the adopted school:

  > It means that you're giving something very tangible to people…they're teaching classes and …at the best times, weaker staff are watching them teach.

- enabling a range of non-teaching staff to spend time in the adopted school to support the development of effective systems:

  > I can say to somebody here, 'Look, someone up there needs some help; you've got this time on your timetable, I want you to go up there once a week for the next three weeks', and I can do that.

- enabling lead school staff to start up a choir in the adopted school:

  > You've got to show kids what it looks like…and of course it's an example to staff. People say, 'Oh you can never have a choir at this school.' Well, lo and behold we've got a choir…they're important because fundamentally we're trying to change culture.

The first of these points highlights a tension between achieving quick results and building capacity within the school. Whilst this was the stated aim of intervention, at some stages a compromise might need to be reached, as in this example, in which short-term measures are taken due to the severity of the circumstances encountered. The same respondent outlined how, once stabilisation had been achieved, the transition from departmental 'takeover' in this subject area to one of coaching and capacity-building occurred.

The opportunities for lead school staff to act in capacities such as those outlined above **facilitated re-culturing through strong modelling**. The use of lead staff was also seen as a positive professional development opportunity for them; they were able to develop their own skills through supporting others.

The use of informed networks of contacts was identified by a significant majority of executive heads as of great importance. Their ability to know whom to contact to secure assistance, and the support for change required; this played a major part in what they were able to bring to the schools and the staff with whom they worked:

> You've got to be able to press the flesh, to bring people in…business entrepreneurs make money; social entrepreneurs create capital, and knowledge capital and wealth in different ways. It's about bringing that capital into the school and sharing [it] with other people, and about having the right people to go into the community to identify who the right people are to transform things.

3.1.5 Establishing the climate for learning

Restructuring of staff, especially the leadership roles also required attention in many instances. In one school the executive head appointed three vice principals and three assistant heads because they considered the school needed that capacity to secure change.

Creating robust, rigorous and consistently applied systems to turn around pupil behaviour was a common feature in the schools. Because there was unfamiliarity with the school setting, some of

the executive heads were unsure as to how the pupils would receive more hard-line approaches to discipline that presented challenge to them, and a feature of implementation was one of risk-taking, though based on prior knowledge of how systems worked in their own schools.

In one school, 50-60 per cent of lessons were taught by supply teachers, many of whom would only teach for one day not to return, resulting in very poor behaviour. The leadership team which had been brought in discussed the situation during the first half-term holiday following their involvement and then spent the whole of the next half-term implementing their rigorous corrective approach:

> We expected World War III from the kids…there were a lot of exclusions and permanent exclusions but the majority of the kids responded brilliantly. We cracked discipline in no time …we couldn't believe it but….kids want to learn.

Common features with some of the other executive heads' approaches were:

- personally "stalking the corridors" and sending the message that, "if you walk out of your class, you're going to be hassled".

- speaking to the pupils collectively in assembly at the commencement of their executive headship about how they were expected to behave:

  > We told them we'd come in because we believed in the school, we believed in them…we felt it could be an excellent school and we weren't going to take any excuses, we laid some guidelines down immediately about behaviour…and then we stood at the back of the hall and we shook hands with every one of them and got them to say their name and we said, 'hello.'

- not letting anything get by:

  > We just told them straight basically; we did a lot of fixed-term exclusions until they got the message.

Establishing a culture in which a positive behavioural climate existed was fundamental in supporting the development of standards of learning and teaching. But re-culturing involved very clear modelling, especially for those younger members of staff for whom there may have been little or no prior experience of what such a climate did indeed look like.

In some cases results were striking - an executive head of one special school did not have one temporary exclusion during his tenure, although the school had had 6000 days of exclusions prior to his and his team's involvement. Attendance was also increased from 33 per cent to 93 per cent.

3.1.6 Improving standards in learning and teaching

An assessment of the quality of learning and teaching within the school upon arrival was essential, given, in general, the schools' attainment levels. Through conducting this audit approach, decisions about how to tackle the weaknesses discovered could be addressed by the leadership team. As cited earlier, audit approaches ranged from the formal application of systematic procedures to more informal, intuitive approaches. Examples of approaches used to deal with raising standards in learning and teaching, found from across the study schools, included:

- using external agents, eg LEA literacy consultants and Advanced Skills Teachers to provide excellent models of practice

- using lead school staff to teach classes, both within and outside standard school hours, as well as model excellent practice to adopted schools' teachers
- importing a whole lead school department team into the adopted school to take over the running of this
- using lead school Learning Support Assistants to work with adopted school LSAs, as well as with pupils directly
- re-structuring the curriculum to enable greater focus on core areas
- staff training, eg in one school this focused on consistent approaches to lesson planning and providing access to this on the intranet
- coaching

Deciding on appropriate support provision

Within this, however, was the issue of selectivity in relation to external assistance. For example, in one school the executive head prevented LEA subject advisors from continuing with their work as their approach erred towards teacher support rather than a rigorous focus on pupils' learning.

Another strongly disagreed with the proposed curriculum staff structure devised by an external consultancy, brought in to support developments by the LEA. A demand that they be withdrawn, as they were undermining what the executive head saw to be right for the school was upheld:

> Their vision was totally at odds with mine.

Adopting a strong position on what they personally considered to be appropriate for the school, and not being swayed from this, emerged in a number of instances.

The transference of systems and practices from the lead school to the adopted school did occur in many instances partly as a result of the need for quick wins within a short space of time, as well as the need for leadership to operate within familiar systems which they knew worked:

> I did say to them [the staff] that I was going to introduce things that had been successful at [the lead school] as I knew they'd worked, but I did say that…'we're not just gong to scrap things and if it doesn't work we're going to look at why and fix it'.

Investing in staff, was also a key approach exemplified by some executive heads, although this often centred on in-house, coaching-based provision - in one case a stop was put on members of the Senior Management Team attending external training, much of which did not address the school's key priorities:

> Very important issues, but frankly we've got more to do here!

The same head had to manage the effective takeover by his own staff of some departments, yet at the same time convince existing staff that this was a temporary measure and that his intention was that they would be fulfilling those roles in a year's time.

He further organised a Chief Executive from industry to perform the function of executive coach for some of the young managers. These staff respond positively to the notion that they are being 'executive coached' as it carried kudos and made the statement that their abilities were being invested in. It was also made clear to these managers that they would gain a great deal in terms of their career prospects through remaining at the school and contributing to its transformation.

Another executive head considered how to move best practice around the school. He argued that 'buy in' to the vision and approaches employed to move towards this vision is rapid "once the school realises it has the learning at hand to be able to transform its fortune" – staff realise that "they are the solution". To achieve this, though, you must "break down the atmosphere of fear". A key way of achieving this is through coaching and mentoring approaches.

3.2 Performing the tasks: relationships

For the executive heads interviewed in the study, relationships were key to their effectively *performing the tasks*. These relationships centred on specific areas:

- the development of a 'team leadership' model, including working with associate heads
- the development of effective relationships with existing colleagues, new colleagues and other agencies/providers

All of the executive heads interviewed in the study had sought to develop a leadership model that drew on the skills and expertise of a number of individuals. Central to this were the respective roles of the associate head and the executive head.

3.2.1 Team leadership: relationships with associate heads

As noted above, all but one participant had been approached to support efforts to improve conditions at an under-performing school, not just in the short term, but also in a sustainable and lasting way. To do so, they recognised the need to improve the broader leadership capacity within that school. As a result, the executive heads interviewed were quick to highlight the importance of others' contribution to the leadership of the school.

From a practical viewpoint, it was clear, as indicated in section 3.1.2, that the demands of the post meant that these executive heads had also needed day to day, operational support to get the job done. The need for quick results meant that executive heads could not afford the luxury of trying to identify and nurture leadership potential at the early stage. All of the executive heads had therefore included other individuals from their own school in the adoption arrangements, as outlined in section 2.3.

The rationale for this was simple. The executive head knew they could trust them. In a context of risk and uncertainty these individuals provided a sense of continuity and solidity. They invariably shared the executive head's philosophy and vision for the school, were often their eyes and ears on the ground when the executive head was away from the school and, in a situation full of risk, represented one of the few things that was safe.

In return, executive heads were able to offer these individuals an opportunity that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. The challenging nature of these adopted schools provided such individuals with a diversity and intensity of leadership experience that leaders in other contexts may take years to accumulate. In addition, they were able to do so under the protective wing of a highly skilled mentor. The potential benefits for their longer-term career opportunities were evident.

The relationship between the executive head and the associate headteacher was in some ways similar to that of an apprenticeship model. The executive offered tutelage and coaching, providing the associate headteacher with the opportunity to draw upon such skills and expertise while at the

same time, benefiting from the intensity of their own experiential learning. Mentoring was a further element of this relationship:

> [The associate headteacher] will come and see me and say 'Look, I'm thinking of doing this' or 'how do I handle this situation?'...and he normally… tells me what he's going to do and say, 'is that alright?' and I'll say, 'Yes, just mind this' or 'have you thought about that?

While this relationship was clear to the relevant parties, they were eager to ensure that others in the adopted school viewed things differently. This desire appeared to be based upon recognition of the importance of each role and the value of their respective contributions – the public face and the private face of the relationship.

The executive head offered a certain level of experience, confidence and understanding, which they brought to the relationship. This was complemented by the skills the associate headteacher brought. In isolation neither would have been willing, or possibly able, to take on the enormous challenge improving the adopted school presented. However together they were seen to represent an ideal solution. As one associate head noted:

> [The executive head] had been head for 13 years when he took over at [the adopted school}. He'd been through all of that school improvement. [The adopted school] could never have attracted him as a head or people like him, but that's what it needed, that level of thinking. You're never going to be able to appoint someone of that stature in the system to a school like that though.
>
> It also needed someone who is still prepared to do the legwork that you do at the start of your headship, which is what I was prepared to do. You wouldn't be able to appoint a first- time head there because of all its complexities, but actually someone in the second stage of headship would have to say 'I'm going to go back down on the ground floor and do all that walking and talking you do at the start of your headship'. So this arrangement combines those two phases.

The closeness and mutual dependency of this relationship places both parties in a highly vulnerable position. It is little wonder then that in all but one of the instances examined in this study, the executive head had made their personal selection of the associate head a prerequisite for their involvement. Core to this was the need for trust:

> It has to be somebody that the EP trusts, that trusts the EP, that can have a working relationship, can be clear about things, be honest and straight. It has to be that kind of relationship because things get very stretched during the length of the agreement.

While this is understandable, it raises the following question: 'Is the number of times an individual can act as an executive head determined by the number of potential associate heads they can identify?' **From a system-leadership viewpoint, it may worth considering what additional support can be provided to help executive heads identify potential associate heads from outside of their personal pool of contacts.**

3.2.2 Team leadership: relationships with other leaders

The need to establish productive, forward-looking working relationships with the senior management, or leadership, teams was essential. In some instances these largely if not entirely, comprised a new, brought-in, team. However in some instances this required a merging of brought-in staff and existing staff. A number offered examples describing their substantial investment in personally coaching and mentoring members of the leadership team to build capacity.

One executive head describes an early meeting with the leadership team members he brought with him, alongside the adopted school's existing leadership team:

> I go in and say, 'I'm not looking backwards…there's no time…but we [must see] ourselves as a management team, the people I've brought in and your team – we are one team. I know it's tough, I know it's difficult, but we sit in one room…there can be no games and, tough as it is, we have to trust each other to move the thing forward'.
>
> 'If English fails it's not the English manager's fault, it's our fault.' You've almost got to wrench this team into focus, but before that they've got to accept where the school is…because if you don't grab that momentum early, staff will look at the Times Ed and leave.

This forcing of the issue was also reflective of how one executive head dealt with two members of the senior management team who made an approach following a staff meeting to claim there was not an issue with behaviour within the school:

> Stop it now. While you say that you're never going to improve. There is a problem with behaviour in this school; it needs sorting out; it's what's preventing staff from doing their job properly. So don't say that to me because you're wrong.

Another example from the same school illustrates how an influential member of the re-formed leadership team, taken from the existing staff was challenged to consider his allegiances – to the executive head and the leadership team, or to staff members resistant to change:

> When I get back from [an extended break], I need to know whether you're running with the hare or the hounds, because you can't do both.

In addition to the support of the associate head, the executive heads interviewed were invariably strong advocates of working with middle leaders to improve learning conditions within the school. However, it was interesting to note differences in the relationships between the executive head and middle leaders in the respective schools.

The issues of trust and control were central to this difference in approach. While middle leaders in the adopted school played a pivotal role in the school improvement process, this was often achieved within tight parameters. In contrast, middle leaders appeared to have greater freedom to act within the executive head's original school. In essence, leadership was more likely to have been distributed in their own school, and delegated within the adopted school.

Two factors are likely to be central to this difference. Firstly, the need to achieve rapid improvements in performance encouraged executive heads to adopt a highly prescriptive approach based upon 'tried and tested' approaches. The use of what could be viewed as 'sure-fire' methods

would have had the additional benefit of ensuring some 'quick wins' for the adopted school, thereby raising the confidence of leaders there.

Secondly, there is little doubt that the presence of an existing relationship with middle leaders in their school gave the executive heads a basis for trusting them and providing greater autonomy for them to act. This was also driven by a recognition of the need to build additional leadership capacity within their own school, to ensure that it did not suffer as a result of their involvement in the adopted school:

> You can't be a head of a school and be executive head of a number of others without your school suffering. The head here is not a backfill, nor is it a backfill at any of the other schools. They are the head and I have moved onto another role…We knew when we took over the third school that the short term answer was for me to cope. But over the medium and longer term, we knew we'd have to make new arrangements [for management in this school] … to give us greater capacity.

3.2.3 Relationships with new colleagues

There was little doubt of just how great a challenge the prospect of developing relationships with colleagues in the new school presented. As already noted, most executive heads had joined a school that was seen to be failing its pupils, staff and community. Morale and self-esteem were at record lows.

Executive heads in these circumstances received something of a mixed reception. On the one hand, they were viewed with a degree of mistrust and concern - staff were sometimes suspicious of their reputation; often harbouring fears that foremost amongst the new executive head's role was that of chief executioner:

> They're watching their backs as you've just got rid of their boss.

However the scale of the problems facing the school also meant that these heads were viewed as potential saviours. The achievements of their current school were often well known, affording them a credibility and engendering a recognition that the new executive head represented the school's best hope of improvement.

As a result, executive heads interviewed had been quick to recognise this and sought to build upon the positive responses as a honeymoon period they had been offered. High on their list of priorities was establishing a culture of openness and trust. This often involved including others within the decision-making process and taking steps to create a blame-free culture, where the mistakes of the past were recognised but seen as a basis for learning and moving forward.

Winning hearts and minds was a key theme identified by most executive heads. This was achieved through a variety of means, including celebrating success, investing in staff, coaching, making things happen, and connecting through positive but focused, relationships:

> It was what it was about at [x]. It's about giving people the confidence that you'll carry out the things you've said you'll do and it's having the humility to put your hand up when things haven't gone right and say 'I got it wrong.

> Win the hearts and minds is the most fundamental thing.

3.2.4 Relationships with others

The importance and influence of social capital contacts has already been mentioned, and the further key area of relationships related to those that existed outside of the school. Foremost amongst these was that between the executive head and the adopted school's LEA.

Practical support offered by the LEA was frequently accessed by the executive heads. Indeed many of these individuals clearly articulated their needs and were happy to draw upon the advice of those more knowledgeable in these areas. Finance, personnel marketing and IT were examples of issues where the executive heads interviewed had used consultancy support offered by the LEA:

> The advantage of being an experienced head is that…I've known where to go for help. And I know when I'm out of my depth and I'm not foolish enough not to shout for help when I need it.

More broadly there was a sense that the LEA concerned was generally happy to let the executive head get on with things.

Several executive heads were clear that their involvement with the adopted school helped enhance its reputation and add credibility to its work. This secured a number of benefits for the school. For instance, in the broader community, the link with an already successful school brought trust and space for the school to work in. It was also seen to provide some more general protection for the school from stakeholders such as the professional associations and the DfES. Some of the executive heads were also clear over the value they could bring through networking and accessing resources that the school so desperately needed. The importance of establishing the trust and involvement of these different groups could be seen as central to the longer-term viability of the school.

> It's fundamental that the community believes in the school, because if it doesn't, the school will die…personally I think turning a school round is pretty straightforward, it's just damned hard work. But if you don't involve the community it will just go straight back down again.

4. Conclusions

Owing to the study's scope, it is intended that these be viewed as tentative conclusions. There are evident themes that emerge through convergence throughout the report, but it needs to be recognised that analysis and synthesis of these are filtered through the authors' own understanding. Also, the data gathered has only been provided by the executive headteacher and whilst veracity is not in question, other sources of data would inform the creation of a richer and methodologically more reliable, picture.

Exploring the themes located within the findings in greater depth would serve to inform judgements about the nature of executive headship further. In each of the sub-sections below, findings are briefly summarised and questions that could be drawn from these are posed - these questions would benefit from further exploration. The list is not necessarily exhaustive.

The benefits for partner schools

The positive outcomes for the partner schools were very evident, based on the interview data. It was clear that, based on the interview data, the impact the executive head and their team had within the time frames was substantial in terms of:

- speed of transformation
- transference of effective school systems from the lead school
- opportunity to be coached by high-calibre staff
- improved distributed leadership
- improved management structures
- improved behaviour and attendance
- a rigorous focus on learning and achievement:
  - high expectations
  - curriculum focus
  - professional development
- improved clarity of focus for all staff and mechanisms to support this
- a no-compromise approach to staff capability proceedings as a move towards high quality teaching and learning provision
- the development of a 'can do' culture
- enhanced school community confidence in the potential for the school to secure improvement

Questions that could be raised which would provide further data:

- How did others within the school community view the transformation agenda and its outcomes – existing staff, 'brought-in' staff, pupils, parents, governors?
- How do the standards of achievement reflect on the executive head's tenure?
- What do the monitoring reports have to say about the school's development?
- Post-executive head involvement, what happens to the sustainability of improvement? Do capacity-building approaches provide a platform for further improvement once the exit is enacted? How does support-based executive headship in primary schools reflect these findings?

The benefits for lead schools

- opportunities for professional development and career development at a range of levels; heightened lead school capacity
- extended reputation of the school
- opportunities to learn from the partner school experience and reflect on implications for own school

The strengths and limitations of this model as a contributor to school improvement and system change

From what the executive heads reported, the model had both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths were largely:

- insight for improvement – seeing very clearly 'the wood for the trees', based on informed experience that the executive head and their associated team brought
- lack of 'baggage' of the executive head and their team – there was no history and a clean perspective could be brought to a difficult situation that was action-oriented and achievement-focused – an example of where this manifested itself clearly was with respect to capability proceedings
- leadership and management capacity that the executive head and the team brought to help move the situation rapidly forward; the collaborative and distributive nature of this meant that there was a solidarity of experience that a 'lone operator' would not enjoy
- school-to-school arrangements that could be brought to bear to add instant capacity – effective practice modelled in situ to staff that may not have been previously in a position to know what this looked like
- trust that could be borrowed on the back of the executive head's individual and their school's prior achievement
- additional capacity that an established support network could bring to the situation – contacts and their 'clout' and resource potential

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Further reading

DfES Federations website: http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/federations/

Appendix 1 – Interview schedule

There are four areas of questioning.

Context of school and conditions for involvement – 20 minutes

1. What was the background to your involvement with the school?
2. What were the mechanics of your appointment?

How they work – role and practice – 30 minutes

1. How do you go about diagnosing what is required for the school and required of you?
2. How do you balance your time and effort between the different schools?
3. How do you spend your time in this role, and with whom do you work?
4. What are the challenges of this role? How do they differ from 'regular headship?

Sustainability/replicability/transferability into the broader school system – 30 minutes

1. What's the balance between achieving the short-term goals and the longer term vision?
2. How do you think your work builds capacity in the school?
3. Do you believe what you've achieved here can be a achieved elsewhere?
4. What is needed to make that possible?
5. Do you think this work provides us with any lessons about the nature of headship in the 21st century?

Impact – school, system, self – 30 minutes

1. What are the key things that have been achieved through your involvement with the school as executive head? How do you judge whether you are making a difference?
2. What defines a 'successful' executive head?
3. How do you know when the job is done?
4. What have you learnt? (about ways of working, about self, broader school improvement).
5. What would you say are your three guiding principles for this work?