

Successful leadership for promoting the achievement of white working class pupils

A report prepared by
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SCHOOL LEADERS

Report

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1. Introduction

The best of school leadership raises the work of adults and the attainment of young people to levels that exceed expectations and, sometimes, even their own ambitions. It combines relentless focus and management skill with wide professional knowledge and profound empathy, wrapped in a bag of energy and tied with robust optimism. It has its most remarkable expression in circumstances where poverty and culture might otherwise corrode the potential of young people to fulfil their talent.

This report celebrates some of that leadership by trying to understand and describe it in ways that make it accessible and replicable. It is a product of research commissioned jointly by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). The research has its roots in a growing national concern about the low attainment levels reached by young people from low-income backgrounds who are described as white British in surveys recording ethnic background. The evidence of the extent and persistence of that low attainment is described briefly below and in more detail in the accompanying literature review (for which the support of Janet Friedlander, Head of Information at the NUT, was invaluable).

NUT and NCSL asked us to look at the research evidence and current practice from a new perspective. Much has been written about how schools can be improved or made increasingly effective and there is an extensive body of research about the strategies and tactics employed by effective school leaders. Less is known about the character and characteristics of those leaders. More knowledge about those features will help the education service to prepare and provide more leaders for similar contexts and to disrupt the cycle of poor attainment that has dogged some communities since the end of the nineteenth century.

Denis Mongon
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2. The research

The research was led by Dr Denis Mongon, Senior Research Fellow and Dr Christopher Chapman, Reader in Educational Leadership, both from the University of Manchester's School of Education. The work was carried out over four phases, the central two of which overlapped considerably.

The first phase of the project was a scoping exercise which included a seminar hosted by the NUT (National Union of Teachers 2008) and from which the following key aims and questions for the research project were produced:

Key aims, to identify:

- key leadership characteristics (skills, knowledge, attitudes and understanding) required to effectively promote achievement of white working class pupils
- key challenges, according to existing literature, faced by school leaders in promoting the achievement of white working class pupils
- support and professional development required to enable school leaders to develop the key characteristics

Key questions, to answer:

- What challenges do school leaders face in promoting the achievement of white working class pupils?
- What good practice already exists and where?
- What does existing good practice tell us about key leadership characteristics required to effectively promote the achievement of white working class pupils?
- What support, professional development and resources are required to enable school leaders to develop these characteristics?
- Are there any barriers to school leaders' development of these characteristics?
- How can an understanding of the specific needs of white working class pupils be fostered relative to the needs of pupils from other backgrounds?

The second phase was the production of the companion literature review which is organised around four areas:

i. Underachievement in low income groups

This section confirmed the depth and persistence of underachievement amongst pupils who come from low income families.

ii. Explanations

This section summarised the explanations for white working class under-achievement which researchers and analysts have offered, including factors such as poverty, culture and social capital, parental perceptions, aspirations and attitudes, pupil perceptions, aspirations and attitudes, professional expectations and attitudes – typically 'labelling' or curriculum and pedagogy in schools

iii. Successful interventions

This section summarised interventions which have been focused on and successful for particular groups and interventions with a wider school improvement focus producing evident gains for pupils from particular groups.

iv. Leadership evidence

This section summarised the literature on effective school leadership in particular focusing on evidence of success in 'challenging circumstances' and/or with specific groups, in particular but not exclusively white working class pupils.

The third phase was a series of visits to five primary and six secondary schools where the attainments of pupils from white, low income families was significantly better than the national averages for their group. Additionally, for comparison, we visited one successful secondary girls' school where the white minority is the lowest achieving group. Suggestions for suitable schools were canvassed from colleagues at NUT, NCSL, Manchester University, and more widely, including Directors of Children's Services. The suggestions were narrowed down to a shortlist by reference to Ofsted inspection reports and the end of Key Stage 2 or GCSE results for 2007. We only considered schools where recent Ofsted reports described leadership as good or better. We used the descriptions at the front of Ofsted reports as an additional confirmation that the schools served low-income, predominantly white communities. We looked for headteachers who had been in post for at least two full academic years so the 2007 results might be influenced by their leadership. One of the secondary schools was below the government's floor target of 30 per cent 5A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths but was retained because of a CVA in the top 25 per cent and a pass rate of 56 per cent 5A*-C overall. Two of the five primary schools selected were in the middle 20 per cent of schools nationally by Key Stage 1-2 CVA score, one was in the top 25 per cent and two in the top 5 per cent. One of the seven secondary schools was in the top 40 per cent of schools nationally by Key Stage 2-4 CVA, four were in the top 25 per cent and two were in the top 5 per cent. At each of the schools we conducted interviews with the headteacher, other leaders and staff. At almost all of the schools we also interviewed pupils. At many of the schools we interviewed school governors and local authority staff.

The fourth phase was the analysis and synthesis of the information we gathered, from which a number of strong trends have emerged and are reported in the following pages. The report is organised in the following four sections:

Section 3: a summary of the findings

Section 4: a report on the key strategies, tactics, intelligence and character traits we have observed

Section 5: narrative illustrations of some of the key practice

Section 6: recommendations

We have also published a companion piece containing 12 vignettes, one for each of the schools we have visited, to illustrate the variety and consistency of their practice and cultures.

3. Summary findings

The companion literature review to this report confirms that after more than a century of free, compulsory education and sixty years of the welfare state, family income and status are by far the most significant correlates of success in the school system. Although gender is also an independent and significant factor, the social class attainment gap at Key Stage 4 is three times as wide as the gender gap. On average, with the exception of the small group of students described as ‘travellers’, ‘white British’ boys entitled to free school meals were the male group with lowest attainment and ‘white British’ girls entitled to free school meals were the female group with lowest attainment.

Pupils from low income, white British backgrounds were significantly more successful at the end of Key Stage 2 and 4 in the schools we visited than their comparable peers in schools on average.

To characterise the shared features of leadership in these schools, we have used a framework of five strategies, three characteristics that we have called ‘intelligences’ and four personality traits. Like threads of DNA, these strands combine uniquely in each case – like members of a species, these schools appear to be as different on the surface as they are alike at their core. The single most impressive and common characteristic of these leaders seems to us to be their ability to stimulate ‘goal-focused teamwork’ or, put another way, to create ‘a purposeful community’.

The leaders in those schools appeared to follow the basic strategies, or very close variations, used by most successful school leaders:

- **Building vision and setting directions**
Staff and students at these schools knew where they were travelling and what was expected of them.
- **Understanding and developing people**
Staff and students were provided with intellectual and emotional stimulation in which personalised support rather than criticism was predominant.
- **Designing the organisation**
The structure and culture of the organisations had been engineered to match their purpose.
- **Managing and supporting the teaching and learning programme**
The leaders were relentless in their application to the highest standards of teaching and learning
- **Collecting, monitoring, analysing and using information**
Attention to detail was a remarkable feature of these schools, not least in the compilation and use of information about what was happening.

These leaders appeared to draw on three characteristics which, for lack of a better phrase, we will label as 'intelligences':

- **Contextual intelligence**
These leaders show a profound respect for the context they are working in without ever patronising it.
- **Professional intelligence**
These leaders are very good at their core business: leadership and management to nurture the teamwork on which the school's excellent standards of teaching and learning are dependent.
- **Social intelligence**
These leaders appear to be sensitive to the emotional state of their pupils and colleagues and to use that to guide their own thoughts and actions.

These leaders appeared to show four personality traits which we have labelled:

- **Self-efficacy**
A belief in your own capabilities and confidence that you can cope with the job.
- **Internal locus of control**
The personal responsibility individuals take for their behaviour and its consequences.
- **Conscientiousness**
A tendency to struggle incessantly, achieve more and more in the minimum time.
- **Rapport**
A deep interest in other people with a tendency to be empathetic and helpful and to nurture a sense of team and community.

4. Tactics, intelligence and personality

A. Strategies and tactics

Strategically, headteachers in the schools we visited appeared to follow the basic formula, or very close variations, adopted by most successful school leaders. The framework of five strategies that we have adopted to describe their approaches builds on summaries in NCSL (2006) and Day et al (2008):

- **Building vision and setting directions**
Staff and students at these schools knew where they were travelling and what was expected of them. There was a strong, shared sense of purpose, goals were specific and well understood; expectations were high for staff and students alike.
- **Understanding and developing people**
Staff and students were provided with intellectual and emotional stimulation (including purposeful professional development for the adults) in which personalised support rather than criticism was predominant. Staff recruitment was a high priority often ingeniously pursued. The values and practices expected of everyone were modelled by the leaders and permeated the schools.
- **Designing the organisation**
The structure and culture of the organisations had been engineered to match their purpose. Lines of authority, responsibility, accountability and autonomy were clear for adults and students, whatever their age or status. Close attention was paid to the appearance of the built environment, of classrooms and corridors and of the people in them. The schools had built strong connections with parents, were appreciated by their local communities and were confident of their role in local and national contexts.
- **Managing and supporting the teaching and learning programme**
The leaders were relentless in their application to the highest standards of teaching and learning. Success in either was never taken for granted and invariably celebrated. Difficulties were never ignored and, for staff and students, always treated respectfully. Support and development were always the first response to any problem or obstacle. Mistakes were acceptable, persistent underperformance was not. The protection of teaching staff from distractions did not stop the schools pursuing other outcomes and benefiting from community engagement.
- **Collecting, monitoring, analysing and using information**
Attention to detail was a remarkable feature of these schools, not least in the compilation and use of information about what was happening. Both student progress and teaching standards were regularly, frequently and closely observed, recorded and analysed. The very large part of this was rooted in regular methodical performance measurement and review. Some part depended on the leaders' personal observation of activity and relationships around the school. The analyses were then used to inform planning and the deployment of effort resources, including precious time. Pupils and staff reported that this approach was comfortable and liberating rather than irritating or oppressive.

There is, though, a more complex story to be told about the success of these schools which draws not only on what these leaders do but also on how and why they do it. Their success is a product of the chemistry combining what, how and why rather than in the formulae that could be written to distinguish them. We will use very little space in this section describing what these leaders do; we illustrate that in more detail in the following Section 5. It is even more extensively explored in companion volume of vignettes we have written to reflect the work and culture of each of the schools. We have summarised what they do in the five strategic approaches above and that is similarly summarised across the research reported in the companion literature review.

We would have liked to be able to report confidently that some of the tactics which followed from the common strategic approaches were consistent across the schools or at least consistent across one of the phases, and to share those. That is not the case. For example: some schools interpreted a care for student appearance into a blazer and tie uniform, others into T-shirts and sweat shirts; some leaders were described as ‘always calm’ in their contact with difficult students and families, others were described as ‘robust’ or ‘prepared to fight fire with fire’; some leaders argued for more of their pupils to be designated as having special educational needs, others believed that was not appropriate; some leaders translated their contextual intelligence into a profound engagement with the local community, others marked clear boundaries between the internal order and the external disorder. Some secondary headteachers interpreted their focus on quality teaching into a banding system, others were committed to mixed ability groups; some asserted the non-negotiables of student behaviour with quiet, almost understated determination, others with vigorous, often public assertiveness.

To avoid any doubt we will repeat the central points:

- we did not observe any silver bullets
- the approaches that these school leaders adopt are those which are consistently confirmed and recommended in the considerable library of school improvement and effectiveness literature
- they interpret those approaches in unique ways reflecting characteristics of themselves and their context

So what is there about these unusually successful leaders that might be different? Every school leader aspires to do the things these do but only a few are then successful with white working class pupils. Are the leaders we met just lucky, have things just fallen into place for them? Or is there something distinctive about how and why they do it? Our answer to those questions is cautiously proposed: we cannot be absolutely certain that those features are distinctive – our research did not allow for that kind of controlled comparison. That said, there are remarkably recurrent features in what we could observe about how and why these leaders work in schools in the locations and ways that they do, sufficiently recurrent to suggest they may well be directly associated with their success. This proposal has echoes of some of the work on the how and why of school leadership referenced in the companion literature review. (Examples include Ainscow and West, 2006; Busher and Barker, 2003; Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) 2008; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; Riehl, 2000; Thrupp, 1999 and 2001; Wrigley, 2003 and 2005)

B. Intelligence

Our proposal is that the leaders we interviewed draw on three characteristics which, for lack of a better phrase, we will label as ‘intelligences’. We use that label simply to capture the idea of a property of the mind which embraces several insights and abilities – we are not making a point about the nature of intelligence. A similar approach using ‘intelligences’ was taken in an earlier analysis of leadership in challenging circumstances (Chapman et al 2006). Disposition, capacity or literacy (Southworth 2004) might be other appropriate labels with which some readers would be more comfortable. The three ‘intelligences’ we propose here and then illustrate through the narratives in the Section 5 of the report are contextual, professional and social.

Contextual intelligence

These leaders show a profound respect for the context they are working in without ever patronising it. Most of them have backgrounds and childhoods in low income communities and this appeared to be an important part of their professional and personal identity. They had chosen to work in these contexts.

They appear to be sensitive to the school's external environment without being condescending. "It is hard, difficult out there, but that's no excuse for any of us..." They tend to talk about the strengths of the local community rather than its weaknesses, they see the locality as an opportunity rather than a problem, they approach the area as a resource rather than an obstacle: "You can actually make a difference here..." No-one in their schools is ever allowed to say "What do you expect with kids or parents or places like these?" They expect to overcome disadvantage and this feeds into a set of values which informed their work.

They see the value of integrated service approaches to the needs of young people and the contribution schools can make to the full range of outcomes for young people. That is an aid to their core activity which is educational provision which in turn contributes to other outcomes. They collaborate with other professionals working with young people.

They have a clear, all round view of their position in local educational networks. They understand the political environments in which they operate, locally and nationally. They adopt the education service's initiatives for their school, drain the contribution and divert the constraints.

Professional intelligence

These leaders are very good at their core business: leadership and management which nurture excellent standards of teaching and learning. They know what is happening in their school or, at the very least, someone in the leadership team knows. The handling of information about the school is in every case treated with remarkable thoroughness. It is harvested and prepared to be organisationally nutritious, to create energy for action.

Leadership and management responsibility has been modulated at different times to match the development stages of the schools. Many have passed through difficult times including a period of tight, central control by the head or a few individuals over leadership and management responsibilities which are now distributed. The phasing and structure for distributing leadership and management varied from school to school. The headteachers seemed in general to want to move in the direction of distribution with some sense of earned autonomy as quickly as they could. Staff understand their own accountabilities and there is a high degree of personal autonomy within that. Disciplined risk taking is encouraged and occasional misjudgements are expected and accepted provided the consequent learning and development is exploited.

These leaders have a strong, personal view about what constitutes good teaching and learning; they can describe it, model it and expect it to permeate their school. They believe that well supported and encouraged teachers will constantly improve and they demonstrate that through high quality professional development programmes. They know about the approaches which improve schools and maintain their effectiveness. That knowledge is drawn in part from their own experience at work, not least working with effective leaders, and in part from a personal inquisitiveness which has drawn them into more or less formal professional enquiry and learning.

They are sharp on funding, funding streams and budget deployment. They constantly scan for new funding sources (one rewardingly laid siege to her local authority's funding formula). They deploy the budget to support what the school needs to do, not what it always does. They are risk takers, flying very close to the wind of financial regulations and grant requirements to ensure that funding streams are aligned with the school's priorities and no-one else's.

They are adept at turning external pressure into internal impetus, sometimes deriving momentum from a sense of conspiracy, "us round here against the rest... and we will come out best". Targets and measured performance are very important to these leaders but they are a means; the end is to improve the quality of people's lives. They look at their work with a long field of focus, across the short term and into the long term. They can do the quick fix tactics that create momentum in school improvement and still keep an eye on the future, knowing that what is done and especially how it is done will carry a long echo.

Staff recruitment is a vital priority for them and they are both methodical and imaginative about filling staff vacancies. They believe that their students are entitled to the best teachers and their staff to the best colleagues. That is easier now that the schools' reputations are good and the staff tell great stories at their professional development events and around their professional networks. Many of the leaders tell of times when personal head hunting, arm twisting and loyal friends were called upon. There is a trend to grow their own staff, initially in some cases a response to recruitment difficulties, now a way to build community connections and to raise staff morale. The combination of new types of support staff, teaching assistants and new routes into teaching mean that at every level, from ancillary to senior professional, the development of local people and current staff is a possible and valuable investment.

Social intelligence

These leaders appear to be sensitive to the emotional state of their pupils and colleagues and use that to guide their own thoughts and actions. In turn, they are deeply admired across their staff, by teachers and others. Asked what they would do if the current head left, many of their colleagues answered "I'd go too", though some then had second thoughts: "We'd have to finish the work we've started." Many teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders were well aware that their experience with that head was laying a foundation or stepping stone for their own career.

The leaders have high level personal skills rooted in and demonstrated by their obvious respect for the adults and children around them. For them, this behaviour is rooted in a value system and sense of moral purpose, a clear view about how people should behave towards one another. They model that perspective as they move around the school, a word for everyone however large or small (the person, not the word). They drive high expectations without losing their sense of empathy or eroding anyone's dignity. Their behaviour in moments of tension and crisis are reportedly different: some are described as "always calm", some are said to be prepared "to meet fire with fire". In any case, their colleagues believe that they are in control of themselves and the situation, uncompromising in their protection of the school's values and practices. One consequence is that they can create an atmosphere in which high expectations are seen as evidence of care and concern and not as surveillance or constraint. Sometimes in our conversations in the schools we could not distinguish between references to students or staff. This verbatim sentence could have come from a pupil or adult in any of the schools, changing only the gender of the pronoun: "You know, he respects, he wants us to be the best. If you need help he knows and you only have to ask... or he'll tell you."

C. Personality

Being an energetic and tenacious leader with a sense of moral commitment who knows how to do school improvement and who is a nice person, at least most of the time at work, might not distinguish those who are exceptionally successful from most other school leaders; so is there more we can say about this group? In the accompanying literature review, we have referred to the three personality traits which Nadine Engels and her colleagues (2008, p.163) identified in their study of 46 Belgium schools said to have a 'positive culture':

- self-efficacy
- internal locus of control
- Type A behaviour

We also noted similar behaviour traits in other descriptions of successful school leadership, (for example in Department for Education and Skills (DfES) 2007; Ferguson, 2007; Harris and Chapman, 2002). We do not think that Type A behaviour properly describes the purposefulness and determination to which our sample appear committed. We have therefore borrowed self-efficacy and internal locus of control from Engel's tripology and added two others to encompass what we observed. Those two are conscientiousness and rapport.

Self-efficacy is the most commonly recurring trait in the literature and refers to a belief in your own capabilities and confidence that you are able to cope with the job. Confidence of that kind makes you more likely to tackle a task and to persist if success is not immediate or even in the face of initial failure. Persistence and eventual success create learned behaviour, reinforcing the original disposition – "Eh, I was right, I really can do this." Day's (2008) review noted that in both primary and secondary sectors, heads from more disadvantaged schools appeared to have the most positive views about their self-efficacy 'arguably a very good thing given the scope of the challenges they face' (p7). The majority of key staff in that research also viewed their headteachers as highly self-efficacious about their jobs. The leaders we interviewed tended to be confident about what they are achieving in the sense that they do know they are doing well although they are all concerned about its fragility. Self-efficacy might make a particular contribution to the application of what we have called 'social intelligence', providing leaders with the confidence (and in these cases without any arrogance) to offer the care and trust which builds strong personal connections.

Locus of control describes the personal responsibility individuals take for their behaviour and its consequences. People who have an internal locus of control have a tendency to attribute events in their life to their own control. The leaders we interviewed were not inclined to blame staff, students, parents, community, local authority or national government for their problems (though some say that the latter two are not always helpful). They were inclined to see the destiny of the school as being in its own hands, it should deal with its difficulties and claim credit for its triumphs. They determinedly control the variables that are at their disposal and are prepared to be accountable for those. That internal locus of control might make a particular contribution to the application of what we have called 'contextual intelligence' diverting leaders away from the temptation to look outside the school for reasons, if not excuses, to explain any shortcomings in performance.

Conscientiousness is one part of the Five Factor Model often used in psychology to describe personality traits. (The others are openness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism). We adopt it here, not in a strict clinical sense, but as a description whose meaning is sufficiently the same in clinical and lay terms for it to make sense to a wide audience. Conscientious individuals tend toward being painstaking, self-disciplined, organised, careful before acting and striving to achieve. They are generally hard working and reliable, sometimes even perfectionist. Type A behaviour which Engels used to describe the incessant struggle to achieve more and more in the minimum time which she observed, is too often associated with competitive aggression to reflect the disposition of our leaders fairly.

We prefer Harris and Chapman's (2002) phrasing, 'the confidence to be contentious and to deal with conflict, highly pragmatic, resilient and determined' (p3) or the DfES's 'not shying away from making decisions...[having] a passion for order and thoroughness... an insistence, persistence and consistency about certain non-negotiables' (2007, p11). The leaders in our sample did not appear to us or to their colleagues to be aggressive in a personal, unpleasant way or to be competitive in ways that required other people or schools to be defined as losers. On the contrary, as we explore in the following paragraph, the ambition and sense of perfection with which these leaders are struggling is characterised as much by the quality of the relationships they create around them as by the student outcomes. Conscientiousness might make a particular contribution to the application of what we have called 'professional intelligence' allowing these leaders to work in ways that were compelling and irresistible.

Rapport, we are using to mean a disposition to show interest in and concern for others. It embraces a strong sense of empathy, sympathy and respect for others. It is associated with trust, openness, acceptance and shared understanding. It is close to the personality trait of Agreeableness which is 'associated with warmth, friendliness, altruism and compliance to the needs of others [and] is uniquely predictive of social support and harmonious relationships' (Nettle and Liddle, 2008, p323). The school leaders we interviewed tended, according to our limited observation and to the other sources we could check, to combine the three apparently self-centred traits we have described (self-efficacy, locus of control and conscientiousness) and still to avoid their potential narcissism and isolation. These leaders actively create a sense of community and teamwork within and around the school. They have an apparently genuine and deep interest in other people and a tendency to be empathetic and helpful. Generally they were optimistic and disposed to trust the adults and students around them. Their sense of how to build robust relationships is adopted by most of the staff and student so it permeates the school, for some quietly and for others ostentatiously. Each of the leaders and other interviewees had anecdotes which showed that they were not agreeable to everybody every day and perhaps not to anybody some days. However, the overall loyalty and appreciation of the people around them is tangible. Our hypothesis is that these leaders have a strong sense of rapport in their personality. They do have confidence in their own ability, a strong sense of personal responsibility and a drive to be successful. They also have a strong disposition to express those aspects of their personality through the success and well-being of other people, younger or older, around them.

D. Some additional reflections

The school leadership we observed had helped to create impressive learning communities. We have tried to reflect accurately the approaches the leaders use, the intelligence they bring to bear and the personality they apply. There were some other reflections which should be shared.

These leaders had been in post for several years. That might have been in part a consequence of our intention to look for schools where the leader had been in post for at least two years but we did not have to use that tie breaker in our selection. It appeared to be more a consequence of their commitment and sense of purpose. They tended to have a well established core to their staffing and notably well established senior leadership teams. Both had been hard won over time and were held to be essential if momentum was to be sustained. New teachers, not least newly qualified teachers were welcome for the variety they introduced. We have noted the methodical recruitment of local people into a range of posts and the focus on personal development which allows anyone to pursue the progress at work that fits their ambitions.

There appeared to be no significant differences between the headteachers for whom this was a first appointment and those who had other headship experience. Experience, the constant process of learning, was important to these leaders and most pointed towards the value of earlier experience working with successful headteachers.

The large majority of these leaders, with only a couple of exceptions, were keen to emphasise that their school's success had not been a sprint and had been a long run, sometimes a bit like a steeplechase. Most were circumspect about the idea of a quick fix for struggling schools and several expressed concern about the implications of leading more than one school, if that role were asked of them.

The success of the primary schools and secondary schools might be described in different ways.

- The primary schools appear to create the safe and healthy foundation on which all happily successful learners depend. They are absolutely dependable places with highly structured routines which iron out the peaks and troughs in pupils' day-to-day turmoil. The personal warmth with which that is done permeates the schools. The emotional and physical boundaries are safe; the schools are, for the pupils certainly and maybe for the staff, a haven. Within that guaranteed and resilient safety net, the pupils are encouraged to take the intellectual and physical risks on which stimulation and learning depend, and which are inhibited in more chaotic parts of their lives. The children can learn, in a virtuous circle, to learn successfully.
- The secondary schools also use routine and dependability to powerful effect. The leaders make sure that the immediate environment is controlled and manipulated so that teaching and learning can be effective. The students learn that they can meet high expectations. A student who can meet this week's high expectations might then begin to be tempted into ambition and aspiration by the constant modelling of success after school, including mentors and role models.

There is a concern in both phases that the cocoon they wrap around their pupils or students is not always well protected at the following stages. We have no evidence to judge that concern though we might expect it to be true in some localities and not in others. In particular, staff in secondary schools that did not have a sixth form frequently commented on two detrimental consequences. First, this deprived their students of role models on-site; older students whose educational progress would be visible are instead at another institution so therefore invisible and inaccessible during the school day. Second, the continuity at 16 plus which might benefit students with less economic and social capital was more difficult if not impossible to plan or implement. One school had been tracking and could report with confidence that after leaving the school for college, their former students recorded disappointing levels of drop out.

5. Narratives

In this section, we want to illustrate the leadership ‘intelligences’ which we described on pages 10–12 by recording some of the stories we were told on our school visits. We will tell six stories, two corresponding broadly to each of the three ‘intelligences’ though they will demonstrate that the work of these school leaders cannot be dissected into separate parts without losing some of their essential coherence. We have disguised the names of the schools, the leaders and the people we are quoting, in part to spare their blushes, in part because some of the narratives draw a little on more than one source and in part to obscure the disservice we have done to the schools and people we have not used in this section. We have taken a poetic licence with some of the quotations and sequence in the narratives so that we could produce an accurate and readable account in a small space. We do though believe we have properly reflected the stories we were told.

Contextual intelligence: Narrative (1)

Take the values of the estate

Michael Seabourne and Jenny Lloyd have worked together, for more than a decade on and off, in the senior leadership team at Broxted School, most of that time as head and deputy respectively. The school is on a very large, mid twentieth century, visibly poor housing estate on the edge of a city. One of their Year 8 boys described the situation succinctly: “There is no school better than this.”

That comment would please Michael and Jenny whose sentences overlap as they describe how their school complements – their verb – the community it serves. Michael had said before we met the students: “If nothing else comes from your contact with students here today, above all I would be mortified if the one thing that did not shine through was their pride in the school, a sense of place...”

The school’s high expectations and achievement appear to owe a great deal to the leaders’ careful alignment of what happens inside the school (for which they have implacably high expectations) with the community it serves. Michael and Jenny are both from low income backgrounds and say that they understand the advantages and disadvantages that kind of background creates for their students. They describe how, because of its increasing popularity, it now draws its students almost exclusively from the estate with none of even the small number of students who once attended and lived in nearby private housing. “We’ve become increasingly less comprehensive; there’s nothing like a reasonable social spread or even ability spread when Year 7 starts here. There is a long tail of underachievement.” They purposefully recruit staff who share their passion, more self-confessed than celebrated, to work in with young people from this narrow, white, low income background from which, they say, a visit to the city centre is a rare event, still less a healthy day out in the nearby national park.

Though they readily describe their location as challenging, Michael and Jenny do not tolerate the idea of labelling children or families as a problem: “When other people say it must be hard, working at Broxted, we always say no, and the staff do as well... We’ve taken the values off the estate and turned them to our advantage.”

Michael and Jenny generate respect for the school’s efforts by asserting their belief that local parents, even in dysfunctional families, really do expect the school to teach. A typical conversation with parents who bumped into Michael or Jenny in the street would once have had three staccato themes “Is my kid at school?” and “Is he or she behaving?” followed by a “By the way, how are they getting on?” Now they describe the ‘textured’ (their word again) conversations they can have because parents expect their children to be doing well and dare to show an interest that won’t be disappointed.

They also believe that the parents expect children to behave and learn in school even if their families can't create those expectations in their own home. "So you end up applying standards the parents recognise but can't attain outside. You gain an enormous amount of respect from the parents because you make sure that the students and the staff and all the stakeholders in this school know exactly where they stand and understand the consequences, implications of stepping outside those parameters. Those are the very things that do not exist on the estate although they would like them to."

The school leaders feel that provided the school is consistent in its approach to discipline, they are working with rather than against the local cultural grain.

The school leaders also believe that the importance they attach to standards of appearance and collegiality are shared by families across the estate – even if they might use a different language to express that. So if the constant battles with teenagers over school uniforms were not a surprise – "only adolescents know how many ways a tie can be forgotten, lost or tied around you" – it was disappointing that parents were so lukewarm in their support for the school's expectations. That was until the parents were asked and could explain how blazers and ties did not fit well with their values or their family budgets. Now they are "completely" behind the logoed polo and sweat shirts: "smart in a serviceable and affordable kind of way".

"You take the values that exist in the community and create a sense of order, cohesion and continuity to those standards. Then people will sign up, with a sense of pride, and there is a flywheel effect."

Contextual Intelligence: Narrative (2)

Travelling a journey

Martin Clark, head at Moorview Primary School, has always worked in schools serving deprived communities, even on teaching practice. "I've never worked in a school that hasn't been like this... in my career, no one's ever let me into one of those leafy suburbs."

Martin recalls the early part of his career when he used to engage pupils through football and chess. On Saturdays, he coached football in the morning and chess in the afternoon. The first house he called at would provide breakfast, someone else would "see him right" for dinner and in the evening on his way home, he'd "be ok" again.

"I was interacting with the community – though I'd not have said that. I do believe in narrowing the gap. I've always believed in pushing and aspirations. We can't tell people what to do, it's about taking people 'on the journey' with you."

More than twenty years later, Martin still employs the same approach, encouraging involvement which in turn leads to increased confidence and contributes to achievement. "I know when our kids are succeeding because I see positive attitudes, I see involvement, I see engagement, I see enjoyment... if you put those together you usually get achievement."

When he first arrived at Moorview, each time he started a club one or two pupils might turn up and the rest would stand by and watch. Now the hall is full every lunch time and every night with a range of activities and parents are asking for more. "The kids are just involved all the time."

Martin is convinced that his seventeen years as head at Moorview and the extent of his work with the local community has a marked effect on the school's success. He feels that he knows the local families very well now, after seeing two generations through school. "Engagement with the people is one of the key demands on me and I want to do it. I'm outside in the playground most mornings to meet everyone, being the figure head I suppose."

He recognises that "when a child has an issue", reflected, for example, as an absence from school perhaps, it is very often a parental problem. Moorview, he explains, has persistent problems with pupil absence: "We have families where two people have died, it's a lone carer, life's absolutely horrendous and every so often they have to get away for a break." Martin feels that a little understanding from him, "take a week off, but the rest of the time get in here as much as you can", is far more effective than adhering to government percentages. He feels strongly that this is an area in which targets don't work and he is forthright enough to manage the consequences his own way.

In drawing many of his staff from the local community or at least with previous experience in similarly deprived schools, Martin promotes understanding of the children and their needs. "These people are great role models for the pupils. They live it - a challenging background doesn't have to inhibit aspirations. A big part of raising pupil aspirations is to understand their needs and how best to support them, and without patronising them."

Pupils at Moorview are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning as they progress through school, not least because they may not be able to rely on support and guidance from their parents. The assistant head says they won't otherwise succeed.

"It's not about parents sitting and doing homework with them or reading with them, it's about them doing it and taking ownership of that. By the end of Year 6 most of our children are aware of that, they're quite switched on to the fact that it's their responsibility."

This is good preparation for secondary school education for which, Martin regrets, there are particular transition difficulties for children from Moorview. He recounts the tales of pupils who in previous years had achieved Level 4 in the Year 6 statutory tests and dropped back to Level 2 or 3 over the summer break. He also talks about the dangers of pupils succumbing to drug and alcohol abuse during this vulnerable time. Equipping pupils with the skills and awareness to take responsibility for their own well-being and education has, Martin is confident, reduced these problems in recent years.

Martin's vision has been to establish the school as a centre for the community and he has successfully developed a wide range of extended services. He plans to provide similar services at the local church hall and to network with local schools. He has also encouraged community groups to use the school for meetings. His aim is to move towards community ownership and community leadership, but to date feels that little progress has been made because he cannot identify groups within the community beyond interest groups. He is looking for a common theme around which the people can unite: "Our new gardening club has started to attract children, parents and grandparents for the first time; perhaps it will be the answer."

Martin's view is widely appreciated and neatly summarised by one of the people who personifies his local commitment, by being all of a parent, ICT Technician and Higher Level Teaching Assistant in the school: "He's always had a vision that the school would become a community school, not just a school but a community place where people could come for all community issues – the fact that there's the health service here. He's always striven for that side of it... to involve everybody in the community in this place."

Professional intelligence: Narrative (1)

It's an attitude

The Headteacher at Kingsbury Lane Primary school, Diane Jameson, believes emphatically that she and her staff can make a positive impact on the lives of every student who enrolls at the school. The impact will be made by the relentless application of their professional skills and knowledge.

The socio-economic challenges of the local council estate are not crushing: "It's an attitude. We simply don't accept the estate as an excuse for second best; we have high expectations, everyday, everybody." (Head)

The pupils' low thresholds of attainment and ambition are not immovable: "We don't expect anything but the best from the pupils all the time and that's the same for the adults. We should expect the best of ourselves, like the pupils, so we all work at that level." (Key Stage Leader)

The stream of local and national initiatives is not overwhelming: "We take thoughtful risks. I think we are good at taking the bits that will work for us and just saying right we're not doing the rest; we're taking this part because this part is right for our children right for our school and will impact. When we were told to raise reading levels we didn't do the national literacy hour. We did our analysis and designed our own approach called The Rainbow Pot which ensures children's literacy learning is structured with key progression skills. Our literacy lesson lasts an hour and a half hour each day and the proof is in the outcomes." (Senior Leader)

Diane Jameson and her leadership team apply their professional intelligence first to employing and deploying the right people by recruitment and then development. Adverts, the head says, are designed "to attract the attention of people who don't say 'for goodness sake?' but who do say 'I wonder what it's like there?' That gets the right people paying a visit." (Head)

The head and staff are also prepared to cajole friends and colleagues whose reputations are known through their networks. When potential staff visit the school, it sets out to persuade them that their journey through the tough avenues across the estate has been worthwhile. The leadership will not allow the person they want to appoint to feel like turning them down: "When I visited the school I bought into it, because it's not just the head who shows you around, teachers and assistants take it in turn. You know what sort of place it is, very quickly." (Senior Leader)

Professional intelligence is then applied to the continuing development of all the staff as a right and a responsibility: "Revisiting and re-questioning, is it still appropriate? Is it still the best? Do we need to adapt? Do we need to change?" (Key Stage Leader)

The school's six page staff development booklet sets out a clear expectation for everybody: "In consultation with the headteacher and CPD manager each member of staff should seek to support and develop their work in school through a range of in-service training."

A framework of clear job descriptions with staff self-assessment and self-appraisal is supported by classroom monitoring, rigorous performance management, professional discussions and an annual review by the leadership team. The product of that activity is a staff development plan which is rooted in both the operational needs of the school and the personal development of individual members of staff. It is a demanding regime, appreciated by a staff which can sense the value personally and collectively.

"I join the training with the teachers so we can all help the children to improve... and I learn things as well." (Teaching Assistant)

With the right people in post and developing as a team, professional intelligence has to be applied simultaneously to the operational detail. The curriculum at Kingsbury Lane balances a focus on the basics with a clear intent to extend the pupils' horizons through a range of activity including writing clubs, meeting authors, performances, residential visits, themed topic days out, a Spanish modern foreign language assistant, music and swimming lessons. Curriculum planning is completed collaboratively in year group teams which meet, teachers and teaching assistants, after school once a week. All the planning documents can be seen in a planning folder on the school's shared network. Once each term, non-contact time is organised for each year group to prepare medium term plans. The planning is built around thematic approaches with very clear learning objectives.

Not only the curriculum, but the layout of every classroom, wall presentations and the decoration of corridors (ceilings and walls) with children's work is methodically planned and executed. Priority and purpose are vital: "You've got to look at what the systems are. There's no point in having a system for lining up the paperclips every morning and make all the staff have the same system to line the paperclips up on the table. Marvellous, same system, consistent, rigorous but you've got to look and say what is the point? Is that making an impact on standards?" (Head)

Professional intelligence: Narrative (2)

Caring about cases

By the time Debbie started Year 11 at the inner city Stephen Cots Grove Specialist Maths College, (SCSC) school had become a marginal part of her life style and definitely not part of her life plan: "I tried to stay out of trouble, just going enough to keep them off my back; but I couldn't see the point really..."

Meanwhile, the senior management team at SCSC was using its collective professional intelligence to target 'at risk' students and tailor the curriculum to their individual needs so that no student escapes 'under the radar'. As Calum MacDonald, a deputy head, put it: "We have a responsibility for every child on our roll. If we have 179 on roll in Year 11 but some of them are not at school I want to know why? I want to know where they are. And I want to know what their programme of study is? The reality is if we lose three children we've lost 1 per cent of our cohort."

Calum is a straight talking Scot who has worked in several schools serving white working class students. His philosophy is underpinned by the principle that SMT's role is to support teachers to teach and that this involves SMT doing more than strategy and high level leadership: "Nitty gritty, rolling your sleeves up and doing the day-to-day grind of school improvement."

One of Calum's many roles is to lead a Raising Achievement Team (RAT). The idea for the RAT came about when the SMT on an 'away day' was reflecting how to engage disaffected Key Stage 4 students. The plan was to develop a system based on 'case reports', similar to the one used to discuss patients in hospitals. The RAT is now a multi-disciplinary team led by Calum and includes the Head of Year 11, the Alternative Curriculum Support Team (learning mentors) and the Attendance Officer, a specialist who works in the community with families to get students back into school. The group's aim is for every student to leave SCSC with the best set of qualifications possible. The team meets on a Thursday afternoon and goes through a list of 'target' students who have been identified as 'at risk' or 'missing'. An action plan is drawn up for each student. The plans range from a specially tailored within school support programme in which a student may follow an individualised programme of study for part of the week to going in to the community to find a 'missing' student and negotiate a pathway for the remainder of their studies. Pathways include a mixture of work experience, a college placement and an individualised GCSE English, maths and ICT package.

Minutes from the RAT meetings are written up, usually on Sunday, and presented for discussion at SMT meeting on Monday. On Thursday the process is repeated, cases are reviewed and new ones are discussed. This attention to detail is driven not by the need to squeeze the last drop out of the system to achieve targets; the main driver is the staff's passion to do their best for all students irrespective of ability or background. Calum believes this is an intensive but necessary process if the school is to support all students to the best of their ability. "We have to do it. It is our responsibility. If we don't fight for these kids then nobody will... Our SEN kids are not expected to leave with Fs and Gs. We want them to leave with A-Cs so they can move on to the next stage of education and training."

As weeks go by, one by one, the under-performing, the hard to reach and the missing are tracked down and drawn back into education. The specialists in the RAT find the students and design the programmes and the teachers do the teaching while SMT provides highly visible support. SMT members pick the students up at the end of lessons to make sure they get to the next room for their individualised support and when necessary go into the community and bring them in. "If we're discussing a particular subject area a teacher may say 'I've never seen three of these kids'. Our response is 'well, we'll go and find them and bring them in'. 171 of our cohort is not enough. I'm working off the roll of 179. And as week by week goes by. This is intensive but it happens and we go on and on and we get them back into the system."

Debbie nearly slipped through the net. Although she was a 'targeted' student her name was not on the list and she was put on study leave. She recalls: "I was walking up the hill. To be fair, I'd just lit up [a cigarette]. I thought this is alright – they've missed me. Then all of a sudden Mr MacDonald came running up the hill – I thought he was going to have a heart attack. He called me back but I just said my name's not on the list I'm not coming back."

Calum reflects on what he suspects must have been an interesting sight for passers by. He charged out of the gates and up the hill calling after this young woman, shouting:

"You are. You are on the list. It was a mistake and I can nae see the fag, Debbie. Put it out, you're targeted for the English paper."

Although Debbie had missed a lot of school and had been on a range of placements and courses, with varied success SCSC managed to keep her in the system. Persuaded that there might be something in it if someone took this much trouble, she left school with five good GCSEs including English and maths. She is now on a further education (FE) course and wants to become a nursery teacher.

RAT does have concerns about what happens to vulnerable students when they leave SCSC for the local FE colleges. Do they slip off the radar again and is all the energy put into keeping them in the system wasted? To counter this there are plans to mentor ex-SCSC students in FE settings with the Head of Year 11 visiting local FE providers and being available to former students for advice, support or just a chat during one lunch time each week. "It's a tiny development, but if success with our white working class students is more about their futures than just GCSEs, then we have to work that out."

Social intelligence: Narrative (1)

That's just how it is

"I'd been here as a kid and then as an assistant before this head arrived. And right from the first meeting, she was coming in with all these ideas and at the beginning I thought, you are having a laugh love, I really did think she was having a laugh and thinking this is not going to work. And I thought, she is not going to last five minutes and it won't be long before I'm out the door, I've just about had enough. But eight years down the line I'm still here and got no plans to leave."

Sarah Wilson, quoted above, is a Senior Teaching Assistant at Longmoor Primary School which serves an estate of predominantly low income families, and has not always been a success. Sarah had hated school, "left at 16, married at 16, had my son at 16, no qualifications, and to think that I'm here now". Sarah tells stories both from her childhood and then from her first years as a classroom assistant at Longmoor of children out of control, running out of school "even after the fencing was built", "there were so many runners, they used to call the police."

Sarah's colleague, Emma Tait, is a teaching assistant and Longmoor is her second school as an assistant: "The difference to where I worked before, I can't tell anybody enough, the difference is unbelievable, you know, the whole atmosphere."

Sarah and Emma describe in their own words how Gwen, the headteacher at Longmoor, models the behaviour which she hopes will permeate the school. They tell how Gwen implements her ideas, offers them training and gives them a voice: "It gives us a belief in this is how it is going to be, but making sure this is how it is going to be and then you believe it. If you have a problem, professional or personal, that door is open. She treats us like she expects us to treat the others..."

In one of several similar explanations we heard in schools, Sarah, describing how she thinks the children are treated, uses phrases which need only to have the pronouns changed to be applied equally to what she and Emma also said about the way they and the other adults treat one another: "It's not just about their behaviour, and understanding them, it's about giving them the boundaries, teaching them that this is how it is going to be and also allowing them to explore their own expectations, and then being aware of what they would like to achieve and what it would take to achieve that."

The stories that Sarah and Emma tell are littered with references to Gwen's calm approach even when faced with parents who are 'ranting and raving': "If a parent is screaming, ranting and raving at Gwen, it's a school so that happens, Gwen will blank them until it's calm. She never gives in, she just tells them calmly: this is how we do it at our school. This is something we have with the children. It's not worth dealing with them when they are like that, they need to calm down till they can listen to you rationally, and speak to you in way you would like to be spoken to, and you can talk to them calmly. That is all down the line, so everybody is like that because when Gwen is with a parent or a child she will do it in a calm way."

They repeatedly say they talk with the children and with one another; it's not right to talk at people, whatever their status and yours. "It's the same though with the adults. We know Gwen is the boss but it's not thrown in your face, I can talk to her. There are no barriers or levels, them and us, here, even though it is really, you're never made to feel like a nobody."

"We back each other: Gwen, the teachers, us, the lunch time supervisors, the cleaners, backs everybody else up not because that's what you've been told to do... that's just how it is, you feel comfortable doing that..."

Finally and as if to reassure us that empathy and hard work are compatible, Emma told a classroom story – the wry emphases are ours: "It might be very unprofessional to say this but last week when Kirsty's mother said 'her cat's dying' and left her clinging to my leg, Kirsty did no work that morning, but we talked about losing precious things, which meant that she could catch up in the afternoon."

Social intelligence: Narrative (2)

Everybody pulls together

Carole Tennant has dedicated 28 years of her teaching career to James Buckley Secondary School, the last 11 years as headteacher. Colleagues feel that her appointment in contrast to the previous 'traditional' head was a catalyst for profound change. The previous head "was of the old school" explains one Head of Year, "and when he retired, and the current head took post, then we got into a new regime with a different ethos".

It was from that point, staff believe, that the school ethos began to change and standards really began to improve. The change in ethos, they say, was about recognising and supporting the needs of people – pupils and staff alike. Alongside all the practical, professional strategies and solutions designed to support the needs of the pupils, to raise their aspirations and to help them succeed, there is an over-riding feeling of nurture in the school.

That permeating sense of support and nurture might reflect, some of the staff wonder, the gender balance in the senior leadership at James Buckley. Carole thinks that might be right. "I think a lot of it is intuitive, it's not something we started and have a grand plan for, and it has developed. Maybe that is a gender style, most of the SLT are women." (Headteacher)

One teacher tells how it feels to be working in a school where people pay careful attention to one another's emotional needs: "If you've got an 'off' day or you're not well, somebody notices and people will come and say 'are you alright?' ..."

The senior leadership work deliberately to create that atmosphere and the Head has a sense of her contribution and how that is reciprocated: "I know in a lot of other schools the headteacher's role is notoriously isolated, well I never feel like that ... We are going through quite a sensitive, difficult time at the minute, people pop in to see if you're ok ... and we do it to other people as well ... I think it's that mutual support really."

As do other members of the team, including one of the deputy heads: "We're all clear about our roles and responsibilities, we all appreciate where each other are at, and I mean emotionally as well as workload or whatever. We are all very clear, we work as a team and everything's joined up and I think, crucially, that's what makes it all work."

Teamwork and mutual support are important to the adults and embodied across the James Buckley where staff are determined to pull together.

"I think our biggest strength is that we pull together, recognising the needs of the kids and how best to support them. There is no energy or inclination for in-fighting or back-biting and I think that's absolutely brilliant." (Head of Year)

"Everybody pulls together, there's a real team spirit and everybody supports each other and I actually do think that where there are challenges with the youngsters, you do have to pull together." (Deputy)

Adults around the school, particularly those from the local area or with similar backgrounds, understand and empathise with the needs of the pupils. They repeatedly express the desire and commitment to helping the pupils to achieve their potential.

Carole explains that this is more than just a soft touch: “Some pupils are dealing with very difficult personal circumstances ... it is not about sympathy or empathy, feeling sorry for youngsters is not going to help them.”

Her vision is to support pupils’ needs in order to remove the barriers to learning to enable them to achieve: “If we are able to do that, their life changes improve and they are likely to make a positive contribution as adults.”

Carole’s leadership is built around recognising the individual needs of her colleagues. She facilitates staff development and those who work hard and want to progress up the career ladder are encouraged to do so. Carole is delighted with the commitment her colleagues then give: “Staff move on and forward but not elsewhere... The reason is that we are good at empowering staff and developing staff. We do invest heavily in that because it does clearly impact on the way that we work and people wouldn’t stay in a place if they weren’t happy.”

Staff also recognise the value of this approach: “We’re rewarded for our effort ... if you can prove yourself to be good at what you’re doing, opportunities are made available to you. You don’t have to look elsewhere.” (Head of Department)

The ethos was summed up by the Head of Year: “Mature experience complemented by some damn good young staff who’ve got the energy, the drive, the ideas, the ambition ... it’s a combination of the two factors that’s helped to move the school forward ... it’s a case of mutual respect between the senior management and staff and it works both ways – they respect and value you for your efforts that you put in for the school and I think staff generally value the efforts they put in to support that and allow the school to move forward.”

6. Recommendations

Many of the recommendations we would make for the knowledge, professional qualities and actions needed by headteachers are already well covered in the DfES's National Standards for Headteachers (DfES 2004) and permeate the leadership development work commissioned by NCSL¹. The current standards are organised in 'six key non-hierarchical areas':

- shaping the future
- leading learning and teaching
- developing self and working with others
- managing the organisation
- securing accountability
- strengthening community

That framework and the detail covered in each area have an obvious resonance with our own conclusions. In forming our recommendations, we have therefore taken for granted an expectation that all headteachers are prepared, encouraged and supported to apply those standards. We have tried to focus on what might ensure the application of those standards in the pursuit of high attainment for all students, though in particular for the white working class students who are at the centre of this research and who achieve so little.

For school leaders

Noting the importance attributed by the school leaders we interviewed to understanding the contexts which they are working, we recommend that the professional development of potential school leaders should provide purposeful opportunity for exposure, opportunity and reflection in locations where white working class pupils are successful.

These opportunities might develop in the following three dimensions:

- **Exposure** – to locations where white working class pupils are successful – in school and also in other contexts (including, for example, in community, youth service and third sector activities) in order to challenge endemic stereotypes.
- **Opportunity** – to act and contribute within selected contexts in order to move beyond observation and test in challenging and fulfilling ways the potential leaders' ability to contribute
- **Reflection** – to record, analyse and critique the experience as some form of action research so that the personal and systemic points of learning can be recognised and assimilated.

¹ A consultation on 'National Standards for School Leadership' is scheduled between November 2008 and January 2009 so new standards can be published after April 2009."

For local systems

Noting the concerns expressed about continuity at key points of transition for pupils and students, especially at the transfer from primary to secondary school and on moving beyond Key Stage 4, we recommend that:

- a) Local authorities should refer directly to arrangements for continuity when inviting competitions for new school provision.
- b) Local authorities and other stakeholders involved in school organisation and planning should pay specific attention to issues of continuity when reconfiguring local provision.
- c) Local authorities and other middle tier organisations should encourage and support schools to pay particular attention to the managed continuity of students whose attainment is low or fragile across the principal points of transition in the school system.
- d) Emerging 14–19 consortia and other collaborations should pay particular attention to:
 - i. the continuity of curricular experience
 - ii. pastoral support across phases
 - iii. the implications for students of behavioural expectations which might be different across different sites or phases
 - iv. compiling, evaluating and using robust evidence from their own and similar projects to inform their work

Noting the way that these school leaders have been recruited and the way that they in turn apply themselves to the recruitment and retention of high quality staff with ‘can do’ attitude, we recommend that local authority and other middle tier providers should:

- i. promote a collegiate and systemic bias in favour of deploying the most effective teachers in the areas of greatest need
- ii. provide both institutional and personal incentives to attract those teachers

Groups of schools which want to promote a shared responsibility for student outcomes across an area and recognise that this requires a shared approach to staff deployment, can be supported by their local authority or other middle tier providers sponsoring networks and directories which underpin the schools’ work. This approach might build capacity in phase and subject areas to tackle in-school and across school variations in performance.

For the National Standards

We make three particular recommendations for the application of the existing 'Headteacher Standards' and which, because of their relevance for a range of programmes from Initial Teacher Training through to Leadership Programmes for Serving Headteachers, should now be considered in the consultation on 'Leadership Standards'. The range of relevant activities would include Teach First, Future Leaders, SSAT's Leadership Programmes, HEI courses, Higher Degrees and others.

First, in the National Standards section on 'Securing Accountability' there is a reference to knowing: 'The contribution that education makes to developing, promoting and sustaining a fair and equitable society.' In the section on 'Strengthening the Community' there is a reference to knowing: 'The rich and diverse resources within local communities – both human and physical.' Noting the knowledge and understanding of the school leaders we interviewed, we recommend that these references should be used to ensure that all potential leaders know and understand more about the inequalities in the system and about the potential of even the most challenged communities to make a positive contribution to student outcomes.

Then, in the section on 'Strengthening the Community' there is a reference to knowing about: 'Stakeholder and community engagement in, and accountability for, the success and celebration of the school's performance.' In the section on 'Leading Teaching and Learning' there is a reference to knowing: 'Strategies for ensuring inclusion, diversity and access.'

Noting the tactics adopted by the school leaders we interviewed, we recommend that these references should be used to ensure that all potential leaders know and understand that community and personal disadvantage can be challenged and overcome.

Noting the schools' commitment to professional development activity which is as methodical and purposeful in challenging stereotypes about social class as we expect them to be about the same issues in ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, we recommend that the challenges and successes around white working class achievement should be given the same status in the National Professional Qualification for Headship, other leadership training and Initial Teacher Training, including for example Teach First, as that given to the equivalent issues around gender and ethnicity.

Finally, in the section on 'Securing Accountability' there is reference to knowing about: 'The use of a range of evidence, including performance data, to support, monitor, evaluate and improve aspects of school life, including challenging poor performance' and to 'Collecting and using a rich set of data to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school.' Noting the high priority given to data collection, analysis and application reported by these school leaders, we recommend that these references should be used to ensure that all potential leaders are encouraged to consider data on white working class pupils as a category for analysis.

For the national system

Noting the length of time in post of the school leaders we interviewed and the comments they made about the importance of medium to long-term leadership commitment for establishing sustainable institutional improvements, we recommend that responsible national organisations should identify and, in particular, the Secretary of State should give a remit to the School Teachers Review Body to offer recommendations on ways to encourage and reward senior leaders and headteachers who provide successful leadership in challenging circumstances over a sustained period.

Encouragement and reward are not necessarily about personal financial gain. Our interviews and the literature suggest that school leaders are motivated and re-energised by opportunities for experience outside their immediate environment including, often, outside the education sector. Recognition by national and local bodies that achievement is not a simple correlate of end of Key Stage attainment is also welcome.

Noting the adept use by these leaders of financial regulations and grant requirements to ensure that funding streams are aligned with the school's priorities alongside the leaders' capacity to contextualise national initiatives, we recommend that funding streams to schools in similar contexts, especially grant funds and national initiatives, should be reconfigured and integrated so that they are deployed and then employed with context sensitivity especially where there are pockets of deprivation.

The reconfiguration should be designed to:

- a) afford flexibility of implementation to school leaders in these areas, with a presumption in favour of school based control and outcome based accountability
- b) ensure that the funding models recognise white working class contexts as both a socio-economic factor (eg FSM factors in formulae) and as a cultural phenomenon (whose assets need purposeful nurturing and whose challenges need methodical tackling)
- c) create sufficient capacity for school leaders to employ staff to work directly with the community and families of children and young people
- d) provide local support for the school's leaders and, when necessary, temporary direction while capacity for project implementation is developed in otherwise struggling schools

Noting the comments made about stereotyping 'white working class' communities, we recommend that DCSF guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion should be taken as an opportunity to identify material and approaches which value all communities and celebrate the background experiences of every child.

Noting the limited rigorous, published evidence of successful interventions targeted specifically at white pupils from low income backgrounds, we recommend that further development work with accompanying research should be commissioned in these or similarly successful contexts to generate and share knowledge about all the aspects of successful practice described in this report. The purpose of this recommendation is to promote localised solutions with systemic relevance.

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The schools are, in alphabetical order:

Bartley Green Technology and Sport College, Birmingham

Bishopsgarth Mathematics and Computing College, Stockton on Tees.

Cardinal Hume Roman Catholic Mathematics and Computing College, Gateshead

Castilion Primary School, Bexley

Edward Sheerien Secondary School, Barnsley

Elizabeth Garrett Anderson Language College, Islington

Greenside Primary School, Tameside

Guildford Grove Primary School, Surrey

Harrow Gate Primary School, Stockton

Redbridge Community School, Southampton

Robert Clack Science College, Barking and Dagenham

St Mary's Primary School, Workington, Cumbria

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