

Successful leadership for promoting the achievement of white working class pupils

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SCHOOL LEADERS

Literature review

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Part 1: Overview

1.1 Introduction

This literature review is one of the outputs from a research project commissioned jointly by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) to reflect on successful leadership for promoting the achievement of white working class pupils. This review is based on a search of published and web based sources, which are listed in the appendices.

The aims of the research project were to identify:

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

Key questions the project was asked to address were:

- 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?

1.2 Methodology

This literature review:

- provides an accessible review of the current knowledge base
- highlights key messages and implications for school leaders and governors
- records sources of information, a database of references and further reading

We are indebted to Janet Friedlander, Head of Information Services at NUT, for the leading role she took in searching for and obtaining source material.

The literature review focuses mainly on developments in the United Kingdom from 1988 onwards. However, some classic titles have been included which were published prior to that date together with a number of seminal works from the United States.

The initial literature search was based on the NUT Information Unit Library which houses an extensive collection of texts in the relevant subject areas. The library is maintained by scanning a wide variety of sources daily both in electronic and hard copy and by email communication with a wide research community. This ensured contemporary currency of sources until the conclusion of the project.

An extensive online search was undertaken of British Education Index whilst colleagues at the Centre for Education Leadership, School of Education, University of Manchester and at NCSL amongst others were invited to send lists of recommended references.

The Information Officer obtained copies of all the references which were reviewed by the authors with the bibliographic citations then being checked for accuracy in the later stages.

The overall research project and this review are limited in scale and we have therefore needed to make some assumptions about the terms used in the commission. The meaning and validity of some of the phrases in our title are contested by some observers. That is a debate we can acknowledge but not engage completely in the context of this piece.

We have, in broad terms, interpreted 'successful leadership for promoting achievement' as meaning school leadership, focusing mainly but not exclusively on headteachers, associated with high outcomes in the national assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 and GCSE or equivalent results at the end of Key Stage 4. We have, however, been sensitive to other kinds of achievement and attainment, for example across the range of outcomes in the Every Child Matters policy. We have, in broad terms, interpreted the phrase 'white working class pupils' to mean school pupils who are identified as white British in surveys which record ethnicity and who also have low income backgrounds, often identified by their free school meals entitlement (FSM) or parental occupation. We recognise that these interpretations can and in some circumstances should be debated as they have been, for example, by Hobbs and Vignoles (2007) on the limitations of free school meal entitlement as a proxy for socio-economic status and Smith, (2005, p.142) on the difference between low achievement and underachievement and West, (West & Pennell 2003, p.39) on the problems of identifying and still more so interchanging social class and socio-economic status. We believe that our interpretations are clear enough to inform the reader and robust enough to sustain the conclusions and reflections we report in this paper.

1.3 Framework for analysis

The review is presented in four sections.

1. Underachievement in low income groups

This section is a short summary confirming the depth and persistence of underachievement amongst pupils who come from low income families. It is based mainly on evidence from the UK. It notes the catalogue of work stretching five decades and more, reporting the comparatively low attainment levels and under-achievement of working class students. It points to some marginal differentiation, for example between girls and boys, within this group. Trends related to gender would be expected and there may be others.

2. Explanations offered

This section summarises the explanations for white working class underachievement which researchers and analysts have offered. In effect, these may provide some insight into the causes which effective leaders have tackled directly and might include 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.

3. Successful interventions

This section summarises interventions which have been focused on and successful for particular groups (typically by gender or ethnicity) and interventions with a wider school improvement focus producing evident gains for pupils from particular groups. The majority of these interventions will not have had white working class pupils as their primary or particular target.

4. Leadership evidence

This section summarises 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.

Section 1: Underachievement in low income groups

Although, the underachievement of working class children is not the only problem facing the public education service, it is a long standing, daunting and profoundly serious challenge. In this section, we review evidence of the extent of the underachievement and the implications.

In their study of the relationship between educational inequality and social cohesion, Green et al conclude that:

‘Education impacts in two ways – first, indirectly, through the way it distributes skills and hence income, opportunities and status amongst adult populations; and the second, through how it socialises students through the formation of values and identities’ (Green, 2006, p.179).

Using a social cohesion index with measures for trust, civic co-operation, condoning tax evasion and violent crime, these authors find that there is a strong relationship between educational inequality, income equality and social cohesion, more noticeably so in countries such as the UK, USA and Canada where greater inequality in educational outcomes and skills coincide with lower measures of social cohesion.

The socio-economic differential in educational attainment, visible all through the twentieth century, was brought into sharp focus during its second half. The evidence then and now has consistently shown that while white working class children are not the only underachieving group, they are the largest in number and by many criteria the greatest underachievers.

‘If you want to know how well a child will do at school, ask how much its parents earn. The fact remains, after more than 50 years of the welfare state and several decades of comprehensive education, that family wealth is the single biggest predictor of success in the school system. Of course some children from well off homes don’t do well at school and some children from poor backgrounds succeed, but the overall pattern is clear: social class, defined in terms of socio-economic status, correlates closely with attainment at school’ (Hatcher, 2006, p.203).

There is also evidence reported in studies from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001) and the then Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2001) that socio-economic differences in educational outcomes are greater in the UK than in many other economically advanced countries.

The description and analysis of working class underachievement is a strong tradition in mainstream social analysis and in the sociology of education. Seminal work from the 1950s and 1960s in this area is associated with iconic publications by Floud (Ed) et al (1956), Douglas (1964) and Jackson and Marsden (1966). It also figured in the writing on school effectiveness and school improvement which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. Some recent work in that field has begun to ask whether the evidence that schools have only a limited impact on attainment might raise doubts about whether any form of schooling can fundamentally change the relationship between socio-economic background and educational achievement (cf Ainscow et al, 2006, p.125).

This review does not engage with aspects of those various traditions which are concerned about the precision in definitions of social class and poverty nor with the important debate about what are the proper measures of achievement. Though we would readily acknowledge the importance of those refinements, our limited focus is required to be on leadership which bucks the general trend that students who can be reasonably described as white British and who come from economically poorer families tend to do less well than other groups by the traditional measure of Key Stage assessments and GCSE performance.

National government and academic reports since the turn of the century have confirmed the persistence of the trend for low achievement in low income groups and particularly in white British low income groups. The government's own 2004 Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners acknowledged that 'socio-economic group is a stronger predictor of attainment than early ability' and that: 'This is not simply a case of the system recognising and labelling learners' innate levels of ability. The gap between the best and worst performers in our system actually widens as they go through education; and it is both significantly wider and more closely related to socio-economic status in this country than elsewhere' (DfES, 2004).

The 2007 summary from the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) of national curriculum assessment and GCSE outcomes (DCSF, 2007) provides simple but clear data showing the obstinacy of the relatively low attainment of pupils who are entitled to FSM. The relative decline of attainment by FSM students is shown in Table 1 using the data from the DCSF summary. This DCSF database does not cross reference FSM with ethnicity.

The 2008 report from the Youth Cohort Study and the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (DCSF, 2008a), using parental occupation as a variable in its sample, confirms the persistence of differences across social classes. It draws particular attention to the recent rates of longitudinal improvement across all occupational backgrounds except for the group 'not classified' which is said to include many respondents for whom neither parent had an occupation. This report's use of parental occupation shows that the trend runs in a deeper and more complex pattern than can be explained by family income as reflected in FSM entitlement.

Table 1 (Source DCSF, 2007) Base Year 2007

Percentages achieving national target outcomes at each Key Stage by FSM entitlement

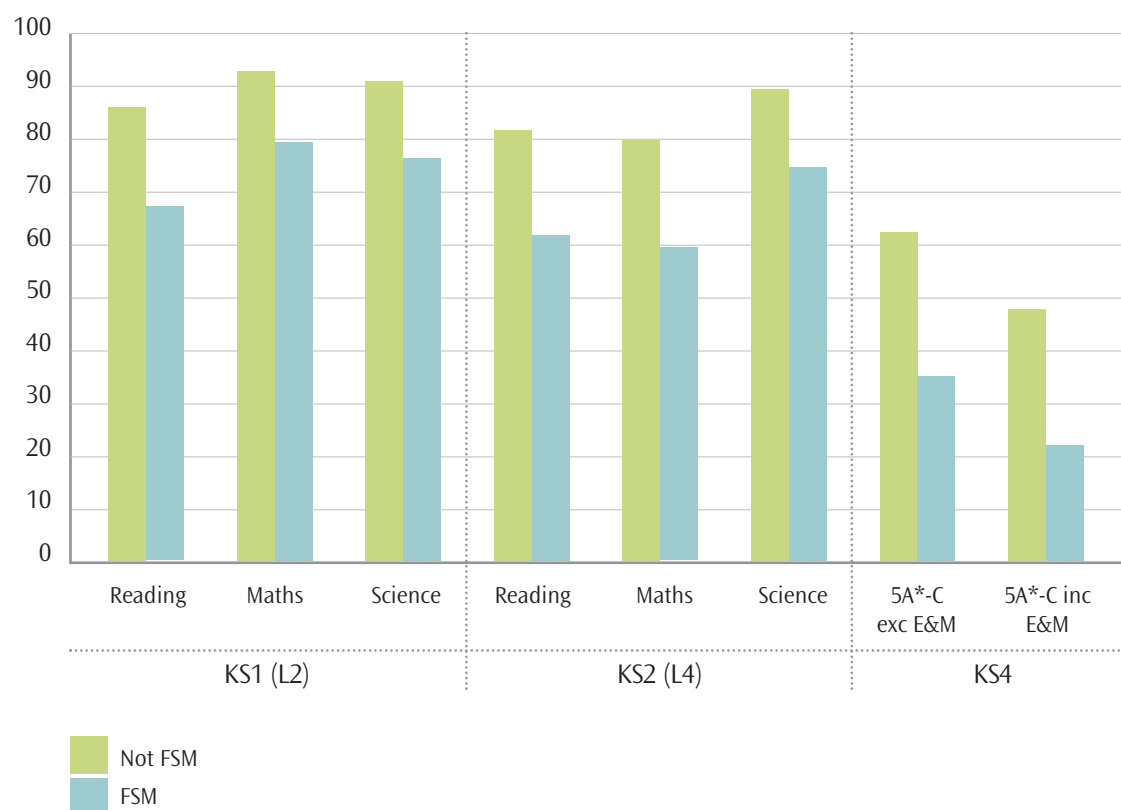
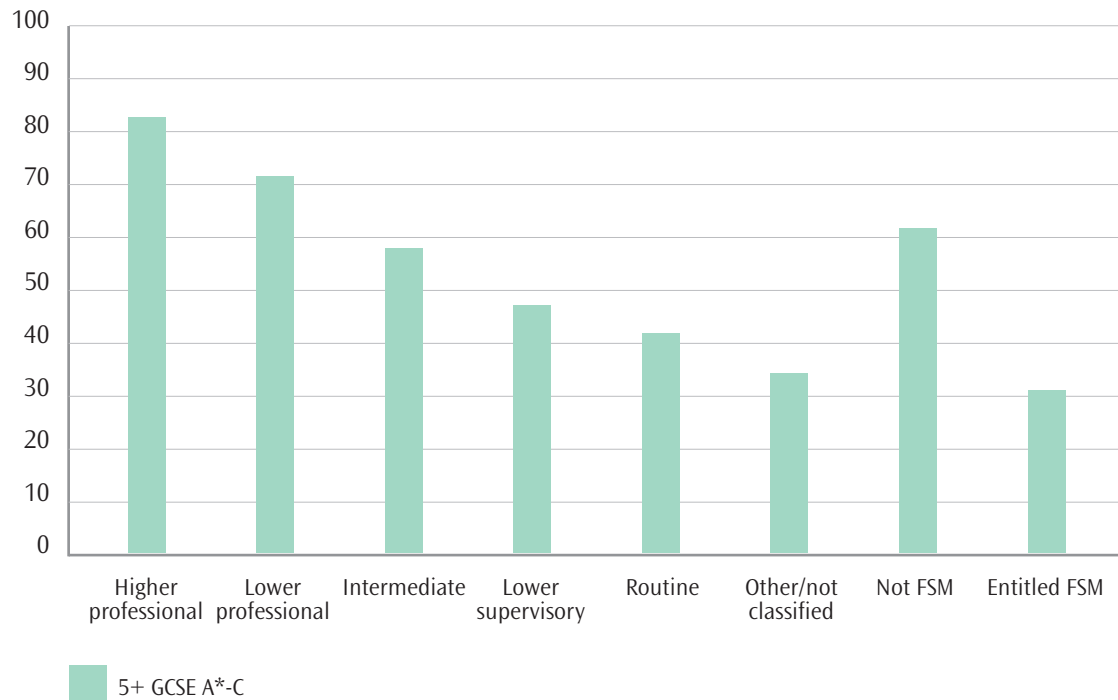


Table 2 (Source DCSF, 2008a) Base Year 2006

Percentages achieving 5A*-C in Yr11 by parental occupation and free school meals entitlement

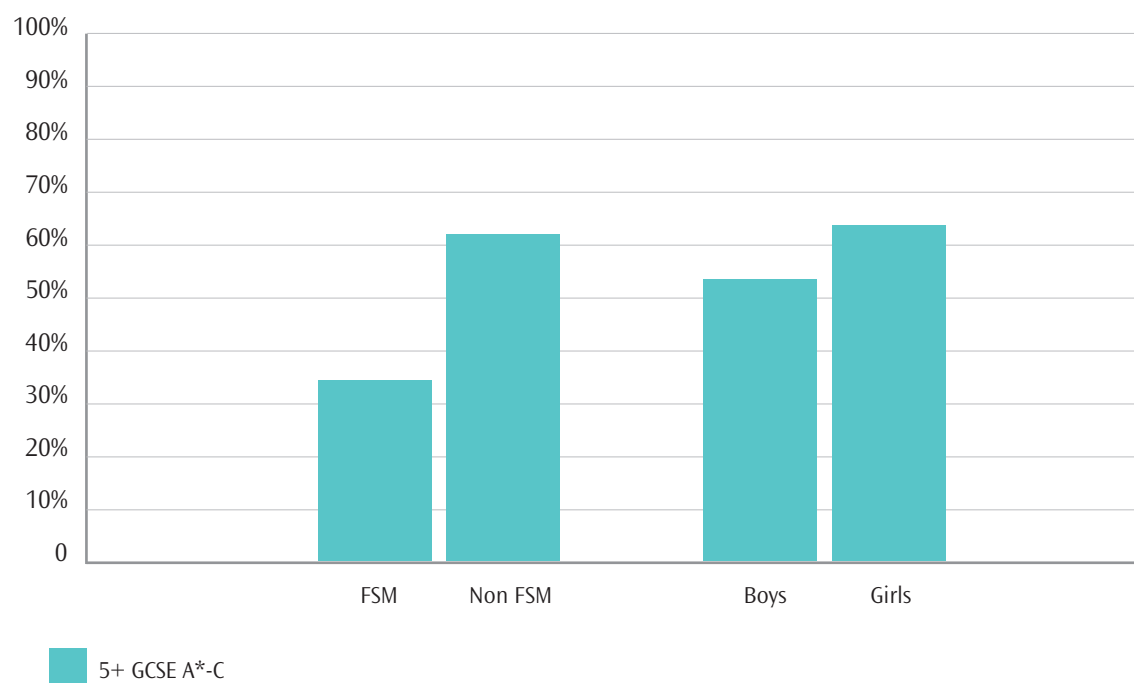


Those findings confirm the trend shown by Power et al who had earlier found that in secondary schools where more than 50 per cent of the students were claiming FSM, then the average 5A*-C pass rate was 18 per cent (compared to the national median school's 44 per cent.) They reported similar trend in primary schools at the end of Key Stage 2 (Power et al, 2002).

The headline outcomes in the previous paragraphs disguise complex connections between educational provision, personal lifelines and geographical spaces. The DfES's review *Gender and Education: the evidence on pupils in England* (DfES, 2007b) concluded that gender is an independent and significant predictor of educational attainment although the social class attainment gap at Key Stage 4 (using GCSE results and FSM as the measures) is three times as wide as the gender gap. Table 3 below shows the 28 per cent FSM gap and the 9 per cent gender gap. With the exception of the small group of students described as 'Travellers', 'White British FSM' boys were the male group with lowest attainment (24 per cent gaining 5+ A*-C GCSEs, compared to the 57 per cent national average) and 'White British FSM girls' the female group with lowest attainment (31 per cent 5+A*-C). Eligibility for FSM is more closely associated with lower attainment for white British boys and girls than for children from minority ethnic groups. These findings confirm an important point for our own project, that the phenomenon of underachievement in low income groups is not confined to boys, it is a problem experienced across both genders.

Table 3 (Source DCSF, 2007a p.57)

Percentages of pupils, end of KS4, 5+A*-C GCSE



The 2007 Joseph Rowntree Foundation report, *Tackling Low Educational Achievement* (Cassen and Kingdon, 2007) used different data and analyses to reach similar conclusions with interesting refinements. Using four measures ranging from no passes in GCSE or GNVQ exams through to not achieving at least five passes at any grade including English and maths, this report concludes that three quarters of underachievers are white and British, boys outnumbering girls, mostly from poor urban areas. There are six times as many pupils who are not entitled to FSM as are so it is not surprising that there are more low achievers in total who are not entitled to FSM than who are (an echo of the Youth Cohort Study's finding). However, the prevalence of low achievement is two to three times greater among FSM students. The report finds that FSM students are more likely to persist as underachievers or slip into underachievement between the ends of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4. FSM is in fact a smaller risk factor for pupils of all main ethnic groups compared to white British. When disadvantage is measured by FSM, then disadvantaged minority ethnic students seem less susceptible to low achievement than disadvantaged white British students.

A recent research review commissioned by the DCSF has revealed some of the trends behind that pattern (Strand, 2008). The review concludes that white British pupils living in disadvantaged circumstances are the lowest attaining group. While that does not make this the only group to be concerned about, there has to be concern about low attainment in some others, particularly male Caribbean groups, despite starting from a comparatively good base, white British pupils (boys and girls) from homes with a low socio-economic classification, reportedly make the least progress over the course of their secondary schooling, especially in Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, black African and black Caribbean pupils all substantially underperformed relative to white British pupils. At the end of Key Stage 4 most minority ethnic groups (except black Caribbean) have caught up with or exceeded the performance of white British pupils (Strand, 2008, p.47).

Strands' findings confirmed and built on an earlier Bristol University study (Wilson et al, 2006) which analysed a universal student dataset and found that:

- all minority ethnic groups make greater progress on average than white students between ages 11 and 16
- much of this improvement occurs close to or in the high-stakes exams at the end of compulsory schooling
- for most ethnic groups, this gain relative to white students is pervasive, happening in almost all schools in which these students are found. (For pupils of black Caribbean or other black heritage, about half of the schools show a relative improvement in scores for these pupils.)

Section 2: Explanations offered; the ways the problem is described

The overwhelming evidence that low income and low educational attainment are linked has not led to a consensus about the causes or, therefore, the potential solutions. In this section, we review the range of explanations, not least to identify those which might be within the provenance of school leaders to tackle.

What might be called the first wave of explanation emerged in the 1950s and 1960s following the turbulence of the 1944 Education Act and included, for example, contributions from Bernstein (1961a and 1961b), Douglas (1964) and the Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967). This was widely interpreted as describing the experiences, practices and culture of working class families as pathological while schools and schooling were a given and neutral factor. It seemed to suggest that if families could be appropriately improved then schools could carry on much as they always had.

A second wave characterised by Freire (2000 reprint), Lacey (1970), Willis (1977) and Young (1971), and emerging in the 1970s, focused on the practices and culture of public education as problematic, on schools as places where inequality was not only played out but nurtured and sponsored. Across these two waves, the emphasis shifted between the effects of poverty, culture, social capital, parental perceptions, pupil perceptions, professional expectations, school place allocations, in-school differentiation, curriculum and pedagogy. Academic and political attention was then washed by a third wave, away from home-school engagement and towards school effectiveness and school improvement.

It seemed that if we could understand how the best schools worked and could transfer those practices across the system, then every school would be successful. It is arguable that there have been systemic improvements as a result of that approach: fewer schools in difficulty, higher pupil attainment on average. However, little has changed for the 25 per cent of lowest achievers who continue to leave school with no accreditation above a D Grade GCSE and the fifth of those with no passes of any kind at GCSE or GNVQ.

What has changed for that quarter of the students is that they are further adrift from the averages and the general achievement of their peers. At the same time, there has been a political reluctance to acknowledge contextual influences in part for fear that these might be used as an excuse for poor professional practice and in part because they expose some profound social questions.

Sammons (2007) summarised the factors associated with low attainment into five groups:

- **Individual characteristics:** age, birth weight, gender
- **Family socio-economic characteristics:** family structure, parents' qualification levels, health socio-economic status, employment and income level
- **Community and societal characteristics:** neighbourhood context, cultural expectations, social structural divisions – especially social class
- **Educational experiences:** from pre-school, school and peer characteristics
- **Cultural capital:** especially the home learning environment

In their review of the literature explaining the correlation between low income and low achievement (Raffo et al, 2007), researchers from Manchester University used a tripartite framework:

- the individual (micro level)
- the social context (meso level)
- social structures (macro level)

Two approaches were identified apparently applying across the three levels: the first, functionalist, explains that the benefits of education do not accrue to students from poorer backgrounds because of dysfunction at the three levels; the second, socially critical, explains that education in its current form is designed to contribute to the unequal distribution of power and resources.

Feinstein proposes a bipartite distinction between proximal factors and distal factors. The former refers to parenting including warmth, discipline and education behaviours within the family. Parental education changes the content and process of proximal factors. Distal refers to more global aspects of the environment: family structure, family size, teenage motherhood, income, poverty and maternal employment (Feinstein, 2004, p.6). Since the work of school leaders impacts primarily on individuals and their social contexts, we have organised the literature into those two groups.

The individual

For the individual, explanations for low attainment draw on evidence of inherited capability, individual identity and personal choice.

The proposal that inherited, genetic differences can explain the difference in educational attainment between socio-economic groups was championed by early practitioners of educational psychology including Sir Cyril Burt and led more recently by Arthur Jensen amongst others (see for example Jensen, 1998). This proposal uses an arguably limited definition of intelligence and heavily contested explanations for group differences in test scores. Overall, we share the view of observers such as Feinstein et al (2004) and Rutter (1997) that environments evidently play an important and significant role and that the ability and capacity of individuals across a range of attributes can be raised, whatever their background. It is not acceptable to behave as if it were otherwise.

Rubin and Silva (2003, p.2) have summarised the paradoxes of individual experience in communal settings to illustrate the complexity of the variables that apply:

‘Students’ daily lives in school take place amid the richly interwoven webs of friendship and romance, the heated pulls of emerging racial, ethnic and social identities, the demands and expectations of teachers and parents and the constructions of academic competence. ...student experience is often thought of paradoxically as individual but uniform... but each individual is a community member and an active agent in the enactment or resistance to reforms and purpose.’

For disadvantaged pupils, the following paragraphs report, those powerful and complex factors often combine to create a personal disposition at odds with the expectations and perceptions of more advantaged groups and the public service organisations with which they come into contact.

‘Some of the particular context which moulds the sense of identity and the potential for choice in young people is summarised by Raffo et al in their review of the related literature. They conclude that the social and cultural capital of young people draws on high trust social relations in the varied and influential networks they occupy. Those networks, central to the individual’s life experiences, provide informal learning and identity-forming experiences which can either enhance or constrain a young person’s life chances. For those in disadvantaged situations, these relations often develop without appropriate material and symbolic resources such as adult role models to support them (Raffo et al, p.22). In effect, these young people do not have the ‘capital’ resources to sustain success as defined by the education system. There is an argument perhaps for celebrating some aspects of laddish and ladette behaviour and recognising its importance in young people’s relationships and status without losing sight of the potential negative impact on formal measures of attainment (Jackson, 2006).

A House of Commons Select Committee found that 'Poor children have a keen awareness of the lack of income in their households... [they] try to manage the situation of reduced income by lowering their requirements and needs...' and concluded that reduced income affects children's opportunities for social engagement and shared activities with their peers (House of Commons, 2008, para 58).

Osborn et al in their comparison of Denmark, England and France (Osborne et al, 2003, p.201) concluded that in England, where the school culture was most characterised by fragmentation and differentiation between pupils, those in disadvantaged circumstances had to devote the most energy to maintaining a balance between a social and an academic identity. They claim that the 'deplored and significant' differences in English pupils' attitudes to achievement are avoidable and are much less marked in the other two countries.

This is also a theme in two studies (Younger and Warrington, 2005; Warrington and Younger, 2006) concluding that: 'If disengaged and perhaps underachieving boys and girls are to be more fully engaged with schooling and learning, they need both to feel secure and valued within the school context, and to be enabled...to develop a sense of self esteem and self worth as learners. Crucially the school has to open up aspirations, to show that achievement can lead to new opportunities which might not be part of the community or peer group tradition of expectation.'

Exploring 'a child's eye view of social difference', with 19 children from a disadvantaged estate and 23 from a fee paying independent school, aged between 8 and 13, Sutton et al (2007) found that the children did not identify themselves as poor or rich, those were terms for people at the extreme. The private school children were very positive about their 'intensive' school lives. The estate children were negative about education and their schools were associated with coercion and control. Private school children's free time was structured and organised. They emphasised the importance of personal space within the home and were involved in a wide range of cultural and sporting activities outside, usually accompanied by adults. The estate children's limited free time was dominated by street play and socialising with friends, open public space was vitally important to their street play which, unsupervised, was more likely to be perceived as 'trouble'.

In his study of sixth form students, Kettley (2006, pp.136-137) concluded that nothing in their family, school or work experience was seriously challenging their perceptions. Students' practical knowledge of (social) stratification was limited and they often accepted stratification arrangements as a factual condition of social life. This restriction of knowledge meant that differences in students' backgrounds strongly influenced their educational practices because they were rarely subject to personal or collective revision. Students' approaches to stratification were primarily experiential, relatively unrefined and closely related to their backgrounds, whereas their approaches to gender were more abstract, refined and corresponded less to their backgrounds.

Personal resilience is a factor here. Stanton-Salazar describes 'hidden injuries', regular, systematic damage to young people's fragile inner selves, creating emotional distress when features which have historically served to foster resilience and positive meaning in the home and community are not played out in school (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p.110). Although underachievement is often attributed to lack of ambition and aspiration, the Youth Cohort Study (DCSF, 2008a, table 4.3.1.) reports that virtually four out of five of students from the occupation backgrounds 'lower supervisory, routine and not classified' wanted to stay on post 16 but less than two thirds do so. Goldthorpe and McKnight (2004, p.24) offer an explanation of individual decisions which is based on rationality rather than deficit: 'In so far as individuals in different classes do inhabit different economic worlds, as characterised by security, stability and prospects, then not only can their class positions be seen as constraining their life-chances but, further, as shaping the life-choices that they make within such constraints, as, for example, their educational and occupational choices.'

Overall, the evidence suggests that the tendency for working class students to discount the future and undervalue education is arguably rational and adaptive in their circumstances (see also Willis, 1977).

The social context

For social context, explanations draw on evidence about the isolation of some economically poor communities, weak social and cultural capital in some neighbourhoods, low parental expectations, professional stereotyping, the distortions created by educational markets and the limited capacity of public services.

Meen et al (2005) concluded that the distribution of deprivation has declined little, if at all, in the past twenty years, 'areas with very high levels of deprivation are becoming stuck in a poverty trap, segregated from other parts of the community'. Relating segregation to schools, Gorard et al (2003, Chp.11) conclude 'who goes to which school and who gets what in secondary education is largely determined by the wider socio-economic structure... Thus far, educational policies rooted in social welfare or market orientated principles have had a minimal effect on that basic social ordering'. They conclude that local geography, housing, transport access, the diversity of the local population and the local levels of residential segregation are more important than school organisation or admission arrangements in determining school segregation.

Part of the segregation, we know, is driven by parental choice in the housing market. Gibbons and Machin (2004, pp.29-30) identified a premium of around 3.0 per cent on house prices close to the school gates for each 10 percentage point increase in children reaching target grades in age-11 tests: 'Parents certainly do pay to get their children into better performing primary schools, but it is evident that they prefer popular, over-subscribed schools.' In contrast, Reay and Ball (1997) drew on ESRC data about market forces in secondary education to explore the ambivalence of many working class parents to school choice. For these parents, school is often associated with powerful memories and images of personal failure; expressing a preference can involve complex accommodations to the idea of 'school' and is very different from middle-class choice making. Choice then becomes a new social device through which social class differences contribute to educational inequality. These themes, around the relative disadvantage which poorer parents bring to bear on their children's schooling, are well rehearsed across the literature (see for example Lareau, 1997 and Standing, 1999).

Burgess et al (2006) confirm that '...students from poor families...are less likely to go to good schools...controlling for location, poor students attend lower scoring schools than non-poor students...' (p.12). In parts of the country where choice was more feasible, school sorting was higher. The DfES reports that 'Low attainers at Key Stage 2 are more likely to move to schools with low GCSE and high FSM rates' (DfES, 2005). In a study of areas with grammar schools, Atkinson et al report that in areas with selective grammar schools, children entitled to FSM are less likely to pass the selection test and are therefore over-represented in the other schools (2006, p.10).

Hills and Stewart (2005) suggest the following connections to explain how unemployment, poverty and ill-health contribute to segregation and low educational achievement.

A low level of family income can directly affect children by:

- determining the quality of child care
- limiting the resources for additional tuition
- limiting school choice by preventing moves to preferred catchment areas
- impairing a child's health
- deterring continuing post-compulsory education

A low level of parental education can affect:

- the parents' interest in education
- their ability to help with school work
- the children's motivation and aspiration
- a child's development

Deprived areas can affect children's attainment by:

- influencing aspiration and motivation through the level and quality of local employment
- create problems in recruiting and retaining teachers
- simply hamper learning opportunities
- nurturing a culture of low achievement and negative peer pressure
- limited extra-curricular activity

In their review of the research on parental involvement, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) draw a distinction between spontaneous and induced parental involvement. 'Differences in parental involvement have a much bigger impact on achievement than differences associated with the effects of school in the primary age range' (p.80). This involvement, they found, is mediated significantly by factors including social class, maternal education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status (which, we have noted, are likely to accumulate in some localities). There is a potential virtuous or vicious circle in which parental involvement is strongly influenced by a child's attainment – the one tends to grow or diminish in tandem with the other. The authors then conclude that although parental involvement can be induced and rates of participation can be raised, the jury is out on the impact:

'Where evaluations are available, they consistently show high levels of commitment, enthusiasm and appreciation amongst the providers and clients for the provision and considerable appreciation for its effects. That being said, it is impossible from an objective research standpoint to describe the scale of impact on pupils' achievements and adjustment on the basis of the evidence available. That is not to say they do not work. It does however raise the questions of whether current activity is getting a good return on extensive effort ...'(p.81).

School organisation and effectiveness are also factors and Ofsted (2007) has reported that schools with high proportions of low income pupils are more likely to be inadequate than those in more affluent communities. Although there were some highly successful schools in areas of high deprivation, a fifth of schools inspected in 2006-07 had 30 per cent or more pupils entitled to free school meals. Of those schools in which overall effectiveness was inadequate, almost two fifths, (37 per cent) had 30 per cent or more FSM pupils. A broad ranging review of international research on school improvement in socio-economically disadvantaged areas (Mujis et al, 2004) concluded that the increased demands made on the schools, originating in the socio-economic deprivation of areas, meant that the schools had to exceed what the review called 'normal efforts'.

Across three reports of her studies of schools in disadvantaged areas, Lupton describes the localities in which the schools operate and considers how those features interact, often negatively, with the approaches that schools typically undertake (Lupton, 2004, 2005 and 2006). The schools are not homogeneous, the differences between areas are greater than their shared poverty 'disadvantage and challenge are not the same in different places: teachers in the white working class areas alluded specifically and frequently to negative or indifferent attitudes towards learning and towards school, among both children and parents' (Lupton, 2004, p.14). There are, however, recurring themes in Lupton's analysis: low prior attainment, poor student health, poor diet, struggles over uniform, irregular attendance lack of personal equipment, low parental contributions for enrichment activity. In the emotionally charged atmosphere at these schools, teachers often refer to 'social work' as characteristic of their activities. Her conclusion that a contextualised school improvement policy would recognise that quality can only be ensured if there are sufficient good teachers attracted to and retained in schools in poor areas, (2004, p.36) has profound echoes in NCSL's analysis of headteacher recruitment which concluded that schools in areas of high deprivation face particular difficulties recruiting new headteachers (NCSL, 2006) and Gu's finding that in secondary schools in his 'high disadvantage' group, the headteachers were likely to be less experienced, and the schools to have had more turnover (Gu et al, 2008).

It is not only between schools that these variations occur, in a critique of streaming, setting and other grouping practices which he describes as 'social barbarism', Ball draws on Bourdieu (1986) amongst others to conclude that the divisions which schools create are based on powerful which establish 'principles of "union and separation" and social identities' (Ball 2003). Ball then draws on a range of studies (p.28) to show that where lower ability groups are introduced they tend to contain a disproportionate number of pupils who are vulnerable and from lower socio-economic groups. They tend to receive a curriculum with less challenging materials and are excluded from some courses and therefore qualifications or grades. They tend to be taught by the youngest, least experienced and often least successful teachers with the highest rates of teacher turnover and with often poor perceptions of their students. He concludes that it is not surprising that these students tend to have lower self esteem and apathy towards school and to be increasingly more difficult to teach.

The persistence of evidence for the effect of teachers' prior expectations and stereotypes which has some origins in the iconic 1968 Pygmalion study (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) is shown in Gazeley and Dunne's conclusion that deficit views of working class children and their parents are deeply ingrained in the teaching profession (2005, p.18). They found that their sample of teachers and trainee teachers defined underachievement in different ways, adopted different types of strategy to address it and that these strategies appeared to be influenced by perceptions and expectations of pupils linked (unconsciously) to their social class. The teachers and trainee teachers often held stereotypical ideas about pupils and parents according to their social class and lacked opportunities to reflect upon these in their own practice.

In a scathing critique of the reality of the current policy and professional interest in 'differentiation', Hatcher (2006) quotes a number of studies including Hart et al (2004) before concluding: 'From age 14 differentiation becomes overt social segregation, within and between schools, when any pretence of a common curriculum ends...' (p.209). Gillborn and Youdell make a similar claim that the modern interest in individual programmes only disguises and therefore maintains inequalities (2000).

In an important caveat to the rule of thumb that deprivation associates with low achievement Webber and Butler (2007, p.1237) identified an important variation. Using the Mosaic neighbourhood classification system and PLASC data, they observed a misalignment between the rankings based on average GCSE points and the ranking based on average level of multiple deprivation of the pupils' postcode. A 'disconcerting' feature of the misalignment was that in neighbourhoods characterised by inner-city social housing, pupils often do much better at GCSE than would be anticipated on the basis of the level of multiple deprivation of their home neighbourhoods. The hypothesis is that there may be a trend for those areas to be populated by poor but aspiring immigrant families. By contrast, some of the neighbourhood types with the very worst GCSE performance area characterised by predominantly white pupils living on very large overspill estates in England's larger provincial cities.

Section 3: Evidence of successful interventions

We have not been able to identify sufficiently rigorous, published evidence of successful interventions targeted specifically at white pupils from low income backgrounds to include in this review. There is good evidence describing successful interventions to tackle issues apparently analogous to the underachievement of white working class pupils. These are, in effect, tactics which have worked with other groups and which school leaders might draw on to tackle the issue central to this project. We are referring in broad terms to approaches which have been aimed at ending the marginal role of girls and young women in the education system or at raising the achievement of particular minority ethnic groups. We also refer to evidence of successful interventions in ‘challenging circumstances’ where the student population appears to have been predominantly white from low income backgrounds.

In this section, we provide a brief overview of the recurring themes in those published accounts. We concentrate more on the content or style of those approaches and less on the leadership characteristics associated with them, though there is some inevitable overlap. This is because we will summarise the leadership material in the next section. It is striking that, notwithstanding the word of caution about transferability in the following paragraph, the successful activity celebrated in this section embraces a number of consistently recurring themes.

We begin though with a word of caution drawn first from Connolly’s conclusions about the interplay between ethnicity, gender, class and context. Solutions that work for some students in some places will not necessarily transfer even for apparently similar young people in apparently similar places:

‘... different boys (and girls) have very different experiences of education dependent upon their social class and ethnic backgrounds. ... for boys and girls gender only plays a relatively minor role in dictating their levels of achievement compared to social class and ethnicity. It is with this in mind that diverse strategies and interventions are required that are based upon the particular needs and experiences of specific groups of boys and girls in particular contexts...A danger remains, therefore, in an approach that attempts to construct educational programmes, even for particular groups of pupils such as white working-class boys, in the belief that schools across the country can then simply use these directly with their own pupils. Rather, there is a need for educational interventions that are tailored much more directly to the particular needs and concerns of pupils in specific classes and schools’ (Connolly, 2006).

Connolly’s conclusion echoes Harris et al (2006b, p.419) reporting that although the strategies they found adopted by schools which were improving in challenging circumstances ‘were not a great departure from those adopted more widely in disadvantaged areas and are not restricted to schools in challenging circumstances’ it is the selection and application of a combination of strategies tailored to local developmental need, context, and pupil configuration which is critical. Each successful school had its own differentiated approach to deploying the common tactics.

In very broad terms, successfully tackling underachievement in particular groups appears to be associated with the following five recurring themes which build on the three, Awareness, Acceptance and Action proposed in Brown’s Birmingham based study (Brown, 2004).

- **Awareness:** that there is a problem and a target group, that the target group is being unfairly treated, that its members have individual as well as shared identities.
- **Acceptance:** that the school system is both part of the problem and can also contribute to the solution.
- **Area focus:** that the wider community has a partnership role and that there is no ‘one size fits all’: different communities, neighbourhoods and even streets or blocks of flats have influential effects.

- **Alignment:** an improvement in the alignment of the students' home and school experiences – without prejudice in what changes and where – encouraging parental involvement, often breaking through barriers in radical, imaginative ways.
- **Action:** focussed directly on the target group and the issue, and designed to ensure that the new activity is explicit, funded and managed.

Ten years or so ago Ofsted (1999) surveyed and reported on the ways in which schools were – though many still were not – purposefully responding to the underachievement of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. They described a range of shortcomings in the system but could still identify some characteristics of successful work. In the schools which had been most successful in raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils, that particular group was in sharp but not solitary focus:

- senior managers had made clear that the under-performance of any group was not acceptable
- evidence on attainment was systematically gathered, analysed and used
- individual teachers and departments were challenged to spell out how they intended to improve the outcomes
- curricular and pastoral strategies were regularly reviewed to ensure that they were sensitive to the ethnic groups in the student population and the wider community
- the stereotyping and hostility faced by minority ethnic pupils was well understood and methodically challenged
- the school ethos was open and vigilant, pupils could talk about their concerns and share in the development of strategies for their resolution

More recently, Ofsted has described the work of six secondary and three primary schools which showed particular success with their black Caribbean pupils (Ofsted, 2002a and 2002b). Both these studies concluded that at the core of the successful schools was a traditional approach to strong leadership, high expectations, effective teaching and methodical use of data to inform action. The schools engaged parents purposefully and 'were not blind to colour or history'. They valued the background of every pupil. In the secondary report Ofsted noted in particular: '...the value for a school in being able to employ effective black Caribbean staff is not to be underestimated. They offer, in addition to their specific expertise, role models within the school community that black Caribbean pupils can see and emulate' (2002b, para 107). The importance of recognisable role models is a factor repeated in the extract from Walker's research further down this page.

The evaluation of the government's Aiming High: African Caribbean Achievement Project (which worked with leaders of schools to develop a whole school approach to raising the achievement of African Caribbean pupils) identified the following features of whole school approaches central to delivering those goals:

- willingness of the governors and senior management, especially the headteacher, to address race equality issues in the school
- commitment to mainstreaming initiatives to raise African Caribbean achievement
- headteachers that have the vision and commitment to address the needs of African Caribbean pupils and to implement a system of accountability on this issue
- recognition of and accountability for the identification and use of African Caribbean achievement and inclusion data

- consistent and equitable practice with respect to behaviour management policy, as well as setting and streaming
- strategic involvement and support from the LEA

(Tikly et al, 2006)

In a study of five multi-ethnic schools with good reputations for their work in multi-ethnic communities, Walker (2004) identified six important priorities underpinning that work.

1. Professional and other staff committed to social justice and equity.
2. Professional and other staff demonstrate a willingness to understand the culture and background of their students and community.
3. Recruitment and retention of staff with similar cultural and ethnic background to those in the school community.
4. Connecting the school with its immediate and broader societal context.
5. Promoting the importance of improving quality learning and teaching as a way of addressing disadvantage.
6. Consciously constructing and nurturing an inclusive school culture.

Ofsted (2008) has recently reported on the work of schools that are successful in raising the attainment of white boys from low-income backgrounds. Although this is a more limited perspective than our interest in both boys and girls from that background, the findings are so consistent with the core findings in so much of the literature that they merit repetition. Ofsted reports these features of the successful schools:

- an ethos which demonstrates commitment to every individual and which treats staff and pupils with fairness, trust and respect
- consistent support to develop boys' organisation skills and instil the importance of perseverance; any anti-school subculture 'left at the gates'
- rigorous monitoring systems which track individual pupils' performance against expectations; realistic but challenging targets; tailored, flexible intervention programmes and frequent reviews of performance against targets
- a highly structured step-by-step framework for teaching, starting with considerable guidance by the teacher and leading gradually to more independent work by the pupils when it is clear that this will enhance rather than detract from achievement
- a curriculum which is tightly structured around individual needs and linked to support programmes that seek to raise aspirations
- creative and flexible strategies to engage parents and carers, make them feel valued, enable them to give greater support to their sons' education and help them make informed decisions about the future
- a strong emphasis on seeking and listening to the views of these pupils
- genuine engagement of boys in setting individual targets, reviewing progress, shaping curricular and extra-curricular activities and making choices about the future

- key adults, including support staff and learning mentors, who are flexible and committed, know the boys well and are sensitive to any difficulties which might arise in their home
- a good range of emotional support for boys to enable them to manage anxieties and develop the skills to express their feelings constructively
- strong partnership with a wide range of agencies to provide social, emotional, educational and practical support for boys and their families in order to raise their aspirations

The emerging success of these interventions, particularly around ethnicity and gender, might demonstrate that when a problem dare speak its name, then there can be some discussion about what kind of problem and whose problem it is. Then tactics to deal with it can then be developed. Perhaps, as Smith suggests, sex and ethnicity have been easier (though not easy) to tackle because teachers can literally and metaphorically see ethnicity and gender in the room (Smith, 2005, p.76). The result anyway is that 'educational and organisational difficulties arising from ethnic differences tend to be interpreted by staff as practical problems that could be overcome to some extent by efforts on their parts (and that current good practice supported those efforts) whereas those arising from social class differences tended to be interpreted as problems of cultural deficit, where changes would have to come from parents and children (and where it was difficult to see how schools and teachers could adapt within the confines of the current educational system and curriculum)' (Lupton, 2004, p.19).

Moving from particular groups to a wider community perspective, there is evidence that schools that are most closely linked to their community tend to be those serving ethnically and religiously homogeneous populations (Mujis et al, 2007). This might impact on the ability of schools to engage directly with ethnic groups of any kind when they are in a minority. Schools do claim that strong and mutually respectful relationships with their local community help them to improve the whole range of Every Child Matters outcomes for their students (NCSL, 2008b; Leadbeater and Mongon 2008). Conclusions from a broad ranging review of international research on school improvement in socio-economically disadvantaged areas (Mujis et al, 2004), included these needs to create success by:

- exceeding normal efforts to transcend the problems presented by the locality
- focusing on teaching and learning – an emphasis even more prevalent in school with low socio-economic status (SES) than in those with high SES
- applying indirect but powerful leadership influence, especially through distributed forms of leadership
- creating a positive, blame-free school culture with committed participants and high expectations
- planning for continuity and sustainability, not for short term headlines

That is echoed in a recent review of successful work in fifty schools from some of the most deprived wards in England and with a great track record of success with their pupils (DCSF, 2008b). This review confirms the underlying theme in this section that what works is, in our phrase, ordinary good practice with extraordinary application:

“Unsurprisingly, they are all excellent schools, and they do all the things that good schools do.

- They have dynamic leaders, who lead from the front, set the tone and establish a 'can do' culture.
- They have strong systems for quality assuring the curriculum, teaching and pupil progress.
- They are passionate about the quality of the classroom experience, about teaching and learning.

- They shape the curriculum – to serve the needs of their intake.
- They track the progress of pupils with ardent regularity and intervene immediately if anyone falls off trajectory.
- They are unusually creative about recruitment and retention.

As well as doing all the things that good schools do, these schools also go the extra mile for the children of their community. They implement deliberate, extra measures specifically targeted at the most disadvantaged. These measures are designed to turn local school culture from suspicious boredom to upbeat aspiration.

- They go out of their way to bring in local heroes, characters, and successes as role models, so that pupils can see that success is possible for people from their walk of life.
- They teach pupils what they need to know about ways of talking, writing and behaving in the wider world, so they have the repertoire to succeed in formal and unfamiliar environments. They educate for equality.
- They define non-negotiable standards of behaviour and a culture of mutual respect, something which plays well with local parents who value the twin traditions of discipline and personal caring. They apply this culture to teachers as well as pupils.
- They provide cultural opportunities beyond the budget of local families so that pupils get a taste of sports, arts and activities from which they are otherwise excluded.
- They are socially attuned. New teachers tour the catchment area before they start to teach, they take time to talk about local concerns with pupils each day, and learn how to meet, greet and converse in ways that are not patronising. They empathise with the local community and local values.
- Knowing that poverty can induce feelings of emptiness and hopelessness, they work harder than other schools to provide rewards and incentives to pupils. Their notice boards are invariably plastered with honours, rewards, mentions, certificates, prizes. They are always praising positive behaviour, small steps forward and extra effort.
- Teachers assume that they have to earn the pupils' respect and attention. They work to gain natural – rather than forced – attention and make children associate school with learning that is fun, interesting and action packed. They use interactive teaching techniques, play to topical and local interests, and they are skilled in 'holding in' weaker learners.
- The schools do more outreach work than most. Some offer out of hours support because their pupils come to seek the support from sympathetic staff. Most work with families. Some have workers dedicated to the neediest pupils and some target well networked pupils who are opinion leaders in their cohort.
- No-one gets away with not working, not behaving, not co-operating, not trying or not attending. Avoidance and disengagement are seen in the same light as disruptive behaviour: as something to be resolved. Resilience, in fact, is one of the key characteristics they seek to inculcate in children who sometimes lack other support to fall back on. The 'no excuses' culture maintains high expectations. Ultimately, it insists on success" (DCSF, 2008b, p.6).

Another review of effective work in schools in challenging circumstances confirmed the consistency of the trends being reported (Potter et al, 2002). Schools which were succeeding against the odds shared approaches to leadership as the embodiment of required practice, teamwork, a vision for academic success, careful use of targets, improved physical environment, common standards of behaviour and an investment in good relationships with the parents and community.

These findings are echoed in a study of schools in predominantly white working class areas in former coalfields (Harris et al, 2003) which found that approaches observed inside the successful schools were closely aligned with what the same study's literature review had reported:

- purposeful and distributed leadership
- climate of high expectations
- focus on relationships
- positive relationships within the internal and external community
- relentless pursuit of quality in teaching and learning
- emphasis on literacy and numeracy
- special pupil groupings (ie express groups)
- commitment to data gathering, analysis and target setting
- use of learning mentors
- securing professional support and development focussed on the classroom

Chapman and Harris (2004) concluded their research and review by arguing that the tactics adopted by school leaders were more likely to succeed if schools are freed from prescription so they can select their approaches to change and development which match their particular needs.

“Further top down reform that treats all schools as the same is unlikely to secure long-term improvement and change. What is needed is more fine-grained and differentiated approaches to school improvement that offer more flexibility and choice, particularly for those schools facing difficult or challenging circumstances. In this way schools can implement those improvement strategies that best meet the needs of their students and teachers in their context” (p.227).

Section 4: Leadership evidence

This section summarises some of the key literature on school leadership which is effective in raising the achievement of particular groups including ethnic minorities, girls, boys and students from challenging communities. Four introductory points are worth making.

1. The literature out there is comprehensive in its descriptions of what effective school leaders do. There is an exhausting if not exhaustive body of research and review in the School Improvement and School Effectiveness (SISE) tradition from the past quarter century. Sammons review of this literature (Sammons, 2007) is a good source for the general reader interested in SISE. We make references to the wider SISE work but it is, we will note later, criticised by some writers for its perceived limitations in exploring, for example, school organisation, the full range of educational outcomes and social class as factors in understanding achievement.
2. Little of the literature has a direct white working class focus, except for a small body of work looking at impact for boys. There is, though, an indirect focus in some of the research because of the character of the communities in which some of the school leaders were working.
3. The literature has less to say about who or what these effective school leaders are. Their background, skills, attitudes and beliefs have, in the main, to be second guessed from what they do.
4. The literature reports across time and space a limited repertoire of almost universally, recurring themes. It is on that summarising point that this section starts.

A recent summary of the impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes concluded that almost all successful leaders draw on a recurring repertoire of four 'basic' leadership practices (Day, 2007):

- **Building vision and setting directions.**
Developing a shared sense of purpose, identifying specific goals and demonstrating high performance expectations for staff and students.
- **Understanding and developing people.**
Providing staff with intellectual stimulation (including CPD), individualised support and modelling desirable values and practices.
- **Designing the organisation.**
Developing a professional culture, creating structures to support that, building school-community relationships, and connecting the school to the wider environment.
- **Managing and supporting the teaching and learning programme.**
Aligning resources with the teaching mission, monitoring student progress, supervising instruction, and buffering staff from distractions to their core work.

To Day's list we would add from our own reading and observation a fifth:

- **Collecting, monitoring, analysing and using information.**

Knowing the school through the measured performance of staff and students, observing relationships within and around the school and using that intelligence to support other leadership practices.

We would also agree with Brighouse that the repertoire is a mixture of leadership and management which rather confirms that 'running a school is a messy business' (Brighouse and Wood, 2008). The following four examples of the taxonomies of leadership activity simply illustrate the point that behind these different analyses the recurring repertoire is consistent.

Englefield's (2002) study of 14 successful primary schools in varied but challenging contexts across two urban and a rural local authority concluded that the headteachers *intensively* (our italics) emphasised distinctive leadership activities in their schools, including:

- emphasising outcomes in a 'we can do this' culture building a culture where there is a belief that all children can learn and succeed, displaying a concern for the welfare and educational experiences of all the pupils in their care
- building in the school a strong sense of community, as well as a strong knowledge and awareness of the community in which the school is placed
- ensuring rigorous and accurate assessments of pupils' progress in order to set challenging tasks and targets
- finding additional success indicators to academic outcomes in order to celebrate pupils' progress and the school's successes
- developing strategies to rigorously control and improve pupil behaviour
- measuring, analysing and celebrating pupil progress rigorously, with procedures that take into account age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic and mobility factors
- positive, safe and happy ethos encompassing high expectations where staff and pupils work well together
- encouraging good attendance and punctuality, utilising all the appropriate external agencies well and encouraging every child to learn
- catering for the social and cultural needs of the pupils and working hard to encourage every parent to play an important part in their child's learning

In a study of ten secondary schools 'facing challenging circumstances' Harris and Chapman (2002) reported that effective leaders in those schools:

- believe that all children can learn and succeed
- offer leadership that is value-driven with a strong moral purpose and are deeply concerned about the welfare and education of all pupils in their care
- build community and shape culture by signalling to others what is important and building confidence and capability in those they lead
- operate strategically by taking a broad view of change and development and focusing on the bigger picture
- have the confidence to be contentious and to deal with conflict
- have no singular leadership style while emphasising forms of leadership that are people-orientated, transformational and empowering
- use a range of leadership approaches, selecting the approach to match or fit the growth-state or developmental stage of the school
- are highly pragmatic, resilient and determined individuals who work towards changing negative attitudes towards and within their school

- establish coherent communities within their schools as well as a sense of a responsible community beyond and around the school
- place educational concerns over management concerns creating schools that are culturally tight but managerially flexible
- are primarily concerned with helping people understand the problems they face rather than solve them
- take advantage of external opportunities (eg Ofsted, EiC, EAZ) to generate change and to encourage staff to innovate
- place an emphasis upon models of professional development that impact directly upon classroom practice
- invest in the learning of staff and pupils

Emmerson et al (2006, pp.6-32) researching in twenty secondary school department in schools facing challenging circumstances identified characteristics from the recurring framework amongst successful middle leaders.

Their common characteristics were:

- **A focus on learning:** strong emphasis on achievement and high expectations, a genuine focus on the individual, a commitment to educating the whole person, learning for both students and staff
- **Consistency:** public and explicit expectations, established routines, systems and procedures, monitoring and review – evidence based, follow-up and consequences, ‘We plod, but it is a consistent plod’, middle leaders exemplify consistency
- **Care:** focus on high-quality relationships, sensitivity to students’ social environment, positive regard: student-student, teacher-student, teacher-teacher, caring relationships between pupils and staff, middle leaders model care, ‘We don’t give up on anybody’
- **Commitment:** help and support over and above formal requirements, responding to student needs, creative and innovative strategies, middle leaders lead by example
- **High expectations:** ‘We want to be the best’, HoDs set and model high, standards, High expectations in every aspect of school life, ‘Expectations of staff are incredibly high. People do live up to it. It’s invigorating, rewarding.’

Their tactics were:

- **Modelling:** leading by example, ‘committed, passionate and driven’, sharing good practice, the department is a reflection of the leader, ‘I am very focused with very clear priorities.’
- **Monitoring:** accountability clear and understood, explicit and agreed criteria and protocols, monitoring of student and teacher effectiveness, evidence-based review and decision-making, ‘We have policies implemented as practice which involves following through with everything.’
- **Dialogue:** focus on students and learning, open, transparent and supportive, continuous, formal and informal, focus on improving practice, sharing strategies, conversation to develop everyone’s understanding about learning, conversation to influence colleagues and pupils, ‘We discuss learning and teaching a lot with [the HOD] without always realising it’s about learning and teaching.’

- **Structures and systems:** meticulous and detailed planning, handbooks, schemes of work, sophisticated student data systems, reinforcement of consistent approaches
- **Retention of staff:** high trust, empowerment, positive regard, 'A key issue for the HoD is keeping, people and looking after them.'
- **Professional development:** classroom focused, primarily in-house, HoD as lead learner and developer, 'Growing people gives the school a sense of pride. We develop the person, not the subject.'
- **Culture:** high aspiration, celebration, focus on growth, development, 'We're constantly presenting a vision of where we're going. A constant and consistent message ... to improve what we're doing.'

Finally, a rare insight into students' perceptions of leadership is provided by Levacic in a study of twenty secondary schools across England. Her 'most robust finding' was of a positive and significant relationship between headteacher leadership as assessed by pupils on the basis of four criteria:

1. the headteacher makes sure pupils behave well
2. I often see the headteacher around the school
3. the headteacher is really interested in how much we learn at school
4. the headteacher seems to be interested in us – the pupils

In comparison, 'Attempts to assess headteacher leadership using more sophisticated questions to staff about more detailed aspects of headteachers attitudes and behaviour proved unsuccessful' (Levacic et al, 2003, p.18).

The conclusion that there is a core, common framework capable of holding local variations on the themes is itself a recurrent theme in research and reviews, including, for example, DfES (2007b); Harris et al (2006a); James et al (2006); Keys et al (2003); Leithwood et al (2008); MacBeath and Dempster (2009); Mujis et al (2007); Riley (2008); Taylor-Moore (2004) and Walker et al (2005). It is also a feature in personal accounts based on leaders' personal experiences, for example Clark (1998); Hampton and Jones (2000); and Stubbs (2003). Chapman (2004) draws these strands together and concludes that the common framework has important underlying features related to the sequence of devolving autonomy and promoting positive collaborative cultures within the school. Successful leaders, he reports, have a highly developed understanding of the necessity to align those two elements with the development phase of the organisation. Put simply, as the school develops and improves confidence and capacity of the staff increase, structures flatten and leadership becomes more decentralised.

Looking to explain how these leaders operate, Ainscow and West et al (2006, p.9) draws on the field of social psychology (Johnson and Johnson, 1994) for a tripartite model, competitive, individualistic or co-operative, of the way leaders may structure working relationships. Ainscow and West conclude that the approaches that have been relevant in studies of schools that have achieved and [importantly] sustained success in urban contexts (West et al, 2005), have shown features which could be described as cooperative rather than competitive or individualistic. Johnson writes that being 'co-operative' allows the school leaders to work in ways which the reader will recognise can be aligned with the recurring framework.

- Challenge traditional competitive or individualistic approaches to teaching.
- Inspire a clear mutual vision of what the school should and could be.
- Empower staff through cooperative teamwork.

- Lead by example, be cooperative and take risks.
- Encourage staff to persist and to strive to improve their expertise.

Ainscow and West (2006, p.10) draw on Riehl's theoretical and empirical summary to illustrate what this means. In Riehl's own words,

'When wedded to a relentless commitment to equity, voice and social justice, administrators' efforts in the tasks of sense making, promoting inclusive cultures and practices in schools, and building positive relationships outside of the school may indeed foster a new form of practice' (Riehl 2000 cited in Ainscow and West, 2006).

This to all intents is what underwrote the success of the three school leaders in Busher and Barkers' (2003) account:

'Persuading school members to support their vision of a successful school; creating a culture that made staff and students feel valued but responsible members of the school community; public sharing of knowledge of how to act effectively within school, e.g. in lessons or break times; understanding how staff, students, and parents might perceive their actions; asserting their views and values effectively within the common interests of the school community; creating relationships with the school's local authority and residential communities that made their members feel welcome partners with the school'.

In all of this there are deep echoes of Bryk and Schneider's (2002) conclusion that one of the most powerful, positive factors in school improvement is the leadership's capacity to nurture the broad base of trust, respect and personal regard which is a critical lubricant in complex circumstances.

We noted at the top of this section that SISE approaches have been criticised in the very area this project is focused on. Thrupp (1999 and 2001) has provided critiques of the SISE paradigm (for counter critique see for example Reynolds and Teddlie, 2001). Wrigley, argues that the field begins to 'create illusions of being able to overcome the problems of an increasingly polarised society through education alone' (2003, p.2). He also makes the point that 'how and why' things are done might transcend the technical aspects of what is done. Recognising the common interest and value in teaching and learning, curriculum, school ethos and wider community for turning schools around, Wrigley argues for a 'remoralisation' of leadership and development. Managerialism and technism, he writes, suppress moral debate and appear value free. 'A managerial approach to school development produces... shallow learning, and often reinforces the very patterns and processes which inadvertently discriminate and disengage' (2005, p.30). Agendas of the school improvement and effectiveness community have also turned their attention to 'beyond school factors' and have increasingly become concerned with differentiated processes and the relationship between context and improvement efforts (Harris and Chapman, 2004).

In all of this the headteacher effect is frequently indirect and mediated through the activity of other staff, especially, though not only, in secondary schools, it is through the work of teachers, the organisation of the schools and relationships with parents and the wider community that the headteacher has to operate (Bell et al, 2003). Knapp (2001, p.190) proposes that the evidence from the Accelerated School Network in the United States is that these approaches work because they deal with the pathologies of the schools in poor settings rather than assuming that remedial strategies aimed at the students' skill deficits can work in dysfunctional circumstances. In an echo of Ainscow and West's co-operative perspective, Knapp concludes:

'The collective act of reconsidering and transforming the school program means that the school staff become a more collegial community which provides ongoing support to its members as they struggle with the ongoing problems of practice' (ibid, p.191).

In an important recommendation for policy, Knapp touches on an often overlooked point which, we will report, is a notable priority for the school leaders in our own research sample. Recruitment practices are not overall fit for purpose in a system where excellence and equity are priorities. Knapp writes from an American perspective which resonates even without translation:

‘In larger urban districts, in particular, where the children of poverty are generally concentrated, recruitment and hiring processes are often cumbersome, untimely and inefficient: good teaching prospects are often snapped up by more efficient districts (typically those that serve a more affluent clientele) or by non-public schools’ (ibid, p.198).

Being leaders with a sense of commitment and moral purpose who know the technical requirements of school management might not distinguish those who are exceptionally successful from most others; so is there more we know about this group?

From a study of 46 Belgium schools said to have a ‘positive culture’ Engels et al (2008) identified three personality traits which distinguished those principals from their peers: self-efficacy, locus of control and Type A behaviour. Self-efficacy refers to a belief in your own capabilities confidence that you are able to cope with the job. Locus of control refers to the amount of 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; well-being and high job satisfaction are associated with an internal locus of control. Type A behaviour is an action complex typical of people involved in a chronic, incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time. Ferguson (2007) has noted the importance of efficacy coming through relevant American research as did Day in his review of literature and survey of over attitudes to leadership in more than 700 schools. He concluded that:

‘Among the small number of personal traits previous evidence has suggested have an influence on the behaviours of effective leaders, this interim report examines, in particular, the extent to which leaders felt self-efficacious about their work. A considerable amount of evidence indicates that feelings of self-efficacy (or self confidence) related to one’s work generates persistence in the face of sometimes daunting challenges and initial failure. Persistence creates opportunities to acquire the abilities needed to address those daunting challenges. Both primary and secondary heads’ responses to items measuring their self-efficacy were positively skewed, indicating high levels of self-confidence on their part. The majority of key staff also viewed their head teachers as highly self-efficacious about their jobs. In both 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 in their improvement efforts’ (Day et al, 2007, p.6).

We have already noted Harris’s and Chapman’s (2002) reporting of successful leaders in challenging circumstances having the confidence to be contentious and to deal with conflict, being highly pragmatic, resilient and determined individuals. A DfES survey (2007b) describes successful school leaders as decisive, not shying away from making decisions based on a clear and firm vision of where the school is going. They have a passion for order and thoroughness an insistence, persistence and consistency about certain non-negotiables.

Section 5: Some reflections

School leadership and management is a complex and layered activity and three themes remain relatively weakly explored in the literature:

i. Governance

If successful leadership involves significant engagement with the community and other providers, it is unlikely that traditional forms of governance based on the interests of a single institution will provide the most effective framework for system wide application. Recent research at Manchester University for the Rowntree Foundation has shown that school governance is often at its weakest and least representative in the economically poorest communities (Dean et al, 2007). There may be more innovative ways of creating public value and community commitment than tradition governing body meetings and those might align with more effective governance procedures without necessarily professionalising governance.

ii. Curriculum and pedagogy

Pedagogy in school is now capable of directly tackling issues around gender and race. It is expected to be, and most teachers would want it to be, part of their professional discourse. They are matters which can and should be openly explored with students through the curriculum sometimes as issues in their own right and sometimes through curriculum content in subject areas. There are many consequences to that, including a thread of evidence that students are now more likely to have friends of the other sex or from other racial or ethnic backgrounds. The same is not true of social class, where the evidence suggests that in mixed contexts, students' will tend to have social class based friendships. There is something to consider in that phenomenon.

iii. Context

Alan Dyson (2006) has summarised this point in his argument for 'contextualised' leadership which, he says, redefines the responsibilities of school leaders, not in terms of the individual institution, but of a wider social strategy within which the institution is one agent among many. Some of the practical consequences include:

- a widespread recognition of the important but limited role which schooling plays in overcoming disadvantage
- school leaders and other leaders willing to participate in local strategies and collaborate within a network of provision
- a systemic and individual readiness to think in terms broader than targets, measured attainments and institutional advantage
- an understanding of the social and economic contexts of children, families and communities and of the role of other agencies within those contexts
- a capability to lead the school not only in driving up attainment but in making connections with children and families cultures and expectations

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