


What we are learning about: leadership of Every Child Matters

This paper focuses on current knowledge and thinking about Every Child Matters and school leadership. Its findings are summarised in six key messages.



The National College for School Leadership commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research to conduct a research study focused on current knowledge and thinking about ECM and school leadership.

The findings are summarised here in the form of six key messages, evidence for which was collected from three main sources: a literature review of relevant material; telephone interviews with key stakeholders, including policy makers, researchers and local authorities; and focus groups with school leaders

Key message 1:

Effective school leaders are able to fully convince staff in their school that a focus on ECM can raise standards and that ECM complements, rather than conflicts with, the standards agenda

- If academic standards are to be raised in a sustainable way, school leaders need to take a broader view of children's needs and to recognise that there are limitations to the improvements focus solely on teaching and learning within the classroom can produce. Schools are accountable for ECM through the Ofsted process and ECM cannot be ignored. However, a focus on ECM should complement rather than deflect from the work on improving teaching and learning.
- School leaders who are well respected by their peers can influence ECM engagement amongst their colleagues. This is more productive than local authorities exhorting schools to become involved. Where ECM may be less of a priority (e.g. in schools in more affluent areas) school leaders may have to be convinced that ECM is about 'doing things for all children and not just a few'.
- School leaders can be encouraged to engage with ECM by focusing on the benefits it can bring (e.g. improved learning outcomes) and by building on what schools are already doing. Good evidence of effectiveness can shift school leaders who are less inclined towards ECM. The sharing of good practice can also provide 'enormous drive to move things forward'.
- Effective school leaders reinforce the message amongst their staff that ECM can lead to raised attainment by meeting the wider needs of children and overcoming barriers to learning. School leaders who are successful in meeting the ECM agenda make these links explicit for their staff. They utilise the school improvement process effectively and design school improvement plans around ECM outcomes. They may also take the view that ECM should not be seen as purely instrumental in raising attainment, rather that the five outcomes are of intrinsic value themselves.
- Effective school leaders focus on ECM and see extended school activities as being as important as activities in the traditional school day, whilst also retaining their focus on the school's core business. Engagement in extended school activities can change schools' perceptions about teaching and learning and make it easier for staff to embrace the ECM agenda.

Key message 2:

ECM cannot be achieved by a single school leader: effective school leaders share leadership responsibilities widely amongst the professionals working within the school

- The ECM agenda is too broad for the traditional leadership model, where the headteacher has authority over everything. Progress with regard to ECM will be impossible and unsustainable without a shift to shared leadership amongst staff. Effective school leaders harness the skills of their staff and, by drawing them into the decision-making process, build capacity for others to take on wider leadership roles. This is integral to securing system-wide development and change. However, moving to a model of shared leadership can be a major change for school leaders and some may find it difficult to hand over elements of control.
- School leaders can change the structure of their leadership teams and establish specifically delegated roles with allocated responsibilities for ECM. They can use TLR payments as an opportunity to restructure pastoral and leadership systems in line with ECM. The promotion of the role of associate staff can support ECM. However, this can also contribute to the view of some teachers that ECM is the role of others so school leaders need to reinforce the message that 'ECM is everyone's job'.
- As a result of the wider focus of ECM and the need for greater collaboration, new leadership roles are emerging and these have begun to include non-teaching professionals. The introduction of 'para' professionals within schools has implications for school leaders, particularly with regard to performance management.

Key message 3:

ECM outcomes cannot be achieved by the school alone: effective school leaders adopt a collaborative approach with other schools, agencies and services

- Effective school leaders recognise that they (and their schools) cannot deliver the wider ECM outcomes in isolation. This involves a strong belief in, and commitment to, partnership working and recognition that different agencies and services have different expertise to contribute. They seek to achieve something that would not have been possible without the act of collaboration and they ensure that the partnership is worthwhile and purposeful. They demonstrate to their staff that working together adds value.
- There is an array of strategies for effective leadership of collaborations. There is no single blueprint and approaches need to be tailored to the local context. School leaders can develop a feel for what is happening locally and feed into partnership forums and networks that already exist to avoid duplication. They can use local authority brokerage as a lever for effectively engaging partners, however, how far partnerships should be brokered through the local authority and how far schools should be part of wider local authority partnerships and systems is still up for discussion.
- The key to effective leadership of partnership working is about 'understanding where the other side is coming from'. Good school leaders respect other agencies and recognise their authority. They are willing to talk openly and honestly and to develop mutual trust. Effective collaborations are led by outward-looking school leaders who are solution-focused, set realistic targets, move gradually to more ambitious targets and build upon existing long-standing partnerships.
- Effective school leaders provide strong direction and articulate a clear vision and a clear rationale for partnership working. They facilitate effective communication and have the capacity to build and sustain close and appropriate working relationships across boundaries. Effective school leaders provide opportunities for staff from different cultures to work together to enable them to become familiar with each other's worlds. They provide clarity about roles and responsibilities and establish jointly agreed protocols on how to work together.

- Good school leaders exercise caution with regard to the funding for partnership working as there can be issues concerning the sustainability of any additional support that is offered to children and families as a result. There can be difficulties in involving all the relevant agencies and achieving a shared responsibility, as well as practical issues to do with the use of the school site by other agencies, in which case it is important to establish jointly agreed working protocols.
- Effective school leaders recognise that inter-school collaboration, where headteachers work alongside each other for the benefit of the children, parents and communities they serve, is necessary for addressing children's wider needs. Where headteachers are competitive, inward looking and aggressive in pushing forward their own agenda, this can hinder progress towards the delivery of ECM outcomes.

Key message 4:

ECM has widened school leaders' role and led to an emerging model involving leadership beyond their own institution, within the wider community

- The ECM agenda has expanded headteachers' responsibilities and given them influence beyond the boundaries of their school within the wider social system in which their school operates. As a result, a new 'system' leadership approach is emerging which presumes that school leaders will be involved in leadership beyond their own institution and have to focus on community self-improvement and transformation. This approach seeks to build sustainable leadership capacity and system-wide development and change.
- As this is a new and emerging leadership approach, the question of how far school leaders should take on wider community leadership responsibilities is yet to be resolved. School leaders may have to persuade their governing bodies that it is beneficial for them to focus on the needs of all the children in the local community rather than just those in their school.

There is a danger that this community role could take school leaders away from their core business, as well as making the school leader's job unmanageable. One view might be that effective school leaders would be better deployed strengthening the existing school system (e.g. by coaching other headteachers).

- Effective 'system' leaders believe in meeting the needs of all children and families in the community. They are 'school exceeding' and see that they have to contribute to the system as a whole. Leadership of this nature is a fundamental challenge for school leaders as this requires them to exercise leadership across the community and across a range of agencies and services. They will need to develop a range of skills to create connected strategies to influence change across schools, within external agencies and within the community.

Key message 5:

Effective school leaders believe in genuine student, parent, and community consultation in order to develop locally responsive solutions to ECM

- Local context is central to ECM and school leaders need to appreciate that there is no single blueprint or 'best way' for engaging partners in collaborative working or for responding to ECM. Developing a local, tailored strategy for seeking out new partners and responding to local need is a more effective approach.
- Effective school leaders adopt an approach which has children and families at its centre. They consider it their core business to connect with the users of their school to ensure that the school revolves around, and serves, them. They engage in genuine dialogue with students, parents and use their views to inform the planning process and to influence the direction of change. In this way, responses to ECM can focus on local needs and are more likely to result in meaningful outcomes.
- Effective school leaders understand how to undertake genuine consultation 'conversations' and are able to manage people's, sometimes disparate, views and their expectations. Genuine consultation can take school leaders and their staff out of their comfort zone, from individuals in authority to those open to the views of others. They have to be prepared to adjust and develop according to parents' and young people's views.
- Successful school leaders spread the message that the school is a resource for the community and a belief that the school thinks the community matters. This is a two-way process and school leaders need to seize every opportunity to 'get the community into the school and the school into the community'. Making the school welcoming is the first step to engaging parents and the local community.

Key message 6:

To implement ECM effectively school leaders will require new skills: effective school leaders engage in ongoing professional development and promote a whole-school learning culture

- For successful collaborative working, school leaders require a more subtle set of skills than those currently recognised for effective school leadership. To be successful they need to respect the experience and expertise of others. Good interpersonal skills and effective communication skills facilitate the development of effective working relationships with a range of partners.
- Effective school leaders capitalise on the experience and expertise within their staff. They establish trust amongst their leadership teams and are receptive to different styles of leadership. Furthermore, with the increasing role of non-teaching professionals, school leaders require the necessary skills to effectively and cohesively integrate 'para' professionals into the school workforce, in particular, in relation to performance management.
- School leaders who are effective in addressing the ECM agenda promote a learning culture within their school and have a commitment to learning at all levels. By investing in continuing professional development in this way, school leaders can reduce reluctance and defensiveness amongst staff, promote buy-in to ECM and create an openness to change. School leaders' commitment to the development of others is also important for sustainability and succession planning.
- Leaders who take on a 'system' leadership role will need to be able to communicate a vision and moral purpose that resonates with every stakeholder and provides coherence. They require the capabilities to change other contexts beyond the school by engaging with the whole system. The key to this type of leadership is also to do with managing relationships effectively and leaders will need to be skilled in relationship building, brokerage and entrepreneurialism.
- The skills required by school leaders for effectively implementing ECM will need to be further defined. School leaders are already skilled at managing change and they have always had to be flexible and adaptable. Where a change culture is already embedded in schools, this can support school leaders in responding to ECM. There is also scope to induce change through the performance management process and the use of TLRs.

Conclusions

Throughout the literature a plethora of terms are assigned to different styles or models of leadership and this makes the distillation of key messages for ECM leadership important. Only in this way can school leaders understand the key principles of what is required and integrate these into their practice.

In the main, there is little within the key messages emerging from the data that school leaders themselves are likely to dispute, particularly given the consistency of findings across the three evidence sources. Whilst there is inevitably some variation across schools, there was a sense that school leaders are making the link between ECM and standards, that they are already adopting a more collaborative approach and developing a local response to ECM through engagement with their local community. School leaders recognise that ECM is not merely an initiative or policy development, rather it is something that needs to be integrated into their staff's working practice. When working effectively, as well as improving outcomes for children and young people, this may also help to improve the life of their staff.

The main area of contention is likely to lie in the suggestion that the school leaders' role should be extended to a wider leadership role beyond the single institution. As a new and emerging leadership role, this is something which school leaders and other stakeholders will wish to discuss and debate further. In addition, there is evidence that the enhanced skills required for school leaders to undertake this new and complex role require more detailed definition. School leaders must recognise that they cannot achieve everything all in one go. It is important that the school leader's role remains manageable and that they are provided with the necessary support in the form of future CPD provision to take on this challenge.

**Publications and resources also
available from NCSL:**

- **ECM Leadership Direct** is an online Resource exploring the implications for Every Child Matters for schools and school leaders.
www.ncsl.org.uk/ecmleadershipdirect
- **NCSL programmes** for school leaders at all levels.
www.ncsl.org.uk/programmes
- **Publications and resources** available to download and order.
www.ncsl.org.uk/publications
- **The Leadership Library** is a free unique resource bringing together some of the best leadership and management thinking from around the world.
www.ncsl.org.uk/leadershiplib
- **The Tomorrow's leaders today** campaign is about finding, developing and keeping great headteachers.
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