

'The Role of Executive Heads in System Leadership'

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System Leadership

- Willingness to shoulder wider roles that work for the success of other schools as well as one's own
- Understand that in order to change the system one has to engage with it in a meaningful way
- Has the potential to respond to the key challenge of how to ensure sufficient leadership capacity in failing schools
- Diverse roles are now emerging. A prominent form is commonly called Executive Headship:
 - of a Federation with a partner school(s) which faces particular difficulties.
 - of two or more schools in a support, stable or non-intervention partnership.



The Research

Research brief was to provide:

- clarity on the strategy of federating two or more schools
- details of the experience, skills and knowledge leaders bring to the task
- proposals for the development of such leaders
- proposals for their recruitment

Methodology:

- undertook an extensive Literature Review.
- researched directly with a Respondent Group of approximately 20 Executive and Aspirant Executive Heads.
- proceeded inductively from the evidence (without prior assumptions).

This Presentation

- (1) Evidence on the practice of Executive Heads
- (2) The implications for developing this leadership role
- (3) Emerging issues for discussion:
 - Identifying
 - Developing
 - Moving the role to a Larger Scale

(1) Strategy for Federating Schools

- (a) Building the Foundations
- (b) Improving the Partner School
 - setting direction
 - developing people
 - developing the organization
- (c) Implementing an Exit Strategy

(a) Building the Foundations

- Readiness of Lead School
 - credibility based on rapid and sustained improvement
 - robust and effective systems on behaviour
 - strong headship combined with a team approach; range of staff at capable of taking on coaching roles
 - evaluation embedded at all levels, with effective benchmarking.
- Setting up the Partnership
 - need to agree to a mandate (in the form of written contract) and ground rules that are understood by all partners.
- Entry into the Partner School
 - diagnosis of need
 - changes to staff in key posts

(b) Improving the Partner: (i) Setting Direction

- Setting out a vision: for a single direction in a complex organisation:
 - what do we need to achieve this term and how will we do so?
 - what are our objectives for the year?
 - what do we want the school to be like in 3 years time?
- Agreeing objectives: bringing immediacy to the delivery
 - action plan focused on termly improvements through
 - Use evidence to tackle root causes of school weaknesses
 - sharp focus on: success; quality of learning; behaviour; consistency
- Establishing commitment:
 - challenging the partner school's myths of adequacy
 - offering a way forward
 - securing quick wins to build confidence

Improving the Partner: (ii) Developing People

- Developing effective management:
 - Associate Head coached in both operational to strategic issues
 - executive leadership team capable of transforming practices & outcomes
 - a culture of openness and trust, that is blame-free
- Improving the quality of teaching:
 - introduce standard operating procedures
 - import curriculum strategy and lesson plans
 - use lead school staff in supporting developments and coaching
- Building Capacity:
 - staff work together and establish consistent practices and procedures.
 - all key staff develop problem-solving skills.
 - practice and innovation are evidence based.

Improving Partner (iii) Developing Organisation

- Range of strategies that provide the organizational conditions for improvement:
 - Developing effective school systems
 - Improving the environment
 - Using excellence from the lead school,
 - Using data and clear accountability to evaluating the success
 - Encouraging disciplined innovation
 - Building Partnerships: with primary schools, parents and industry

(c) Implementing an Exit Strategy

- Capacity built for sustainable improvement:
 - a capable and aspiring senior leadership team
 - flexible organisation and collaborative process
 - management of risk taking and detailed planning
 - confidence and optimism
 - sustainable and effective relationships
 - future benchmarks.

(2) Clear and Shared definition

- Opportunity for clear and shared definition of:
 - core practices executive heads employ to improve partner schools.
 - core knowledge, understanding and skills that Executive Heads need to succeed.
- Two key benefits:
 - a basis for identifying Executive Heads through accurate and robust assessment
 - a basis for the professional development through more focused and appropriate support.
- Are National Standards an appropriate a way forward?

Outline of National Standards

- Building the Foundations
 - Setting up a Partnership
 - Diagnosing the partner schools strengths and weaknesses
- Setting Direction
 - Creation and communicating a vision
 - School Improvement Processes
- Developing People
 - Leading in Learning
 - Transferring best practice
- Developing the Organisation
 - Managing change
 - Building effective relationships

(3) Implications for policy and practice

- Range of options for developing Federations, including to:
 - remain locally determined, developed on ad hoc basis.
 - move to a larger scale, with LEAs required to seriously consider using federations as response to failure.
 - develop a national system and infrastructure to support locally brokered federations as a key policy intervention to school failure, low attainment and underperformance.
- Need for an expanding supply of Executive Heads.
- Issues for discussion: how to:
 - (a) identify
 - (b) develop; and,
 - (c) move Executive Headship to a larger scale

(a) Identifying and recruiting Exec Heads

- Key target groups: differentiated by experience and capability:
 - *Existing*: those currently undertaking Exec Head roles or have successfully done so in the past.
 - *Designate*: those recently taken on, plan to or are deemed capable of taking on Exec Heads roles.
 - *Aspiring*: those with the potential for in the future.
- Proposed Options:
 - Register of Exec Heads: quicker deployment; better preparation
 - Incentivise Exec Headship: recognition; reward; better support
 - New career path for aspirants: NPQH and Associate Headship

(b) Professional development for Exec Heads

- Principles:
 - focus on the promotion of student learning, the schools' context and capacity building
 - focus on problem-based learning.
 - focus on a repertoire of practice not a single style
- Proposed Options:
 - a formal qualification
 - tailored learning opportunities
 - toolkit of guidance and materials
 - link to performance management and / or Exec Head status?

(c) Moving to a larger scale: Lead Schools

(i) Identifying Lead Schools:

- Inevitable relationship between identifying Executive Heads and Lead Schools
- Aspirant heads can probably be divorced from a particular school's readiness to lead a federation, but Existing and Designate Heads probably cannot.

Question therefore whether:

- o school quality and readiness should be part of the identification of a pool of ready and willing Executive Heads?
- o criteria set out on 'readiness to lead' provides a suitable outline for doing so?
- o OfSTED evidence, value-added data and LEA and SIP knowledge should also be employed?
- o these judgments must necessarily be taken on a case by case basis, pointing to local decision making?

Moving to a larger scale: Brokerage

(ii) Brokerage:

- choosing right partner for failing school is critically important
- brokerage needs to be based on contextual knowledge, but concern for whether (many) LEAs are up to the task because they: lack capacity; unaware of external assistance; don't fully understand requirements of school improvement

Question whether to enable:

- o Executive Head teachers to negotiate with partner schools?
- o Governing Bodies and or Parents to trigger change?
- o a National Agency to lead responsibility for brokering local partnerships?
- o DfES to provide oversight, as well as direct involvement in specific contexts where, for example, local brokerage fails?

Moving to a larger scale: Resourcing

(iii) Resourcing:

- Will be in play from the start of the brokerage process, need to consider:
 - payment to the executive head
 - payment to lead school to backfill and develop capacity
 - the financial position of partner school, which may often be in debt
 - restructuring partner school, with the need to make limited staffing changes

Question whether:

- o partner schools should pay lead schools?
- o LEA should lead (with potentially a ring-fencing in their budget from the DfES)?
- o a National Agency should be tasked with developing and resourcing a defined system of federations from existing budgets or with additionally funding?
- o DfES should lead funding, potentially through a 'LiG type' model (but with control of resource allocation designated to the lead school)?

Moving to a larger scale: Support

(iv) Support:

- Our respondent group was particularly concerned about the provision of ongoing personal and professional support.

Question whether:

- Executive Heads should receive specific powers so as to succeed in the face of resistance from partner school Governors?
- Governors need professional development to better support Executive Heads?
- SIPs should explicitly focus on supporting particular aspects of federations?
- Ofsted inspection criteria should include federations?
- National Agencies should identify and spread best practice?
- DfES should formalise the role of Executive Headship, for example, in 'pay and conditions'?

Discussion Questions

- Does the model resonate as a clear & shared definition?
- Do we need National Standards?
- How can we best identify and recruit Exec Heads?
- How should we professionally develop Exec Heads?
- Are we looking to move Exec Headship and federations to a large scale?