‘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 of 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 strengthens 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:
- school quality and readiness should be part of the identification of a pool of ready and willing Executive Heads?
- criteria set out on ‘readiness to lead’ provides a suitable outline for doing so?
- OfSTED evidence, value-added data and LEA and SIP knowledge should also be employed?
- 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:
○ Executive Head teachers to negotiate with partner schools?
○ Governing Bodies and or Parents to trigger change?
○ a National Agency to lead responsibility for brokering local partnerships?
○ 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:
○ partner schools should pay lead schools?
○ LEA should lead (with potentially a ring-fencing in their budget from the DfES)?
○ a National Agency should be tasked with developing and resourcing a defined system of federations from existing budgets or with additionally funding?
○ 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?