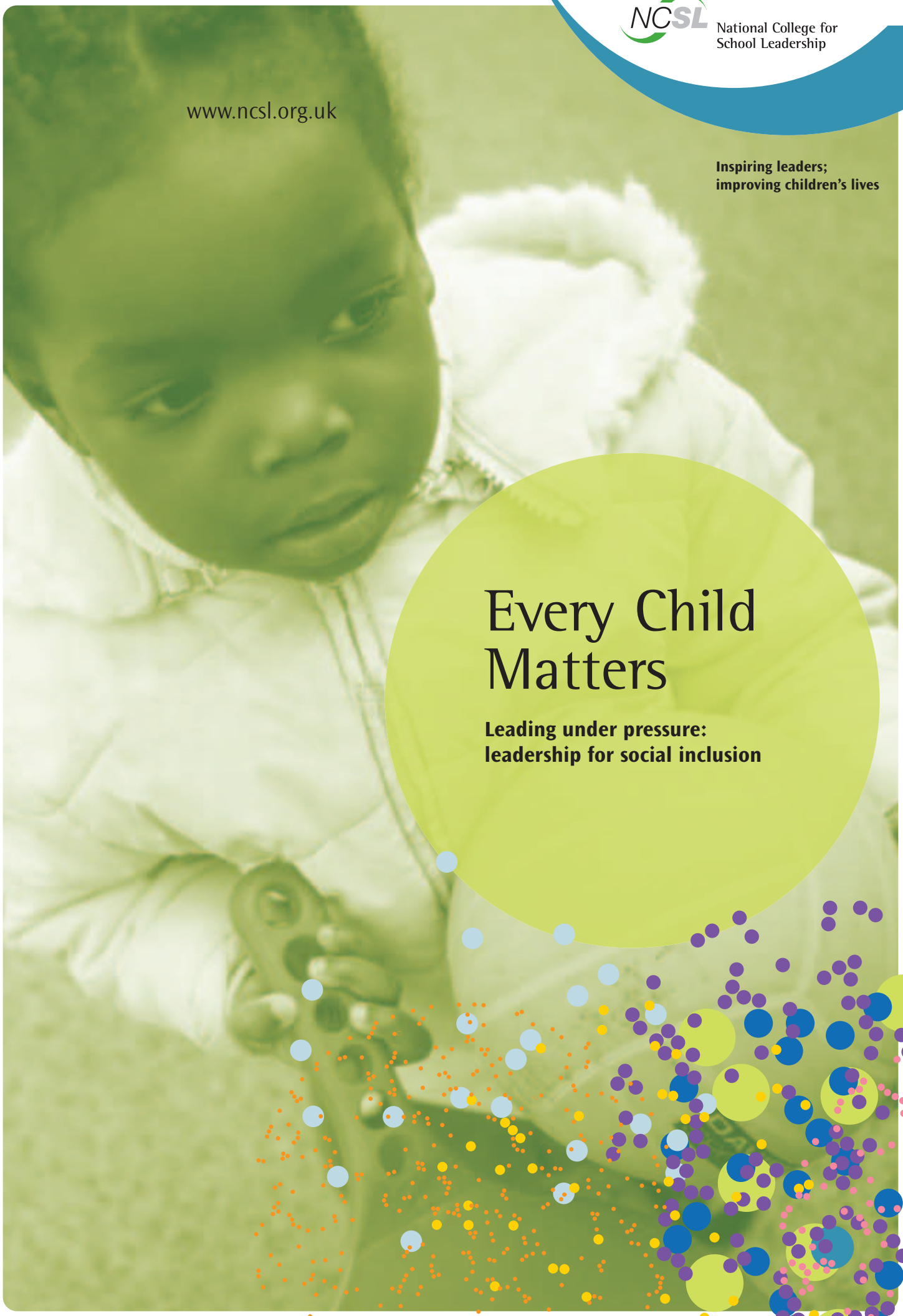

National College for School Leadership

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Inspiring leaders;
improving children's lives

Every Child Matters

Leading under pressure: leadership for social inclusion

Contents

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1. Introduction

While a lot is known about leadership and school effectiveness, there has been a tendency to generalise findings from effectiveness research across contexts in a way that does not take into account issues of social inclusion or the context of schools serving disadvantaged communities. In its review of published evidence on effective school leadership, NCSL highlighted the importance of context in this (NCSL 2007) There are clearly a number of distinctive tasks related to leading for social inclusion that are different from simply leading an effective school, such as:

- Enabling the school to respond to students from diverse backgrounds.
- Connecting school culture to students' home and community cultures.
- Promoting the overall personal and social development of students and enhancing their life skills and life chances, as well as promoting their academic development.
- Reconciling the social inclusion agenda with the standards agenda.
- Managing complex relationships with communities, community agencies, and employers.

Following the recent rise in interest in social inclusion, there is a need to develop this research base further. However, in order to do this we must first develop a clear understanding of what is meant by social inclusion. The concept of social exclusion has been with us in contemporary social policy for some time (Byrne, 2005). Although a contested term, at the root of the concept are multi-dimensional socio-economic processes that exclude particular groups of individuals, in particular places and in particular ways, from mainstream society.

In many respects the concept became embedded in numerous discourses at the same time as the social exclusion unit was set up by New Labour to examine some of the processes and possible causes of social exclusion. The social exclusion task force was then empowered to suggest policy developments that would counter the processes of social exclusion and enhance its corollary – social inclusion.

One of the key areas of priority for developing social inclusion centred on improving educational attainments for all children, regardless of personal circumstances and family background. Through the removal of barriers to engagement and achievement young people would be able to participate, engage and succeed in various aspects of mainstream life.

Over the last ten years there have been numerous attempts to assist this process, for example, Education Action Zones, Excellence in Cities, Connexions, Sure Start, Educational Maintenance Allowances. However, late developments such as Every Child Matters (ECM) and the subsequent launch of a range of extended services such as Full Service Extended Schools (FSES) has now resulted in schools being more outward-looking with a focus on working with partners to provide a range of services to support children, families and communities.

Although much research has focused on how these various initiatives have impacted on the educational attainment of young people categorised as most ‘at risk’ (see for example Kendal et al, 2005; Middleton et al, 2005; Melhuish et al, 2005; Cummings et al, 2005) little research has systematically examined, categorised and synthesised the types of school leadership that might assist in improving social inclusion for young people and their families. What research there is appears to be both disparate and yet fork along two distinct lines of enquiry that either (a) take for granted a somewhat vague and normative understanding of social inclusion linked to instrumental school leadership practice; or (b) develop a social justice approach to schools and school leadership that are generally critical of current educational policy and bureaucratic forms of school leadership implied in that policy.

At one level social inclusion can be viewed as the extent to which various practices, activities and mechanisms promote or limit integration and participatory access of social groups and individuals into mainstream society. At another level, it can also mean the way different individuals and groups are given recognition for who and what they are. These various foci of analysis suggest a need to examine what types of knowledge about social inclusion are generated and what perspectives underpin this knowledge.

Broadly speaking, social inclusion can be defined as: the promotion of equality of opportunity for all children within society, regardless of background or personal circumstances.

A review undertaken by Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000) on social inclusion and education suggested that there is a potential equity problem. Here we focus on two aspects of social inclusion:

1. economic inclusion
2. cultural inclusion with regards to gender, race and ethnicity

1.1 Economic inclusion

Equity research and policy from this perspective examines the extent to which education can bring about economic inclusion as a proxy for social inclusion. Policy-orientated literatures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development strongly relate labour markets to education. The argument presented is that schooling should promote access and success in the economic field, delivering greater levels of social inclusion more generally. Inclusion is enhanced by enabling more people to achieve credentials that will act as a passport to improved labour market opportunities. The tensions for education in such literatures is that schools at one level act as a sorting function for the delivery of a differentiated credential system, ie not everyone can equally achieve. Yet at the same time, the school needs to find ways of equalising an unequal playing field. This is managed through eliminating potentially exclusionary practices that create different educational outcomes for particular social groups and groups with particular special educational needs. A different perspective on the link between education and the labour market suggests that new forms of post-industrial economic activity increasingly require new forms of knowledge that place a greater emphasis on social and cultural capital than on ascription and merit. Class distinctions in such labour markets appear to becoming ever more marked as the middle class with appropriate capitals reap the benefits in these new labour markets (Ball, 2003).

This suggests that those most disadvantaged need to be provided with bridging ties into opportunities for enhanced social and cultural capital development (Raffo, 2006).

1.2 Cultural inclusion

Here the equity issue relates to both representation and stereotyping, and the institutional rules and processes that may culturally exclude some groups from mainstream social life. Equity issues for education concerning cultural inclusion focus on questions, such as:

- the nature of the representation of gender, class and ethnicity in the curriculum
- teachers' discourses about cultural plurality in classrooms
- the gendering of roles in classroom and school practices
- inclusion in mainstream classrooms of young people with special educational needs
- the affordances given to the educational values and norms of different families and communities with diverse class and ethnic backgrounds

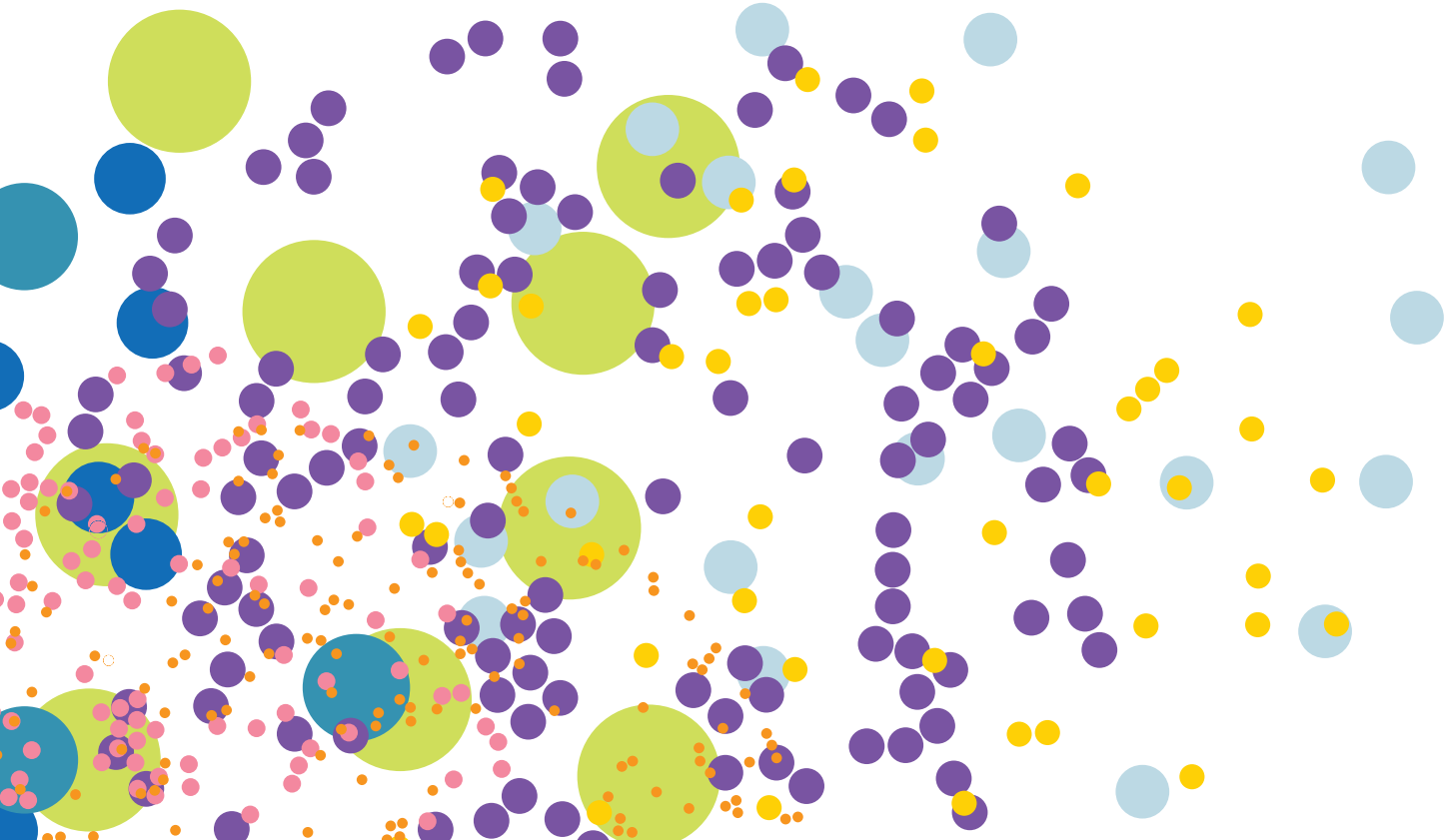
More information on this can be found in the full literature review (available at www.ncsl.org.uk/publications)

In this study, we will not proceed from a fixed view of what social inclusion means. Instead, we interrogate the views of case study schools to gain an understanding both of what views exist in the educational community and how these relate to leadership and practice.

The centrality of social inclusion to educational policy and practice raises important questions about the forms of leadership that are necessary to take this agenda forward. The study will address this issue, focusing specifically on the following research questions:

- How are school leaders addressing the challenge of social inclusion?
- What forms of leadership practice are proving to be effective?

- To what extent do these practices lead to improvements in presence, participation and achievement of vulnerable groups of learners?
- What are the implications for leadership development programmes?



2. Details of methods

2.1 The case study methodology

In this study, we have used a qualitative case study approach to interrogate issues of leadership and social inclusion. This approach is seen as best able to provide us with an in-depth understanding of the processes involved and uncover emerging views in the schools rather than enforcing preconceived frameworks on interviewees. The case studies contain the following elements:

Developing accounts of leadership practices.

Qualitative evidence was collected within each of the schools, based on interviews and focus groups with students, staff, local authority officers and families. The focus was on the nature of leadership practice, how it has developed within each of the schools and extended into the community. Like Spillane and his colleagues (2001), who see leadership as a collective good within an organisation rather than as an individual property resident in the headteacher, we started from the assumption that leadership has to be understood as a distributed practice, stretched over a school's social and situational contexts. The trustworthiness of the evidence was scrutinised by comparing evidence from different people within a particular context,eg teachers, support staff and students. In utilising this framework, it is important to involve as many participants and stakeholders in the case studies as possible to ensure that the sample reflects the diversity of those involved in school leadership. We interviewed a cross-section of leaders, including:

- the headteacher
- two members of the senior management team
- two middle level leaders
- two teacher-leaders

This has enabled us to gain rich data on leadership practices across the organisation. As well as this group we interviewed a focus group of parents in most schools, (although this was not possible in all) and a focus group of pupils in all schools, to get a fuller picture of inclusive education in the sample schools.

The interviews were semi-structured, to enable us to clearly focus on the key research questions while allowing flexibility for our experienced research team to react to relevant emerging data.

(ii) Analysing individual cases.

The evidence for each school was analysed in order to determine possible links between contextual factors, leadership practices and student outcomes, using a coding system corresponding to emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). An audit trail was created so that claims about the relationship between practices and outcomes can be subjected to scrutiny (Schwandt & Halpern, 1988). The trail took the form of an exploratory account, linking examples of leadership practice to changes in student presence, participation and achievement.

(iii) Cross-case analysis.

We carried out a cross-site analysis of the six accounts of practice in relation to the overall research questions. A central strategy here was the use of 'group interpretive processes' as a means of analysing and interpreting evidence. These involved an engagement with the different perspectives of team members in ways that are intended to encourage critical reflection, collaborative learning and mutual critique (Wasser and Bresler, 1996). In this way, conclusions were reached that are both valid and relevant. In addition, our research partners in other countries were asked to comment on the conclusions of our study. Participating schools were invited to comment on the final report before submission.

(iv) International comparison.

In order to make full use of the international dimension of the study, we instigated a conversation with our international partners in the UNESCO International Inclusive Education Research Lab around the vignettes they prepared on their own countries and our findings to explore similarities, differences and lessons for practice from the international vignettes and the English case studies. This has enabled us to deepen our understanding of general and contextual elements of leadership for inclusion.

All participants were sent all data and vignettes and invited to comment before the final report was produced.

2.2 The sample

It is important to stress that the six schools we investigated were not selected on the basis of assumed good practice. Rather we saw them as instructive cases, our existing knowledge of these schools suggested they varied in terms of the nature of the communities they served, their stages of development and the styles of leadership. What we also knew was that all these schools had an interest in and commitment to social inclusion, in whatever way it was defined by them (see findings). We also felt that, in terms of lessons to be learnt, schools which represented a range of practice would allow easier identification for practitioners. The districts and schools were chosen to be representative of different types of socio-economically disadvantaged contexts common in England, although the schools themselves were all located in the north west. Both primary and secondary schools were included, as were a variety of school types eg comprehensive, faith schools, academies.

In summary, the districts and schools have the following features:

District 1 – A town with high levels of economic deprivation, hidden in a large rural county that is generally well off. The population of the town is almost entirely white.

- School A1 – A low performing primary school, previously in serious weaknesses. It includes children from traveller families as well as a majority of White British pupils from a disadvantaged council estate. A new head was appointed in September 2006.
- School B1 – A low performing secondary school serving a highly disadvantaged community. A new head joined the school three years ago and has turned things round. Results have improved significantly and recently the school became a specialist college for Performance Arts. However, it is likely to be closed in the near future to be replaced by an academy.

District 2 – A town that has a large enclave of Asian heritage families. Schools are noticeably segregated on ethnic lines and there are selective schools at the secondary stage.

- School C2 – A primary school that is well regarded for its distinctive approach to multi–cultural education, which includes an emphasis on community involvement. The head is from an Asian background.
- School D2 – A secondary school that serves a mainly Asian population. The head, who has been in post for eight years, was recently awarded the OBE for progress in raising standards. There are, however, worrying trends in the take-up of post-16 opportunities.

District 3 – An inner city area that houses a complex and diverse population, where there are high levels of crime. There is a range of school choices at the secondary stage, including faith schools and an Academy. Attendance and disciplinary exclusions are areas of considerable concern.

- School E3 – A primary school where 80 per cent of children receive free school meals and where there is a high level of mobility. The head is seen to have improved standards in a school that was previously on the local authority's list of schools causing concern.
- School D3 – An academy that has chosen to separate itself from the local authority. There is a high proportion of immigrant families, including asylum seekers and refugees. The head appears to be introducing tight procedures intended to bring about rapid improvements in attendance, behaviour and results.

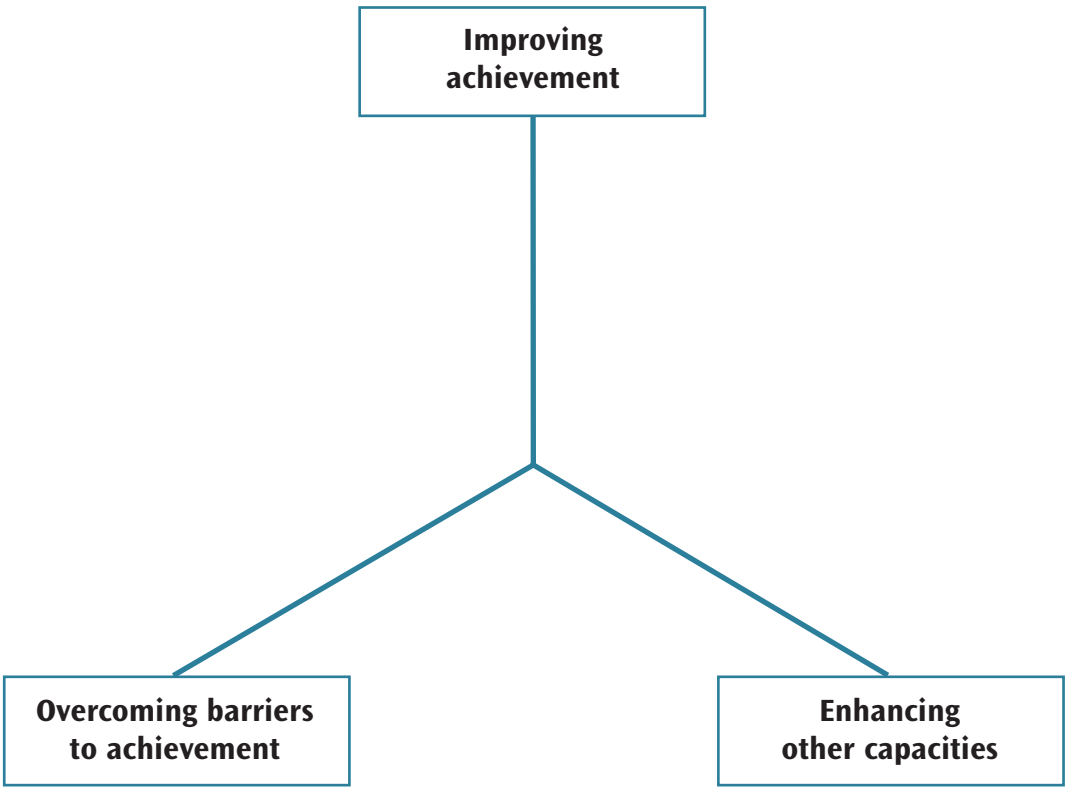
3. Findings

3.1 Conceptualising social inclusion

What became clear from the case studies was that the schools, though all concerned with social inclusion, differed substantively as to what they felt was meant by this concept. In essence for the case study schools social inclusion was differentiated around three main concerns:

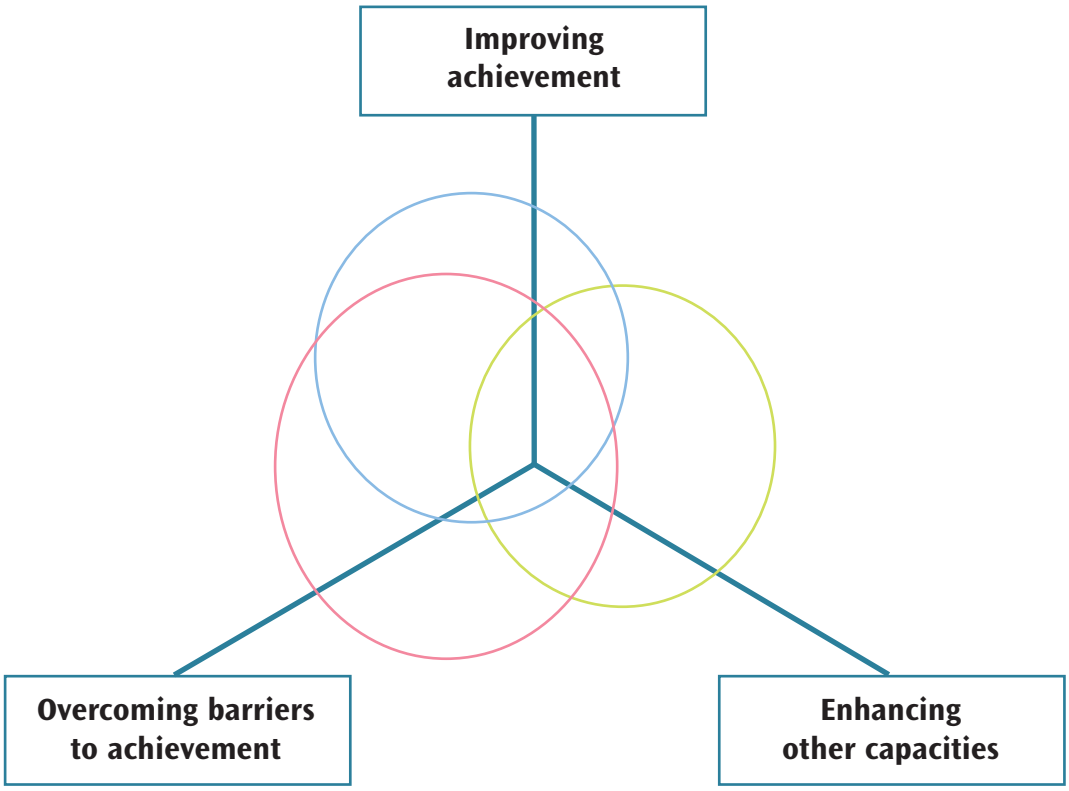
1. Improving achievement and qualifications for all social and ethnic groups.
2. Overcoming barriers to learning that exist within particular groups.
3. Enhancing other capacities and skills of children from disadvantaged groups.

It is clear that schools will not focus solely on one of these three areas. Achievement in particular was a focus for all the schools in this sample, as any school neglecting this aspect would soon find itself in serious weaknesses. Similarly, in our sample no school totally ignored attempts to overcome barriers to learning. However, what we did find is that schools differed in the extent to which they focused on these different aspects, with some showing a very strong orientation towards achievement and little attention to enhancing capacities, while others saw enhancing capacities as almost as central as achievement. Each school can be mapped according to the extent they subscribe to these three poles of social inclusion:



Schools focusing mainly on achievement are called type I schools in this report. Those which, in addition to a focus on achievement, take a strong interest in overcoming barriers to learning are called type II schools, while those which, in addition to achievement, are oriented towards enhancing other capacities are type III schools.

As an example, we have mapped three schools that conform to this typology onto the framework, with the blue school being a type I (achievement orientation) school, the red school a type II (overcoming barriers) school and the green school a type III (enhancement) school. Obviously, each individual school will map somewhat differently on this typology.



This framework can be linked to that outlined above assuming a difference between economic and cultural inclusion, with the former being linked to qualifications, and a stronger achievement orientation, while the latter may be linked to a more type III (enhancement) perspective.

One important point to make is that all schools we studied work within what we describe as a functionalist perspective. This adheres to a perspective that sees social inclusion as a societal and/or economic good, without questioning possible fundamental causes, as would be advocated in a critical approach. The fact that we have not found a critical perspective does not necessarily imply that such a perspective is not possible, nor that it doesn't exist. This would need to be investigated with a more extensive sample (eg Hart et al, 2004). Rather, political constraints on the education system might make it hard to achieve within the English context, though even here schools will differ in the extent of their functionalism.

There is some evidence for more critical approaches from one of the international vignettes. A newly amalgamated school in Australia is in the process of being set up, with an emphasis away from deficit and victim blaming interpretations of disadvantage, instead focusing on community capacity-building approaches involving identifying and mapping community skills, strengths and assets. This school wishes to emphasise fostering and developing grassroots and local forms of leadership, with outsiders who work with this community re-skilling themselves as active listeners rather than all-knowing experts. The impact of this activity has to be awaited. The lack of rigorous longitudinal research in this area makes the effectiveness of such approaches hard to judge.

3.1.1 Type I schools

Improving achievement is a goal that is of major importance to the case study schools. Government reforms over the past decades mean that schools are under some pressure to attend to issues of achievement. However, it is true to say that all schools in the sample subscribed to and supported the standards agenda. An emphasis on attainment as one of the means to social inclusion was not questioned. Indeed, for some schools this was clearly very much the primary goal of social inclusion: "Social inclusion is about learning, because that's what our job is. We're educators, we're not social services," (deputy head). This view was linked to an emphasis on social inclusion as promoting equal opportunities: "It's not about everyone doing the same thing, but about everybody being able to do what is right for them. It's about access to the curriculum, letting everybody achieve and the right to not having those opportunities taken away from the,"' (deputy head). A similar view was expressed by a primary head, who saw social inclusion as: "Taking each child and doing everything possible to allow the child to gain access to a curriculum and hopefully, into society."

Background and social problems were of course acknowledged in these schools, but, as one teacher commented: "It's tough love, we have to say: no excuses." Within the school all pupils are expected to achieve, and the school is there to provide the safe and learning-oriented environment that allows them to do that. Saying this, it was clear that in the contexts of social disadvantage these schools faced, there were limits to what an intensification approach around standards could achieve. In schools where the emphasis was very strongly on attainment as the means to social inclusion, this dilemma was solved through staff taking actions on a problem-by-problem basis, contacting individual parents or organisations where necessary. As one head said: "Sometimes you have to intervene in the home….. You've got to blur your responsibility between education and the pastoral." Community work and work with parents was not a general policy of these schools, linked to specific structures, however.

3.1.2 Type II schools

In other schools, while achievement remained a key goal, there was a stronger emphasis on overcoming the disadvantages the specific background of pupils presented. This was done through collaboration with other agencies that intervened in health and social problems, and through work with parents to help them to develop their own skills in supporting their children. In one school, for example, a senior leader described inclusion as: "including everyone, regardless of background, income, disability, being gifted and talented…" It has, she said to "encompass the child's background and involve other agencies."

Preparing parents to help their children was often a part of the approaches to social inclusion in these type II (overcoming barriers) schools: "There is a lot of parental involvement. The parents know how they can help right from the word go. They get a booklet in nursery how they can help, then in reception, year one, year two and so on. So every year they know how they can help the child and reinforce the learning at home," (classroom teacher). This emphasis was evident in one secondary school serving a white working class community, which works extensively with outside agencies. There was an emphasis on catering to pupils' social, emotional and health as well as academic needs, and there was a clear identification of social inclusion with the pastoral as evidenced by the choice of interviewees presented to us. The emphasis on overcoming barriers was clear in this school: "If they don't have their basic needs seen to, they are not going to come to lessons and learn. So we have to meet those basic needs as well," (head). The head therefore feels that with ECM "we win hands down. Because we've always had to do that."

While in type I (achievement focus) schools, involvement with parents and pupils' social issues was ad hoc, in these schools it was a key part of school policy. The standards agenda and ECM were intertwined. Interviewees consistently argued that they saw their academic and social inclusion work as closely inter-related. As one middle manager put it: "Without the social inclusion policy, the academic side of the school would fall apart."

As the deputy head of inclusion of one school implied, this cuts across the traditional academic-pastoral divide since pastoral work becomes the essential precondition of academic work. In these schools, education was seen as offering a way out for young people, but this way out is only accessible if the school is creative in responding to the barriers to learning they experience. So, academic achievement is important but can only be generated by looking at young people's lives as a whole. This led to innovative structures and flexible responses which enabled the school to be responsive.

3.1.3 Type III schools

In type III schools, there was a strong emphasis on the socialising role of the school, where as well as qualifications, social inclusion was seen as involving a lot of work on social skills, attitudes and self-esteem: "Social inclusion is about more than just attainment, it's about how they move out into the wider world and interact with others around the,'" (head). Socialisation was explicitly at the heart of what this kind of school wants to do.

In a primary school serving a predominantly Asian community, for example, a key goal was helping pupils to learn "what it means to be a British Asian" (inclusion manager). The head defines this as: "As a British Asian you need good results, but you also need the interpersonal skills. You need a rounded education." This concept was linked to values by the head: "If you look at the host culture being British, then there is a set of values that British people will have, there is a set of values that Asian children born in Britain will have that they take from their parents and my philosophy is that what we have to do is integrate one set into a common set in the middle. You pick out the best of your own culture, but you also pick out the best of British culture." In another school, social aspects are likewise emphasised: "We're talking about people leaving the school literate and numerate, but also being able to speak with people from different backgrounds and cultures and not feeling humiliated. They all leave with a confidence and high regard for themselves. I think if we do that they will hold down jobs in the community," (head).

3.1.4 Types and strategies

These different perspectives on social inclusion resulted in the use of different strategies. In type I (achievement focus) schools, the main aim was to ensure access to the curriculum and an atmosphere oriented towards learning and teaching. An illustrative quote is: "the first thing we had to do was to create a sense of normality, of schoolness about the place," (senior management team member). Consistency in teaching methods and behaviour policies were seen as key: "We are trying to bring structure into their lives at school, and equal opportunities, and that means treating everyone the same," (middle manager). In another school, achievements are emphasised throughout, and pupils spontaneously mentioned the 'work hard, play hard' motto of the school to us.

Where overcoming barriers was a major orientation of the school (type II schools), work with parents and booster classes for specific groups of children seemed to figure strongly. One school emphasised adult literacy and computer classes, in some cases with parents learning alongside their children. In another primary school, the head commented that parents are illiterate in their own language. With this in mind, the school produced a DVD for parents that introduces the work of the school, explaining its overall approach and addressing the sorts of difficulties that newly arrived families may face, such as what to do if a child is ill or is likely to be absent for a sustained period. This DVD is available in five languages.

In type III (enhancement) schools, there was a stronger emphasis on non-academic skills and enrichment alongside academic achievement than in the other types of school. Reward systems, for example, were geared to factors other than achievement: "They are never ever just based on achievement. There are so many other things, social behaviours, like just being helpful, that we think are really important," (classroom teacher). Likewise, enrichment activities focused on widening pupils' experiences. In one primary school serving a largely Asian community, the school organises international visits, such as school trips to demonstrate traditional dancing, while staff also take the children to watch the local football team out-of-hours.

Providing these experiences is seen as important in the light of the limited experiences that many children may have in their home environment: "We want to provide these experiences, which maybe other children, schools can take for granted. We have to make sure that we make up for that through the type of trips and activities we organise," (classroom teacher).

Every year group goes on several trips a year, which are then linked to cross-curricular work in the school. Similar views are expressed in a secondary school serving a White working class community: "Our aim is to include all pupils in all the activities. Because of the deprivation in the area, the pupils don't get that many chances so it's about getting them to engage in as many activities as they can," (Head).

3.1.5 Curriculum

Curriculum was a key concern for all these schools. Providing more curricular opportunities and pathways was something many schools have done with the aim of improving opportunities for all. Making the curriculum relevant to the community served by the school is another. In schools with a large non-indigenous population, topics such as the Victorians are far less obvious as none of the children will have had family heirlooms or experiences of Victorian England: "We can't take anything for granted," (classroom teacher). Schools needed to be creative in adapting the curriculum while keeping to the learning objectives. According to the head of one school: "When I came here it was very much based on a form of indigenous education, that had very little relation to pupils' actual lives."

There was a need for dialogue with the community around this: "You have to show children what they can achieve. An inclusive education is an education that allows children to achieve," (head). Curricular programmes aimed specifically at improving particular problem areas are common in type II (overcoming barriers) schools.

In one primary school, the American literacy programme Success for All had been introduced, while in one of the type II secondary schools, the standards-inclusion interaction was seen in a redesign of part of the Key Stage 3 curriculum. What is clear from these case studies is the need for the curriculum to be adapted to the needs of the pupils if social inclusion is to happen. One-size-fits-all approaches can, in this respect, be seen as highly problematic in terms of social inclusion.

A more radical approach to curriculum reform was found in one of our international examples. In one school in Australia, the centre-piece of the school's approach to inclusion was around student ownership of learning which was pursued vigorously, comprehensively and pervasively in all classrooms and learning activities of the school. The school's shorthand term for this inclusive approach was called "student-initiated curriculum". What it amounted to was students deciding, designing and pursuing learning they initiated around a set of individualised learning plans that students developed with assistance from adults in the learning setting. This learning occurred within and was continually attentive to, the wider context of a statewide curriculum framework.

3.1.6 Behaviour and exclusions

The issue of exclusion is important in terms of social inclusion to many schools that emphasised their attempts to limit excluding. In one school, for example, accepting all pupils is seen as key. As the head stated: "We made a decision to take all children, irrespective of issues." This created a dilemma for the school in relation to national policies that judge school performance in terms of test results. Putting the issue bluntly, the head said, "Our attainment is crap," (its overall attainment level is below the government's floor target).

While schools tried to avoid too many exclusions, behaviour was an issue, especially for the secondary schools. Schools of course have in place behaviour strategies and tried to provide incentives for good behaviour as well as punishments for bad.

This, however, can lead to dilemmas around issues of fairness and around the extent to which systems reward misbehaviour in the eyes of pupils who do not misbehave. One school that was confronting this was the secondary school in the white working class area. Behaviour was seen as a major problem in the school and a variety of strategies are in place to deal with it. A lot of misbehaviour was seen as emanating from outside the school, where a culture among young people exists that was characterised by one interview as: "Very urban, like gang culture, not quite like gangs but close to it, a lot of drinking and fighting. Often there's a lot of pupils doing stuff in the school and in the lesson, and its nothing to do with what is going on in the school, its about what's happening outside the school," (Senior Manager).

Behaviour management strategies were in place to deal with this, such as removal, where pupils who consistently misbehaved in lessons got moved to another room to do work there, ie a form of internal exclusion. There were also a number of nurture groups, consisting of pupils who behave badly "due to factors outside of the school," (Middle Manager). They come into school a bit later and leave a bit earlier and receive "a lot of support", including work with a separate teacher where appropriate. Use of rewards was common as well as punishment and the school works with a leisure and sportswear retailer in the local shopping mall to provide attractive rewards. Trips and residential activities were arranged for particular groups of pupils. These activities were seen as successful, though the long-term impact is not yet known: "It gives them a sense of achievement and makes them think about what they were doing wrong. You get lovely cards from the children thanking us for the experience," (Middle Manager).

However, this use of incentives has come under criticism from other pupils who felt that this leaves the average pupils out in the cold. Punishments were often seen as more fun than regular school activities rather than as punitive. Examples of this are: "There was an incident of graffiti in the toilets and the girls who did it got to paint the toilets. It's a bit like, oh I did graffiti so I get to decorate," (sixth former).

A Year 10 boy claimed that: "They treat you better if you are naughty, 'cos you can go to a room and do word searches and stuff." The residential trips were similarly complained about.

This again suggests a dilemma for schools when pursuing social inclusion. On the one hand, in order to maximise opportunities for all, an orderly climate in which pupils can learn is essential. However, if this is seen as only achievable through exclusions, negative consequences for both the child excluded and possibly for the community may follow. Furthermore, in order not to exclude many schools put in place programmes aimed at incentivising groups of pupils seen as potentially problematic. This in itself may seem a good way of promoting inclusion. However, it may alienate better behaved pupils and harm their effort and belief in education. In schools serving disadvantaged contexts, such as those here, this is in itself a social inclusion issue.

3.2 Leadership and social inclusion

The main factor impacting on leadership in these schools was the extreme pressure schools were under. In these schools, the standards and accountability agenda combined with the social disadvantage meant that pressure to perform at adequate levels was unrelenting and high stakes. It also meant that schools constantly faced dilemmas, such as the tension between the standards agenda and social inclusion. Solving these dilemmas was a key leadership task. Leadership was therefore strongly engaged with meaning making around such issues as:

- What kind of school shall we be?
- How to lead staff under pressure?

Creating a common meaning was something all heads have done in these schools, through combinations of imposition, staff changes, negotiation and discussion.

3.2.1 Strong leadership from the head

Leadership by the head has clearly been a driving force in encouraging social inclusion in all the schools studied. In many cases these schools, all serving disadvantaged communities, were performing poorly when current heads took over and heads have had to turn the school around. This means that the process of change has, initially at least, been driven by the head in the schools studied. One head, for example, was seen as an inspirational figure by staff: "He always seems three or four years ahead of everyone else, we'll be doing things and then a few years later it will be on the news as something that schools should be doing. It's a lot of new ideas but always with a bit of enjoyment to them as well," (senior manager). Similarly, in another school staff emphasised the head's high standards. He expects staff to work hard, but inspires them to do so: "He passes his enthusiasm on to us," (middle manager). The important role of the head is also clear when it comes to the school's vision and approaches to social inclusion. The head in all schools articulated a clear vision on inclusion, which in many schools was echoed by staff.

This emphasis on the role of the head leads us to two main questions. One is the extent to which distributed leadership is evident in these schools, the other how sustainable the approaches taken are in the long-term.

3.2.2 Distributed leadership?

Distributed leadership was not particularly strong in these schools. In many, there was evidence of strong top-down leadership by the head with the senior management team, at least in the earlier stages of their headship. This was seen as necessary to sort out difficulties faced by the school: "I needed to go in there and sort it out, impose my vision, we had to create a school almost out of nothing," (head).

However, some heads intended to move their school towards more distributed forms of leadership now the initial work of putting the school on course was done:

"I'm working at restructuring and widening the leadership team, and getting more people to become involved in leadership, starting with middle management" [headteacher]. One primary head who started off in a very directive way, gradually sees himself moving to what he describes as a "flat leadership structure". This involves having a senior team that includes the deputy head, an assistant head, the senior teaching assistant and four other post holders. He clearly found this change in approach personally challenging, as he tried to adopt what he described as a: "semi directive approach, with guilty twinges".

This form of tight leadership at the start, followed by a loosening up once improvement has occurred, is a common pattern in successful school improvement (Chapman, 2005). This again is related to the issue of leading under pressure. In the high pressure situations that heads of these schools find themselves in, school closure being an option in many cases, heads have to take a strongly directive approach at the outset, to safeguard the school and their own position, and essentially impose their vision.

An example of these pressures is that in several of the schools, behaviour was a pressing issue requiring immediate action when the new head arrived, requiring a directive approach. For example, in one of the secondary schools, the head felt that when he arrived the school was failing children. The story he tells is that for the first three of his five years he needed to be "centralised and non-collegiate" because the school "needed strong leadership" and he "needed to create a common vision". In particular, he needed some "quick wins to show that the children could achieve". As staff have bought into the vision, he has moved into a more collaborative model. Although he did not make the link explicitly, this increased delegation seems to be a necessary precondition for the creativity and risk-taking which he sees as the next stage in the school's development.

A minority of schools have already achieved a far more distributed approach. In one of the secondary schools, for example, a different member of staff is invited to each senior management team meeting. A wide range of staff have roles that carry leadership responsibility. These staff need not be teachers and need not be very experienced. This model seems to arise in part from the creation of structures which cut across the hierarchies and silos of more traditionally-organised schools, and which arise from the social inclusion agenda. For example, the school has an Inclusion panel made up of the deputy head inclusion, heads of house, SENCO and leader of learning transition. This panel considers issues to do with individual students and allocates responsibilities for action, for instance to heads of house or to key workers.

When we map this classification to that of views on social inclusion, there appears to be a relationship between a more achievement-only orientation and little or no distributed leadership. However, in a small scale case study design such as this one, it is obviously dangerous to draw strong causal conclusions from findings unless a strong theoretical rationale is present. In this case, it may be merely a characteristic of individual schools in a small sample.

3.2.3 Pupil voice

The extent of involvement of pupils and pupil voice likewise differed significantly between schools. In one of the large secondary schools, there was very little evidence of any use of pupil voice. In other schools, this element was far more strongly developed. In one primary school pupils had their own common room, with facilities such as playstations and table football. The common room was an adult-free zone. Not all pupils can use it at all times, and a rota system operated that was linked to effort and achievement. Pupils are consulted on a variety of issues, for example all pupils received a survey on what kind of books and authors they liked to inform library purchasing decisions. Class rules were devised by children themselves. One of the secondary schools involved pupils in decisions on learning and teaching. Surveys were used to gage pupil opinion and they were developed into active learners through thinking about learning and classroom practice.

The existence of pupil councils is no guarantee that pupils feel involved in decision making and the extent to which pupils' views were listened to was contested. In one secondary school, a pupil member of the council claimed that: 'If you want to say something, you can tell the school council and they will say it to the head and usually something gets done out of it," (pupil). However, another pupil said "the head doesn't listen as much as she could". This points us to the importance of realising that pupils are not a homogeneous group, but have different interests and views, a fact often overlooked by pupil voice advocates.

While elements of pupil voice exist in all schools, the extent to which this is developed does seem to vary with the extent of immediate pressure the school is under in this sample at least. In this sample, schools that appeared to have fully executed a turn-around were more likely to have strong pupil voice, while those that were still under severe pressures from being undersubscribed, media scrutiny or area situations, tended to be more tokenistic in their approaches.

Extent of distributed learning can therefore be mapped along a continuum:

3.2.4 Leadership and sustainability

The second issue related to the key role of the head in these schools is sustainability once the head leaves the school. This is an issue which concerned many of the heads and efforts were in many cases being made to ensure that progress and vision were sustained. Enlarged leadership teams were seen as one way in which this could be done, in that they both helped develop staff skills and involved a larger group in setting vision and strategy for the school. While the increased emphasis on distributed leadership over time in some schools was intended to encourage sustainability through broadened leadership capacity. Embedding policies and practices was also seen as a way of ensuring sustainability: "I think a lot of what he's (the head) done is try to embed things so it's within school to pass on. There's a lot of leadership at all levels. We do our own action plans and have ownership of our subject area, so in that way everything's learned a skill that can be moved on," (middle manager). Putting clear structures in place around issues such as communication was seen as potentially aiding sustainability of the vision and progress of the school.

However, though efforts are being made through embedded, clear and open procedures and communication, in many of these schools leadership and vision were strongly driven by the head. This does lead to questions of maintenance of the vision once the head leaves the school, which an emphasis on structures will not solve. A key question is the extent to which views on social inclusion are genuinely shared by staff or conversely are contingent on temporal agreement with extant senior leaders, and to what extent new heads share or wish to change that vision. In type II (overcoming barriers) schools, the issue of relationships the head may have personally built up with the community comes to the fore here and it can be argued that in approaches that wish to put the school at the heart of the community sustainability would need to involve the community in succession planning.

3.2.5 Motivating staff

A key leadership role that emerged from the case studies was motivating staff, which was more important than might be the case in more advantaged schools. As has been found in other studies, staff had to work harder to keep these schools successful than those working in less challenging contexts (Muijs et al, 2004) One head, for example, saw this importance of motivating staff as a key difference between leading schools in disadvantaged and middle class areas. This was all the more the case where the emphasis on social inclusion led schools to organise a lot of extracurricular activities: "It takes real commitment from all staff. For example, the local football team drew 2-2. Now they're having the replay in their cup game. Already, the staff have said we'll take them. But the game could finish at half past eight if it goes to extra times and penalties. Staff will have been in school since 7.30, there is a football game after school, then they are going straight to the game and then back at 7.30 tomorrow morning. It takes real commitment, above and beyond the call of duty," (head)

One way of motivating staff to put in this amount of effort was leading by example. In one of the schools studied, the head did this by being first to arrive and last to leave, though this is obviously just one possible strategy in terms of leading by example. Heads also relied on the enthusiasm of staff in working with youngsters and on enthusiasm generated by success as evidenced by improved performance, reduced absence (for example going from worst to best in the city on this measure), and positive Ofsted reports. One head tried to convince staff of the benefits of extracurricular work, for example the free breakfast that comes with doing the breakfast club or "on Friday they do basketball, and we try and convince staff that, hey, it'll keep them fit as well," (head). In general, embodying the vision was a key motivating strategy for heads. For example, one head believed there has been a focus on him as an individual: "giving emotionally, interacting with students and staff, celebrating student and staff achievement, motivating them to believe they have a real contribution to make". So, while he does what he calls the "standard things' of management, essentially 'it's about you".

The implication seems to be that change in a school with a disadvantaged population is not only about the technicalities of practice but about changing attitudes and perceptions to develop aspirations in line with a shared vision of social inclusion: "The principles and philosophy is what drives you forward. The strategy and tactics you use fit the circumstances of the school," and "The key is convincing people that the children are worth investing in…we have then worked strategically, but you need a gut instinct and emotional intelligence," (Headteacher).

3.2.6 Fit, personality and biography

An important issue in some schools regarding social inclusion appeared to be the fit between head and school, and between the head and the community served by the school. Achieving social inclusion was complicated by the fact that one could not be sure whether the head's set of values was shared with the parents. It is very important that heads select their school carefully: "Everyone comes to the job with a set of values, and if that set of values is very different from that of the community it's going to be a massive failure," (head). It was noticeable that in some schools where heads were more strongly engaged with their community they shared some or many background characteristics of that community, while heads who came from very different professional and personal contexts, such as having previously led a middle class school, more often employed deficit language when talking about the community and pupils.

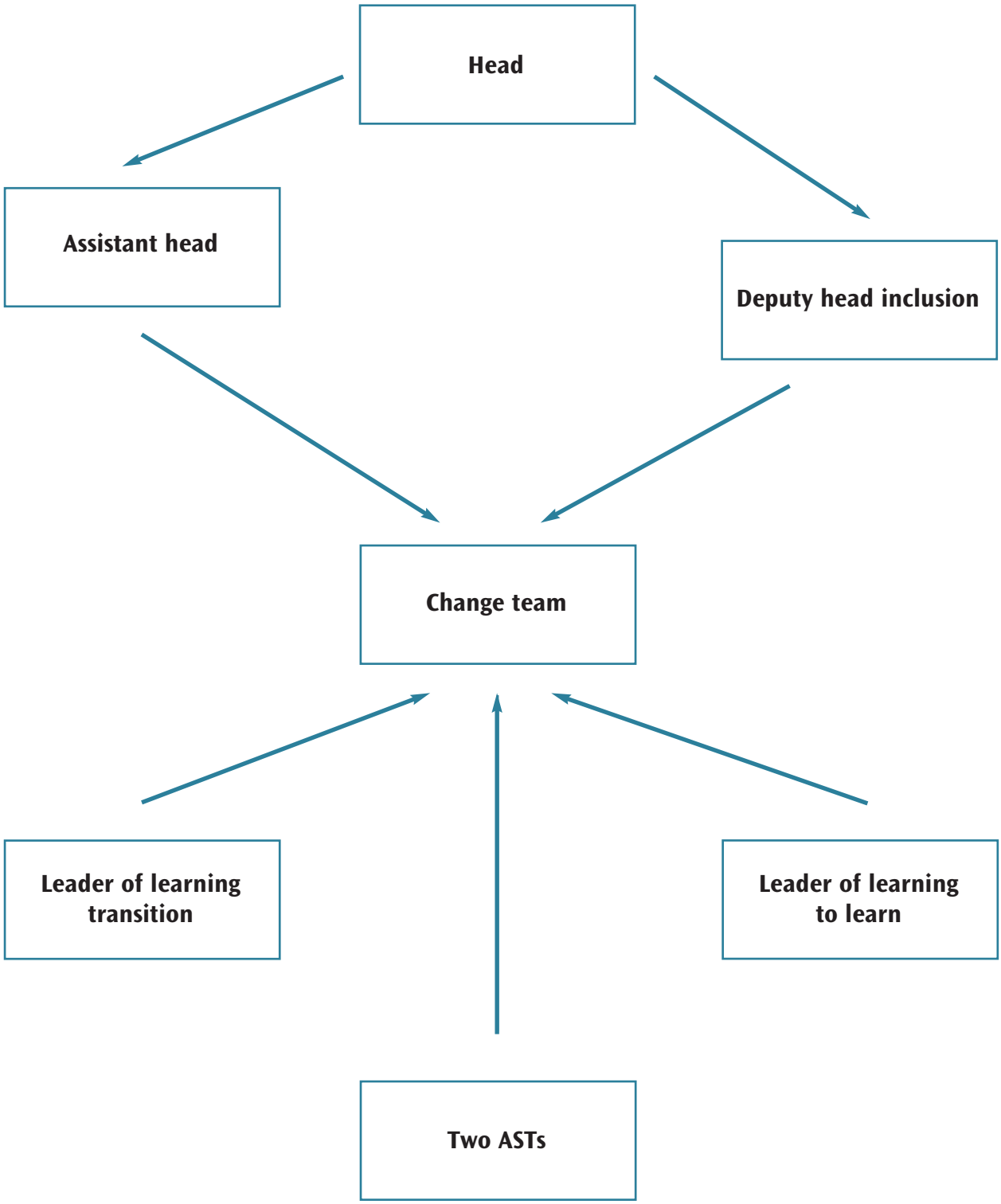
Personal biography was another factor that emerged as important in the case studies and one that drove headteachers towards particular ways of leading. In one school, for example, there was a strong emphasis on competition, both within the school and between this school and others, that appeared to be at least in part personality-driven: "I personally am a very competitive person. I spent a very unhappy childhood because I wasn't allowed to compete. If you ask the children, they will say you've got to learn how to loose," (Head). Other examples of the importance of personal biography were evident in the case studies as well.

One head, for example, had previously worked in a school serving a very advantaged context, and was keen to instil the same work ethic and pride in the school, using a number of methods, such as an emphasis on a smart uniform including blazers and ties, often seen in schools serving middle class parents. Several senior leaders interviewed were clearly particularly committed to working in disadvantaged contexts, having themselves come from low Socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. While leadership development is clearly important, personality and biography matter as well and should not be discounted in the way they often have been in the past.

Context clearly matters as well. Some of the less distributed practices, as well as some of the pure achievement emphases, appear to be driven at least partly by the very severe problems that schools confronted in the past. In some cases, the high profile of the school led to very strong pressures for fast improvements in exam results. School size was also a factor. In one small secondary school, the issue of size was mentioned by interviewees as an important factor in determining leadership styles and structures. The deputy head inclusion, for instance, said that both she and the head tried to delegate because: "in a small school it's essential that middle managers do this, ie take on responsibility." Similarly, the leader of learning transition reported that: "The school is small so everyone is busy with multiple issues."

3.2.7 Structures

Structurally, schools in the case studies appeared to be characterised by extended leadership teams and in many cases the structural characteristics echoed the schools' vision. The inclusion panel mentioned in one school above is an example of this. In the same schools, there was also a change team responsible for developing the quality of teaching and learning, and delivering training to staff. This comprised the assistant headteacher with responsibility for specialist arts status, two advanced skills teachers and the leader of learning to learn. The deputy head inclusion and the leaders of learning transition and learning to learn were explicitly social-inclusion focused roles and the first two arose from the dissatisfaction with traditional pastoral structures.


Head
Assistant head
Deputy head inclusion
Change team
Leader of learning transition
Leader of learning to learn
Two ASTs

In many other schools studied, a commitment to social inclusion was structurally translated through the appointment of an inclusion manager. This person was not, or not solely, there to deal with issues relating to SEN, but very specifically to deal with issues relating to social inclusion, and was a part of the senior management team. In one school, the leadership structure embodied the academic-pastoral interaction that was central to the school's vision. There were two deputies, one responsible for inclusion (see above) and the other for curriculum. The former role was created two years ago as a means of promoting inclusion. The division of responsibilities was "emerging" (DH Inclusion), but the latter focused on curriculum structure, timetabling and securing work placements. There were three assistant heads – one responsible for data and assessment, one for the school's visual, creative and performing arts specialism, and one for quality of teaching and learning, though this position is vacant and is being reviewed. This senior leadership team jointly managed the teacher with responsibility for special and additional needs, heads of faculty and heads of house. In other words, there was no traditional division of curriculum and pastoral line-management. Heads of house were regarded as leaders of learning. Other roles below the level of the senior leadership team have been created to promote social inclusion, such as the leader of learning transition, and the leader of learning to learn who has responsibility for developing a learning skills programme delivered by all teachers to all students on five days each year.

There was evidence of some innovative approaches to management. In one primary school, an interesting management tool was the use of hypotheses. These were linked to action plans, and were aimed at getting managers to reflect on how they were doing and if the resources they had asked for in their action plan were being used effectively. Hypotheses are specific statements of intent, such as "the school can provide opportunities for swift referral to outside agencies". These hypotheses are linked to use of information that helps the school to demonstrate if what they are doing is helping pupils.

What we are seeing in these schools that focus on social inclusion, is an alignment of structures to vision and goal, ie. the commitment to social inclusion, of whichever of the three predominant types it may be, is echoed in the creation of posts and working arrangements within the school. This is important in making the vision of the school a reality and sends strong messages to staff as well as embedding socially inclusive practices within the day-to-day work of the school.

3.3 Parents, community and agencies

3.3.1 Community relations – different models

As was the case with views on inclusion, schools had different attitudes and relationships with their communities. At one extreme, there was the fortress model, where the school saw its role as education and itself as a beacon, but also standing somewhat outside the community: "The school here, it is really like a Cathedral in the middle ages. For our kids it is the most impressive building and calmest environment they have seen. And that is the atmosphere we want to keep," (deputy head). A key goal here was not letting the chaos and problems of the community spill over into the school.

Other schools took a very different approach. In one school, the school was seen as having a strong role in the community: "Our role is quite varied, really, not just teachers, but sometimes social workers, adviser, so many different roles… For parents, it's like their community centre, I think, not just a school," (senior manager). The bond with parents, or more accurately mothers in the Asian context, was strong, "it's like a family, I think". The concept of the school as a family came up in quite a few of the interviews. The role of the school in the community was something the head emphasised from the start: "Seeing the problems, the prostitution, the unemployment, I thought, hang on, are we actually doing our best for the community." The school has a role to play in raising aspirations, but was also seen by the head as being the centre of the community: "It's gotta be a place where everybody feels welcome, where everybody feels they've got a part to play in the education of the children." Going for early successes was seen as important in motivating both pupils and the community as a whole.

That schools had different views of what their involvement with the community should be is not the same as saying that some schools have a deficit model of parents and community and others don't. Many schools work with a deficit model to the extent that communities are seen as lacking the cultural capital needed in the school and the workplace.

What differs between schools is the extent to which, alongside this view of deficit, there also exists a view that communities have strengths to draw on as well and the effort schools are willing to put into harnessing those strengths.

These differences led to very different levels of engagement with the community and community groups. In the second school cited, which is a type III (enrichment) school, the school works closely with community groups, such as local mosques in this predominantly Muslim community. This involves some sensitivity: "There are quite a few mosques, so we try and keep everybody happy. For example, when it's the Prophet's birthday we have marches, but because there's different mosques there's two different days so we have marches on both days,"(senior manager). The community appeared to take pride in the school, and parents interviewed expressed a great deal of satisfaction with it. In the first school, which is a type I (achievement orientation) school, tensions were more apparent. Some community members felt and expressed at community meetings that the school excluded too many pupils and was in that way exclusive of the community. School staff denied this, pointing to statistics showing sharply decreased exclusion rates, and claimed rumours were being spread by disgruntled members of staff of the school it has replaced.

In some of our international vignettes, we find other examples of community involvement, where schools play an active advocacy role. One school in Australia actively encourages and assists students to develop learning plans focused on activities in the local community such as, constructing oral histories by interviewing residents of an old people's home, providing the circumstances in which students can organise to visit two local museums, or helping two boys to design and construct a skateboard and then to successfully present a case to the local council to construct a skateboard park on a local disused allotment. This type of approach, which we also see in New Zealand, has clear promise as a way of moving towards greater community involvement.

In other schools the relationship with the community was more harmonious but less involved than in school 1. The community took some pride in the school, which had improved, but it was widely dispersed and less coherent than in the high community involvement school: "We do have a problem getting people involved sometimes, I definitely wouldn't say they were negative, but not necessarily that interested," (middle manager).

The extent to which schools are oriented to their community is connected to their position in the social exclusion classification discussed earlier. Type I (achievement focus) schools appear the least community oriented, while type III (enhancement) schools appear most community oriented.

3.3.2 The Importance of context

It has to be pointed out that the context in which the schools worked appears to play an important role as well as views on social inclusion, and of course the two influence one another. The community focused school mentioned above worked with a homogeneous population in terms of ethnicity and religion and to a large extent social class, which even extended to parents coming from the same province of Pakistan. This background was shared by the head, making community engagement easier. In the least community oriented school, by contrast, the number of nationalities and backgrounds of pupils made it hard to actually describe exactly what the community would be, certainly in ethnic and religious terms. There was also a great deal of turnover as the population of the area changed through immigration and population movements. This meant that relations within the community were more tense as well, with violent incidents not uncommon. This obviously made it harder for the school to have the strong community role envisaged in the primary school mentioned above.

Ethnic homogeneity is no guarantee of strong community links, however, as the experience of one secondary school serving a homogeneously White British community demonstrated. The perception of staff was that there is not a strong sense of community in the area:

"There are community fights every weekend, ie fights between different members and groups in the community, but if you encroach on that, then yes they suddenly are a community," (head). The culture was not seen as very aspirational: "It's not aspirational, they don't venture outside of the town, and everybody is related to everybody else," (head). In this school, links to the community were as limited as in the secondary school serving the very diverse community. The community the school worked with was largely described as the immediate neighbours of the school building, and described in terms of complaints about traffic and pupil behaviour by these neighbours. The wider community was less evident.

By contrast, staff in the school serving the homogeneous population could build on a significant amount of social capital in their community. Parental involvement in the school was high and there appeared to be evidence of commitment to education. This was in evidence in our meeting with parents, whose key concern was the founding of a university locally. Pupils too stated that they were interested in going to university following a visit from a university Aim Higher team, mentioning professions such as dentistry as an ambition. Pupils were strongly involved in out-of-school activities organised by the school, like dance clubs, cooking clubs, football and religious activities. Parents appeared concerned with their children's education and according to teachers, some would prefer a more mixed intake into the school in terms of ethnicity. This was not the case in the third school discussed here, the one where we would describe community involvement as medium, in the sense that according to teachers, a commitment to education is largely absent in the population served.

Stability of the community was another contextual factor that impinged on the way schools could relate to their communities. In one primary school, the majority group of children in the school when the head arrived was African Caribbean. Subsequently the numbers of children from this background has declined significantly. Nowadays the largest group is of Somalian heritage. A feature of this school was high pupil mobility, with a turnover of around the 40 per cent each year.

This type of situation obviously makes it harder for schools to develop strong community relations.

In some areas, the issue of a lack of safety in the area made the creation of a safe environment in the school paramount and this had lead to more of a fortress mentality. Pupils in one of the primary schools, pointed out that they felt safe in the school, as opposed to aspects of life outside school, eg "I'm frightened that I might be kidnapped when going home." This school had clearly been able to create this environment according to pupils, who saw their school as a happy, safe environment, within which there was little or no violence or bullying. Interestingly, some staff felt that these children had perhaps painted too rosy a picture in this respect. Having said that, the staff agreed that the school was a positive place to be and that the pride of the pupils was itself a positive indicator.

Raising parental expectations was stressed as important by a number of interviewees. Several schools tried to work with parents and communication was seen as important in this respect. One head felt it was important to communicate to parents about how capable their children were. He gave the example of a pupil in Year 5 who had reached Level 5 and how important it had been for him to communicate to his parents that their child had the potential to study at university. However, low parental aspirations was a problem for most of the schools in the project, that was not easily overcome, not least where parents themselves have had negative experiences of education. Many of the more static areas in terms of population movement, had had negative experiences of the school their children now attended. This issue was also very apparent in the international vignettes, being a problem across schools. As in England, many parents had histories of a lack of educational success and institutional hostility and had long memories of schools not working for this community. Schools had an uphill battle to demonstrate that it might be otherwise for the parents of these children. Often the parental view was that as long as their children are not in trouble, are happy and cared for and seem to be learning, then parents leave the school alone to get on with its job. Involvement is usually restricted to more or less the same small group of volunteers.

Internationally, schools appear to use similar strategies to those in England to involve parents. Football coaching was used to involve dads from North African backgrounds in one school in Belgium, for example.

A dilemma that arose for some school leaders was where their own views on social inclusion came into conflict with views held in the community. An example is another predominantly Muslim pupil school, where following requests from families, there is a prayer room. Commenting on this the head hints at potential tensions: "I'm not prepared to allow the girls to line up behind the boys during prayers." Similar issues were expressed in another Muslim majority school.

In summary, it is clear that schools, due to both differences in vision and in context have very different relationships with their communities. It is easy to point to the admittedly problematic nature of engaging in social inclusion without building strong community links. This risks alienation rather than collaboration and can be questionable and sometimes make patronising assumptions about what 'these kids' need. It is clear from these cases that simple exhortations to stand at the heart of the community are equally problematic. They are often underpinned by a highly unrealistic view of homogeneous and harmonious communities, full of social capital waiting to be acknowledged. It is clear that in many circumstances, additional overarching structures and broader policy interventions will be needed if schools are to realise this. If this does not happen, many schools may well be justified in taking a more hands-off approach.

3.3.3 Multi-agency collaboration

Commitment to the community did not necessarily translate itself into strong links with external agencies. In both the most community-oriented and least community-oriented schools, relations with external agencies and the local authority appeared somewhat problematic. While most schools work with other agencies, such as social services, the police and local authority SEN services, working with both the local authority and other agencies was seen as somewhat challenging at times: "Working with the authority.

Sometimes they are hard to contact and you have to wait weeks for a response. They often don't keep appointments as well," (inclusion manager). Agencies were sometimes seen as not being primarily concerned with the best interest of the children: "They don't give of themselves," (head). Agencies were seen as politicised and overly concerned with issues of where exactly funding streams have come from: "I don't care, what they want (the community) is end services." Furthermore, inefficient spending was seen as at times characterising agency work. When agencies make links it is said to be too often about empire building, and Sure Start was given as an example by one primary school of an agency which appeared to deliberately setting itself up in competition to the school in some of its activities.

Clearly difficulties of different timescales, cultures and goals were proving hard to surmount, as had been the case in some of the extended schools studies (Muijs, 2006). This was not so in all cases, however. Examples of very successful interagency work are cited in some schools, for example with education welfare officers, Connexions and youth workers.

The strongest commitment to working with other agencies appeared to exist in the type II (overcoming barriers) schools, where work with external agencies was seen as an essential part of meeting pupils' basic needs, without which they will not be able to effectively learn. This type of school seemed very connected, with one, for example, working with Sure Start, social services, youth services, drug intervention services and being involved in a youth intervention programme, as well as an intervention programme run in collaboration with the Fire Services alongside other agencies: "We are in daily contact with other agencies," (head). The school also had a team of professional counsellors and learning mentors on site that staff worked with "on a wide range of issues," (head of Year 9), and who worked with pupils referred by year heads or other staff, or that have approached them directly. Connexions staff were also on site. There was also a police support officer on site shared with other local schools, who dealt with anti-social behaviour. This on-site support is seen as very helpful by the head: "I'd welcome even more, I'd love to have a social services person on the site."

In a number of international examples, social inclusion appeared very closely linked to multi-agency work. In one example from the Netherlands, schools worked with a multiagency team to support at-risk pupils. The school was part of a structure with regional care advisers co-ordinating multi-agency work, an approach that was being rolled out across the country. In another international example, a neighbourhood renewal process funded by the state government around housing issues and community issues, that connected both school and community renewal was the key social inclusion mechanism. While the personnel came from education and non-education areas, there was a lot of overlap in terms of activities.

3.3.4 School-to-school collaboration

Collaboration with other schools was also differential and did not appear related to extent of involvement with the immediate community. However, where there was a concern geared at a wider community than just the school's immediate population collaboration appeared stronger: "We basically take part of our children from the same area as school X, so we can't just be concerned with our kids or our area, their problems are our problems and we collaborate closely with them," (head). Likewise, the extent to which heads emphasised competition affected relations with other schools. One very competitive primary head did not collaborate very much with schools in the area, while, by contrast, a secondary head in the same authority had deliberately not marketed the school aggressively, allowing him to develop good relations with other schools. This made it possible to secure a partnership agreement to place excluded children equally across schools instead of just in the sink schools.

Barriers to collaboration were varied, including government policies encouraging competition, a perceived jealousy by other schools, personality issues and perceived differences in philosophy: "The way the government has set things up forces us to compete with the other schools in the area. I want the children to have the best education they can get, and if they can get a better education here than in other schools I'm up for that," (Head). Nevertheless, even in schools that were less collaborative with others, there were some interesting examples of collaboration aimed very specifically at furthering the school's vision of social inclusion. To encourage more mixing and experience of children from different heritage backgrounds and religion, children from different schools attended each other's religious and cultural activities in one school.

The lack of school-to-school collaboration in some instances is problematic with regards to social inclusion. In a system of parental choice, success in one school in an area can easily be at the expense of others, who nevertheless serve some in the same community. In terms of social inclusion, dividing school provision in such a way by quality or effectiveness can be harmful.

3.4 Leadership development

3.4.1 Involvement in formal and informal programmes

In terms of leadership development, many heads and senior managers had attended courses such as NPQH or LfTM. However, views on the effectiveness of these courses in fostering leadership for social inclusion were mixed. NPQH was seen by one head as, "providing very useful generic skills, which I have been able to apply to my context. It's not too specific, so you learn". Another head was less enthusiastic. He believed that heads should not go out on courses too much, and that some heads used by NCSL were not the most effective: "NCSL have got too look at the integrity of who they approach. Because the first thing I would do as a headteacher is look at the background of who is delivering the courses," (Head). In a primary school, five teachers had studied for the NPQH. However, the head saw dangers in this: "It's a high risk strategy – we could lose them…..The city is having problems attracting heads, even in primary schools. It will be a challenge to get somebody to replace me." Another secondary head also saw NPQH as useful. He reports finding the self-directed aspect of NPQH particularly valuable because it "made me reflect on what I really wanted," (ie not as a piece of technical training). Likewise, he had found support from peers valuable, in the form of the NCSL New Visions programme which created a support network for new heads.

The extent to which leadership development had prepared heads specifically for leading schools in disadvantaged areas was disputed. Amongst staff with leadership responsibilities in one school, there was a sense that their roles were defined in such a distinctive and fluid way that established training programmes were of limited use.

The deputy head inclusion, like the head, has spent her career in schools serving disadvantaged areas, and felt that "most people feel their way into a role like this". She was not sure what might be a better way. She had started a Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and Management and found this enjoyable but theoretical and did not complete it. Likewise, she found NPQH enjoyable but it did not deal with social inclusion issues and a training course provided by a previous local authority had likewise not dealt with social inclusion. She was not opposed to the idea of training and wanted to know more about specific points of information – on the legal frameworks of ECM and child protection, on local agency networks and on the promotion of multi-agency working.

In another secondary school, middle managers were positive of their experience doing NPQH and as a result of acquiring NPQH they were invited to senior leadership team meetings on a termly rotated basis. The process was seen as useful "especially in my role dealing with other agencies. We did all sorts of role plays, and it gives you a real good feel about what school is and all the problems involved. I certainly feel it has helped me deal with my job here much more competently," (head of Year 9).

Many schools organised in-school activities, drawing on strengths of the staff there and a senior manager commented that staff "find these as useful as outside courses.". In terms of social inclusion, one head saw her expertise in leading schools in disadvantaged areas coming from her career in similar schools rather than from leadership development and from a moral purpose: "You have to want to work in this kind of school, to want better life chances for the kids."

In general, there was a tendency to value more experiential modes of leadership development when interviewees were asked what forms of leadership development they would find useful to foster social inclusion – shadowing, mentoring and sabbaticals were all mentioned as useful experiences, while some middle managers specifically mentioned being given the responsibilities so they could learn on the job.

3.4.2 Leadership development and succession

The key issue for leadership development in the context of social inclusion is the extent to which mechanisms can be built in that help heads lead under pressure and cope with issues of succession and context. The importance of these issues means that leadership development needs itself to take place at least in part in the contexts in which heads are going to lead. This links leadership development closely to succession planning. In order to be able to develop understanding of the context, which would lead to a reduction in pressure in terms of having to develop an immediate understanding of the school and its context and lessen the need to impose top-down solutions, it would be useful to allow potential school leaders time to bed into the context. This could be done by building in a period of pre-headship work in the school and area the prospective head will take over, ie mentoring and shadowing and preparation meetings. In some cases this could potentially happen in the school to be taken over, and in some cases the higher capacity schools could nurture their own leaders by developing an internal leadership development (boot room) culture incorporating forms of distributed leadership.

However, not all schools have the capacity to provide strong leadership development and the context of the area as a whole may be ignored in such a school-based approach. The local authority would traditionally have been seen as a possible source of this development work, but the differential capacity and strongly reduced role of the local authority make this problematic in the current context. Networks of schools, such as federations, may be the way forward in providing the context for this type of leadership preparation. However, in order to fulfil social inclusion goals, such networks should include agencies outside the school, as well as agencies within the school.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Social inclusion is a complex phenomenon, which is interpreted in a number of different ways, by policymakers, researchers and school personnel. Three main perspectives were identified, all of which are present to different extents in different schools, but all present nevertheless. These are a:

- focus on achievement
- focus on barriers to achievement
- focus on socialisation and capacities.

Schools in the study draw on these three perspectives to differing extents. Leadership clearly plays a key role in terms of which perspective predominates, but equally, context appears important. Where communities are more homogeneous and/or more oriented towards education it is clearly easier to develop a capacities and socialisation oriented approaches that puts the school at the heart of the community than in those circumstances where schools are confronted by fractious and sometimes hostile situations.

It would be simplistic to present a simple list of things leaders should do to foster social inclusion. This is all the more true as no convincing evidence exists on which version of social inclusion is most likely to lead to the desired outcomes. What appears to be the case, is that certain approaches may be more suited to specific contexts. For example, more directive leadership may be necessary where a school is performing poorly and needs to be turned around. Similarly, where a safe and orderly environment for learning does not exist, a more inward-looking approach that creates this environment within the school may be necessary before considering wider community links. What type of communities schools work with will influence approaches to social inclusion. More homogeneous communities lend themselves more easily to creating type III schools than do fractious and divided environments.

As well as these contextual factors, personal visions, staff capacities and backgrounds and biographies may also influence views of and approaches to social inclusion.

Each individual school and leader will need to consider the needs of children and community, the circumstances they confront and well as their own beliefs in coming to an approach to social inclusion.

That does not mean that there aren't some clear lessons to be learnt. In the following section we will draw out the key lessons for policymakers, practitioners and leadership development.

4.1 Implications for policy

1. In schools which are successful in terms of being socially inclusive, strong commitment to social inclusion underlies the ethos and vision for the school. While it would be neither possible nor desirable for policymakers to mandate school vision, putting a commitment to social inclusion at the heart of education policy would provide a strong incentive for schools, as has been the case with the focus on standards over the past decade. A concern for issues of social inclusion and social cohesion have been increasingly apparent in recent policy documents, as is evidenced by the requirement to foster social cohesion evident in the Educations and Inspection Bill 2006. Nevertheless, contradiction does remain in terms of government policy on these issues.

2. Schools need to be provided with the freedom to adapt their curricula to the needs of their population. The greater flexibility in curriculum development given to schools recently has been very helpful in this respect, but is in some cases counteracted by contradictory initiatives, such as mandating subjects as part of accountability measures.

3. Many schools are struggling with the challenge of reconciling contradictory policies, such as the emphasis on collaboration and community versus the founding of academy and trust schools. This has resulted from the implementation of a constant stream of new policies, without renouncing earlier systems. For schools that are already experiencing severe pressure, reconciling these sometimes contradictory policies is problematic.

A less interventionist central policy agenda, with far fewer initiatives and indeed policies would be helpful to schools in these circumstances.

4. Leading under pressure involves dealing with dilemmas on a daily basis, the key one in this instance being that between standards and inclusion. All heads in the study agree on the importance of standards and have signed up to the standards agenda. However, how to square this with social inclusion is partly dependent on their views of what social inclusion is, as well as being another source of pressure. More sensitive and broader accountability measures, that take into account social inclusion as well as other goals of education (such as well-being), would be helpful in this respect. It is no longer true that such factors are in any way unmeasurable. While Ofsted does now take into account a wider range of outcomes under the ECM agenda, it remains the case that published performance data, on which local reputations and recruitment depend to a large extent, are limited to achievement test scores.

5. Leadership under pressure tends, certainly in the initial phases of headship, to lead to an emphasis on top-down directive management. If more distributed and democratic approaches are to be encouraged, means must be sought to relieve the pressure on these heads through networking and support, and the generation of such networks need to be encouraged, though not mandated, as this will lead to token effort.

6. Social inclusion is a wider issue than that of individual schools. The effectiveness of one school in an area can, and does, impact on others, as do the policies of a school with regards to such factors as admissions, behaviour and exclusions. Furthermore, policy and practice of other agencies impacts on school and education readiness of pupils. There is clearly a need for structures that encourage co-operation and collaboration within areas. Such networks need encouragement.

4.2 Implications for practice

1. If a school is to be inclusive, a strong commitment to social inclusion is key. This needs to be a central part of school vision, underpinned by the commitment of the school leader. Different foci have emerged from this study, but in all cases these foci are relentlessly pursued and the vision of the school is clear and clearly articulated.

2. This commitment to social inclusion needs to be translated into structures. In many schools the role of the inclusion manager was a central one on the senior management team, sending out both a clear message and providing accountability for social inclusion in the school.

3. In all cases studied commitment to a specific view of social inclusion was translated into practical action. Where the focus was on protecting children from negative outside influences and providing a safe learning-oriented environment, this translated itself into the creation of a very orderly and calm environment and consistent practices on both teaching and behaviour. Where, on the other hand, there was a strong focus on non-academic skills, this translated itself in a wide variety of extracurricular enrichment activities. Alignment of practice and vision is key.

4. Views of and approaches to social inclusion should also ideally be translated into different measures and assessment of impact. In schools that focus on overcoming barriers to learning, type II schools for example, it might be useful to assess the extent to which family literacy has improved, or to what extent specific targeted groups are changing their attitudes to school. In type III (enrichment) schools, one could assess student's social skills, or look at the impact of enrichment activities specifically, in both quantitative and qualitative ways.

5. The importance of motivating staff and sharing the vision with them was obvious, and was notably successfully achieved in the case study schools. A consistent message emerged from the interviews, including those with pupils, and communication around the school vision was continuous in these schools.

6 Curricula need to be adapted to the needs of the pupils and communities in the school. They need to be relevant both in terms of culture and in terms of meeting the goals of social inclusion in the school. This will differ depending on the exact position of the school regarding social inclusion, but will include standards.

7. Leadership was key to social inclusion in the schools we studied. As we know, leadership development is important and helpful. However, the view that leaders are made, not born, was not fully supported in these cases. Both personality and biography influenced leadership effectiveness, as does the fit between leader and context. This puts a premium on leader selection and on the role of governors, who need to be both well-prepared and very well-versed in the issues and needs of the school when engaging in this process.

4.3 Implications for leadership development

1. In view of the importance of motivating staff in schools under pressure, varied motivation strategies have to be a key element of leadership development programmes. They are probably more central than leadership styles in terms of improving leadership in schools facing the kind of pressures that exist in these schools.

2. A key task for leaders in the schools we studied is dealing with the dilemmas they confront in leading under pressure. Dilemmas such as reconciling standards and inclusion, or developing inclusive behaviour management strategies were issues that schools struggled with. Leadership preparation needs to include a strong focus on the difficult choices school leaders will confront.

3. It is clear that while respondents find formal leadership development programmes useful, leadership development focused on social inclusion needs to include contextual learning as well as leadership development programmes as they currently exist.

4. The key issue for leadership development in these schools is the extent to which mechanisms can be built in that help heads leading under pressure to deal with issues of succession and context. The importance of these issues means that leadership development needs itself to take place at least in part in the contexts in which heads are going to lead.

5. This links leadership development closely to succession planning. In order to be able to develop understanding of the context, it would be useful to allow potential school leaders time to bed into their school and area. This could be done by building in a period of pre-headship work in the school through mentoring, shadowing and preparation meetings.

6. In some cases, this could potentially happen in the school to be taken over. However, not all schools have the capacity to provide strong leadership development and the context of the area as a whole may be ignored in an overly school-based approach. Networks of schools, such as federations, may be the way forward in providing the context for this type of leadership preparation. However, in order to fulfil social inclusion goals, such networks should include agencies from outside the school, such as social services, as well as agencies within the school.

7. In those schools that emphasise their role at the heart of the community as part of their vision of social inclusion, it is important to include community members in succession planning.

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Further Information

This report is available to download from **www.ncsl.org.uk/publications**. A summary report and literature review are also available.

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PB246