

A U T U M N 2 0 0 4

# Growing Your Own Leaders:

The impact of professional  
development on school improvement

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## Introduction

Headteachers rarely get time to meet but when they do get the chance to share views, the budget and recruitment of staff are two recurrent themes. There is not enough money to enable them to make the changes they need and they cannot attract the right people. The problem is that these two themes are irreconcilable. Schools that do not have enough resources are forced to make hard spending decisions. If more were available, schools would be able to put more into the development of human resources. However, in the absence of funds, it is often the first thing to go. How to break out of this vicious cycle is the subject of our research. We argue that you have to invest to accumulate but that, importantly, there are things you can do within the school at a low cost that can make a difference to the climate of your school. This will impact on staff morale, which in turn will impact on both recruitment and retention.

Consider the following two scenarios:

### School A

A new teacher joins your school teaching in a shortage subject, say physics. You only had two candidates at interview but nevertheless you were impressed and thought yourself lucky to have made such a good appointment. The teacher makes a good start and you breathe a sigh of relief. After two terms they come and see you: they want more responsibility. You have a post of responsibility going and you offer it to them. After another year, you find they are applying for other jobs. When you ask them why, you realise they were using the experience in your school as a stepping stone to a better management role. They explain to you that they are quite stressed since they did not appreciate how much work the post of responsibility was going to be. When they leave, you have two jobs to fill!

### School B

A new teacher joins your school. Although the vacancy was in a shortage subject, you had a high standard of applications. At interview, candidates speak enthusiastically about the school; they've heard about it and all are keen to come. They have read on the internet that training and development is a priority, and that there is a career path within your school; in short, you will offer them both development and opportunity. They can gain different aspects of leadership experience and the school offers opportunities in action research into learning. You have a very good idea of the kind of person you wanted, not just as a teacher but as a potential leader. You have produced criteria and spend a lot of time on the interview process. Within three years, this person has a leadership role within your school.

If School A sounds all too familiar, School B is not a dream. It can be a reality but it does not happen by accident. The schools in our research had not planned for scenario B. Mostly they had identified that staff were the most important asset they had and had put in place plans to make the most of them. We also found that these schools had other features in common, in other words, there was a 'virtuous cycle'. We were interested in what came first: was it, for example, an improvement in examinations results? It was clear that once they had embarked upon the improvement, things continued to improve. Importantly, it would appear that recruitment and retention was less of a problem in these schools. In this report, we investigate what factors the schools had in common in terms of engaging the process of staff development with the school improvement agenda and we draw some conclusions about what makes an effective staff development programme.

## **Context**

The findings are drawn from interviews and surveys of schools that comprised the first phase of the Buckinghamshire Professional Development in Schools Project.

The aim of the project was to establish and develop a network of schools to act as models of good practice in staff development, which could be replicated by other schools.

Schools were invited to apply to become part of the project; each school was required to conduct self evaluation of their professional development provision. The quality of this provision was, in part, tested by our research.

The range of practices identified by schools included some or all of the following features:

- strengths in induction, monitoring, tutoring, peer training and coaching
- effective use of performance reviews and staff portfolios
- a supportive environment for initial teacher training
- a willingness to explore innovative ways of increasing capacity in initial teacher training
- an interest in action-based enquiry into learning

## **Methodology**

Findings were based on in-depth interviews with headteachers and staff from 11 schools from the project. In addition to interviews, we used data provided by the project co-ordinator to identify the strengths of each school at the start and to evaluate progress at the end of the first year. LEA profile data and Ofsted reports were referred to as were external accreditation such as Investors in People.

## **Key questions for the investigation**

- What is important for you as a leader when you plan for improvement in your school?
- What actions have you taken to facilitate professional development?
- What are the essential characteristics of effective professional development in schools?

We hoped that the tentative answers to these questions would give us an indication of how much emphasis in terms of time and resource schools should place on professional development in Buckinghamshire schools.

Our warm and welcoming atmosphere encourages positive relationships, which foster trust, respect and a willingness to take risks. Our whole-staff approach to professional development supports school improvement...

Richard Millington, Chepping View Primary

## Findings

Our interviews with the headteachers and other staff in the schools suggested that the climate of project schools had much in common. In particular, the following findings stood out:

### The vision

A clear vision which has teaching and learning at its heart is crucial.

All our school improvement activities are undertaken with a view to improving the learning experience for our students.

Cathy Long, Headteacher, Burnham Grammar School

All the schools in the interviews made their vision for the future of their pupils explicit. Statements included references to pupils but, more importantly, staff could articulate what they needed to do to achieve the aims.

All schools had a mission statement which encapsulated the vision and this featured prominently in the staff handbooks, prospectuses and on policies. For example, in five of the 11 schools, the mission statement was displayed prominently at the front entrance.

The vision was also communicated by explanations to staff in other publications, for example, Lent Rise's "The Complete Professional" and "10 Golden Rules to stay ahead of the game" mentioned "classroom organisation and management must be exemplary (chaos does not breed pride)". Chalfont Community College publish "The Blue Sheet" and regular staff bulletins. These include regular training days or a conference, to build team commitment to the aims. They were seen as a valuable resource and either heads or senior staff spent time carefully planning the activities that facilitated the outcomes. Chalfont Community College, with 140 staff, hold an annual conference at a local venue, providing an opportunity to reaffirm the vision and develop the team. The day provides staff with a variety of activities around a theme.

It's important not only to offer development opportunities but to think how it's offered in terms of making people feel valued. Team building is therefore vital.

Sue Tanner, Chalfont Community College

However, activities that develop team building and enhance development opportunities for staff do not always have to cost a great deal. The opportunities to learn together provided by training days, often with shared activities such as lunch together, can have benefits.

After we'd achieved the task [of moving] where we all knew what we had to do and worked together, there was a great sense of team achievement, which has lasted. You can work with people on an everyday basis then.

Teacher, Disraeli School

All schools described the value placed on the training days or meetings and the importance in allocating time and resources to value staff in order to get the best from them.

In all schools, the responsibility for various aspects of induction was clear to all. The new members of staff knew who to go to for what reason and staff were proactive in

checking that procedures were being followed. Heads cited the ability to draw new staff into the school way of doing things as quickly as possible as a vital ingredient of success. In establishing the vision and developing the culture of the school, staff had to be coached into delivering their aspect of the induction.

In establishing a vision (for the school) it is important not to forget that others may have different perceptions. The key role of the head is to understand those perceptions and harmonise them in order to move forward with a common purpose.

## **Standards**

Headteachers all described the importance of developing a 'learning culture', 'zero tolerance of low standards' or no culture of acceptance. In all cases, heads mentioned raising standards as being a key motivation for any school improvement and therefore for professional development.

There was a wide definition of what was meant by 'standards', however. Only two mentioned SATs or GCSE results but all referred to the importance of getting the best out of all pupils in many areas of school life.

Ofsted reports of the schools in nearly all cases referred to assessment and tracking systems, informing the progress of pupils. The schools were therefore adept at analysing the areas for development.

Most of the schools were adopting creative and innovative approaches to raising standards. For example, some were developing 'thinking skills' or exploring accelerated learning techniques as a way to improve normal provision. Most were exploring ways of developing creativity across the curriculum with exciting programmes of staff Inset provision. One head described the importance of exposing to staff to quality ideas:

If the training is mediocre, then the delivery in the classroom will mirror it. We want staff to be more adventurous and develop a passion for (writing).

Headteachers were all able to describe how their school had developed or was developing a culture of staff intolerance of underperformance:

Staff here work bloody hard and if someone's not pulling their weight then they expect managers to do something about it.

High standards came about not only through clear expectations of performance but through the monitoring and coaching:

Helping each other to improve is far more valuable than just pointing out problems.

Schools had usually defined what was wanted, for example, in what makes a good lesson, and has reached a common understanding within all staff:

It's not good talking and 24 have a triangle picture in their head and you have a square in yours.

The longer I've been head I've realised that we don't all have the same perception of what's needed or what needs to be done. If I can work out what are the different perceptions, then developments become more effective.

Several heads talked of having a direct style or being clear that they were intolerant of poor standards. Not only, they said, should standards of displays, classroom organisation and staff dress etc be made explicit through staff handbooks, but also heads should lead by example as well as encouraging and enforcing those standards.

We want to be ahead of the game and think strategically, be out and about and know what's going on, as well as setting up your information gathering systems. In short, know your school.

Example from Lent Rise Classroom

## **Systems**

Underpinning the vision and the work on standards were clear systems that supported development and that were understood by all. Clear expectations and roles where everyone knew what was expected, how they should do it and who undertook other roles were crucial to the system.

I like to walk the school and meet everyone every day.

Sue Tanner, Chalfont Community College

To release time to do this organisation, particularly with regard to diary entries, prioritising and office management was deemed crucial.

Three schools made the simple rule of putting a limit on how many people were out, either on a school visit or elsewhere, to minimise disruption.

It's important not to be in an ivory tower, you get a feel for how things are going.

Eileen, Chesham Park School

Central to the systems established was the performance management system. Usually, the headteacher managed the performance of senior staff, although there were four instances of heads being involved directly with a far greater number of people because they deemed it so important.

Several heads described the need to lead by example, to undertake training and professional development themselves. In addition, all mentioned the need to be visible and accessible. When systems were being established, heads described how they took on greater responsibility and workload, but then coached others into taking over. Often regular meetings were then held.

A clear school improvement plan, which was understood by all staff in terms of what everyone needed to do for their performance management, was essential.

A shared understanding of what was being aimed for was helpful - for example, what makes a good lesson or what the role of a subject leader should be.

Most heads stressed the importance of not only recognising but also working on strengths, as well as improving weaknesses. Any system should have access to support colleagues or a network of good role models or mentors, for example:

We're good as a staff at recognising the skills and qualities of each other. Also, we recognise when we undertake some Professional Development that it's not just for the individual but for the school.

Half the schools preferred to spread the annual performance management interviews over the year, whereas others held them early in the autumn term, followed by 'keep in touch' or 'one-to-one' meetings.

Most schools had defined line management for support staff as well as teachers. Four schools emphasised that they tried to reduce the number of regular formal meetings to release time.

The implementation of the school improvement plan was put into 'bitesize chunks' by most. Heads emphasised the importance of prioritising, doing a few things well and celebrating implementation rather than taking on too much and feeling frustrated.

Recurring themes were:

- knowing staff and therefore spotting potential, issues and successes
- thorough mentoring and induction systems
- careful resource deployment and management (including human resources)
- accountability, but freedom to make mistakes
- other senior staff as well as heads modelling developments and coaching others to take them on
- acceptance that staff shouldn't stay in the role for too long. The average quoted in the same role was about three years
- clear roles and responsibilities and clear expectations of those

## **Recruiting the right people**

All 11 schools placed very high emphasis on the recruitment and retention of good staff. All schools were in geographical areas where staff recruitment was challenging due to the high cost of living.

Most of the schools described the professional development and performance management interviews, which enabled senior staff to keep in touch with intentions and aspirations of their staff. Those intending to move from the school or aspiring to promotion or to new roles are therefore identified at an early stage.

Some schools assessed the likelihood of staff leaving and began recruitment before the member of staff resigned. Clearly the financial risk was taken into account although in this way heads felt that they would stand a greater chance of filling a vacancy.

Strikingly, in all schools, heads described that when a specialised or senior staff vacancy was likely to occur, they were inclined to develop their own staff to fill the role. This is described in the next section.

Recruitment strategies varied. Seven heads felt that eye-catching or humorous adverts, different in some way to the majority of other schools, would attract either more enquiries or a more lively calibre of candidates. All thought that selling the advantages of good professional development was essential.

## **Appointing overseas-trained teachers**

Three schools worked with the LEA to cover particular shortages by recruiting overseas-trained teachers. The headteacher would visit countries such as Australia to recruit.

Their induction into the school culture was far more challenging and tested the systems of induction, mentoring and support.

One large secondary school felt that the additional benefits like providing accommodation and organising social events (such as wine and snack sessions) and networking, were successful. The social informal meetings of a small number of staff with the head over a glass of wine was particularly successful. Plans to increase the frequency of these sessions and extend them to other staff were in place.

## **The recruitment pack**

An attractive pack was cited as important, giving as much details about the school and the job as possible. All schools commented on the need to send full, lively job profiles and person specifications to potential recruits. The investment of time, thought, imaginations and, to a limited extent, money in the recruitment process was deemed vital. Many of the 11 heads commented that if candidates thought that time and energy had gone into the recruitment pack, then they would be more encouraged to apply.

The inclusion of clear expectations was deemed vital by five of the heads, and other heads commented that it was essential for candidates to 'get a feel for the culture of and expectations of the school' when they visited.

I ask candidates into the school and ask staff to tell them how it is.

Brenda Bigland, Lent Rise

I see all candidates for interview to set out the vision and what the organisation believes in.

Sue Tanner, Chalfonts Community College

Thus, the crucial matching process takes place between candidates keen to be part of the school's culture and the school with a new recruit to be developed and supported.

Most schools used all or some of these:

- reviewed application forms against their criteria thoroughly
- interviewed
- observed lessons, either in the candidate's present school or at the school
- asked for a presentation
- used children's work to ask the candidate a National Curriculum level and what they would do to take the learning forward
- used a number of people in different roles in different circumstances to provide objective information
- sometimes used pupils in the selection process

Heads felt that the rigour was justified because of the importance of appointing staff.

Three heads stated that candidates not willing to go through a rigorous process demonstrated that they did not have the determination required at the school.

Recruiting the calibre of person required in each school where there is a shortage in the number of candidates applying presents the schools with a huge challenge.

The provision of high-quality and thorough professional development encouraged applicants. Of the eight NQTs that were seen, all of them cited an induction programme and professional development as a main reason for joining the school.

All heads described how they had led initiatives or developments initially, but felt that the key was knowing how to bring others in and hand over. The balance between giving tasks and true delegating, and coaching the implementation of the new task whilst giving space 'to drop the ball occasionally', was key to professional development.

All 11 schools had close links with either initial teaching providers or were running other schemes.

### **Case study 1**

Bourton Meadow is a Designated Recommending Body for ITT, facilitating up to 15 graduate trainees, six at the school and the others at link schools.

A deputy head managed the scheme. Benefits listed included:

- a continual supply of keen, vibrant staff
- funding stream to school
- staff developing opportunities for mentoring
- improved quality through scrutiny of staff's own practice

Disadvantages were:

- workload issues – this has to be managed
- continuity in teaching not necessarily achieved

Two schools employed and supported teaching assistants who were training to be teachers whilst employed part-time at the school under the certified teachers' scheme.

All had links with higher education established to monitor their programmes or to receive students.

Heads stressed that the more well-managed links there were, the greater the chances of recruiting of suitable candidates.

Appointments were advertised internally and induction into new roles provided.

### **Induction**

The Induction of new recruits or staff new into their role was cited as being vitally important.

Seven schools had a dedicated member of staff. Others had either senior staff responsible for the induction of different aspects or often a 'buddy' or mentor was allocated to a new member of staff, with a senior person to oversee.

Five of the schools had a written induction procedure and/or checklist to ensure thoroughness and consistency in induction.

Often staff were invited in, sometimes employed before an official start. In four cases, an induction period of one to two weeks included a structured period of observations and briefings.

## **Case study 2**

Burnham Grammar – initial stages after recruitment

- candidate appointed – identification of training/development needs
- contact with candidate after employment
- visit to get documentation, meet staff, familiarise etc
- on-job induction – mentored approach or observations
- mentor/buddy – line manager support and one-to-one discussions leading to formal and informal support
- two-way feedback based upon an early good relationship
- continuing support into role feeding performance management and ongoing support, training and development

## **Succession planning**

All schools could describe how people assumed new roles. Most heads talked about knowing the staff in terms of strengths, areas for development, aspirations and intentions. They were able to gauge when the role needed a shadow or mentee or indeed when external recruitment was needed.

Several heads talked about how, during one-to-one or professional development meetings, they would get to know staff. They would then be proactive. Heads spoke about the value of having good recruitment and induction procedures linked with good performance management. New recruits well inducted into the school made or better senior staff. Most heads talked about feeding staff development opportunities and rewarding initiative. Senior staff vacancies could therefore be filled internally when 'excellent people within are often higher quality than external candidates'.

Heads were aware of the risk that developing people without the internal rewards would lead to staff seeking other posts but commented that the alternative leads to school stagnation and frustration on the part of staff, which in turn leads to staff also seeking other posts.

When an NQT joined the staff, they were in all cases given an induction period, which included looking at a role that they would be assuming. For example, in primary

schools, this was usually when an NQT was being developed to become a subject co-ordinator. They would often shadow a co-ordinator and be mentored into that role.

The importance of succession planning to spot potential and groom people for a new role is what gives them a buzz.

Cathy Long, Burnham Grammar

### **Case study 3**

Disraeli School

When we knew that our SENCo would be looking for a new post, we asked if there was anyone on the staff who would like to take on the role, rather than advertising it outside.

There was one candidate and, because she had worked within the system and had expressed interest in developing this area in her professional development discussions, we decided to appoint her.

We devised six months of shadowing, training and taking on increasing responsibility until when the SENCo left, she was almost 'up to speed'.

Further support and development is of course needed, but we now have a SENCo who is already familiar with the school culture and is already doing a good job.

Succession planning permeated the culture of most of the schools visited.

To grow our own staff, to select a person with potential and develop them is not only immensely professionally rewarding for everyone, but also ensure continuity within the school.

This also applied to all jobs from within the school, including headteachers.

It's our role to develop the heads of tomorrow.

If you show them what to do before the persons left it's much easier.

### **The 'buzz'**

A striking feature common to all 11 heads was their desire and motivation to 'know what's out there'.

My job is to be aware of funding sources and to be aware of national and local developments, and filter them to decide whether we want to be part of it, or say 'no thanks we've got enough on to do this now'.

Nearly all of the 11 heads had undertaken professional development of their own during the last 12 months, including short- or long-term secondments, consultancy or inspections. Reasons given were income generation for the school, their own professional development or to give other staff experience in managing during their absence. They all felt that they brought a greater breadth of knowledge and expectations back to the school.

I don't want puddings. I want people who are as passionate about the job as I am.

The passion of the head is vital.

In most of the schools, staff were undertaking nationally accredited courses, NVQs or degrees or had been recently supported by national initiatives such as the Primary Leadership Programme. Both teachers and other staff were conducting their own action research or further studies, for example the NCSL bursar qualification.

A striking feature in all the schools was not only the immense sense of pride felt by staff in their school, but also an excitement and enthusiasm about what they were doing. Heads reported that they had passed through the era when staff were reluctant to be observed in their roles. The culture included mutual respect in which professional feedback enabled performance to improve.

A teacher at Bedgrove Infant School spoke with enthusiasm about her role as a mentor for new staff. She had been trained to do so and felt that it had enhanced her understanding of her own teaching.

Although funded in the same way as neighbouring schools, many of the schools had managed to find ways of providing staff with resources such as an interactive whiteboard and laptops. Other ways were often found that staff reported made them feel valued – dishwashers, good-quality staff rooms, provision of lunch on Inset days to name a few.

Many used Quality Mark, Artsmark, Activemark and Health Schools as outside accreditations for what they were doing.

We don't do it to collect badges, we do it because we feel we have good practice and by getting accreditation against national standards, it shows the parents but above all the staff, how well we are doing.

Many of the schools were developing initiatives such as 'thinking skills' or 'accelerated learning'. Far from resisting initiatives, they embraced and welcomed them. However, they managed the workload so that staff were not overburdened.

This is not for the faint-hearted. I tell potential recruits if you've come to put your feet up, you can go somewhere else. However, the workload and demands of the staff have to be managed. Staff need to know that I'm demanding but that I consider their well-being.

Sue Tanner, Chalfont Community College

Another feature of each of the schools was the importance placed on the environment for learning. For example, displays and special features such as sculptures were apparent. In three schools, murals adorned walls whilst in others vibrant displays of high standards were abundant. Sculptures, environment areas and interesting play areas were common. All schools placed very high emphasis on giving this exciting feel to their schools. Heads mentioned the excitement as a vital ingredient in their school's improvement.

We want to get through to new recruits that this is a dynamic place, not just a learning centre with visitors, trips, music, sport, foreign languages and exciting things going on – a 'want to' culture.

There was an expectation in the schools that all staff were learners, developing this the school felt exciting, dynamic places to be.

Guidance and support was given to staff to make lessons exciting in most schools. All had lots going on, whether it be in respect of training, pupil activities and clubs, initiatives, awards, secondments or links with other schools.

Clearly the management issues of planning, sharing and articulating the task, enabling people to do them but letting them develop within the overall structure enables the satisfaction of developing. There are time implications for staff but all the schools found creative ways of enabling their staff to undertake the activities.

### **Case study 4**

Bourton Meadow

Jane Harman, deputy head, has been at the school for 10 years since being an NQT. She was given sporting responsibility after shadowing the PE co-ordinator. After receiving good feedback, she felt gained confidence and felt encouraged to do a bit more. She became maths co-ordinator and later a leading maths teacher.

Jane became deputy head after feedback and is now responsible for the school's DRB programme.

Gill (the headteacher) is good at recognising good teachers and feeding them more responsibilities if they want it, which builds confidence. She has high expectations and staff know what they are.

All headteachers talked about the need to make expectations clear. Five talked of themselves as being plain speakers, whilst four mentioned being 'control freaks'. However, the importance of using different styles at different times was vital. The buzz comes about by people operating as a team and feeling that they are doing well.

### **Conclusion**

Our research findings indicate a link between good practice observed in schools and key outcomes relating to successful professional development of staff. The following were found to be essential:

- The Leadership Team must prioritise staff development and training. This needs to be reflected in planned developments in the School Improvement Plan.
- A champion to take the lead is essential.
- Issues of sustainability must be addressed. Getting the right people takes time and money. You need to keep them as long as you can and you need to train new people to take over when they leave.
- Adequate time must be given for development; the payback will prove the value for money.
- Time for the implementation of the programme needs to be recognised and built in and the complexity of the task needs to be acknowledged. There are no simple answers. Focusing on one aspect of the equation does not work!

Good professional development for all staff is vital for schools if they are to fulfil their potential as centres of excellence in learning. Such development does not come about by accident; it has to be proactively managed and it depends on a 'mix of ingredients'. It begins with clarity – of vision and of systems. It develops into a very practical understanding that each person within the organisation has of what they need to do in order to make a difference. It is crucial to this development that the headteacher and senior staff know the strengths of each person and feed them opportunities that relate not only to their own development but also to that of the school. In order to impact upon school improvement, professional development needs to be targeted.

Succession planning is vital since inevitably good people do move on, but it is seen as a strength, as part of the process of continuous improvement, rather than as something you need to do because someone is leaving. Growing your own staff is a way of ensuring continuity and it means that you will keep people for longer. A staff who feel secure that their potential is being recognised and developed will be happier and more fulfilled and will give more to the school. However, the school has to be prepared to invest first: a dedicated person to lead the initiative costs money. You will need to invest more in recruitment, training, development and on removing barriers to learning. However, it seems schools are very creative in finding new ways of doing things that cost less. If the will is there, even with a small amount, progress can be made.

### **Features of a good staff development programme**

- training and development a key aspect of the School Improvement Plan with the training plan reflecting the development priorities of the school
- training and development happening on the job as well as on courses
- trainers (eg heads of department) receiving training themselves! Time allowance is made for them
- regular time for staff development interviews
- training taking place at all levels from senior managers down
- importance of process, ie 360 appraisal
- involvement in ITT at departmental level
- time and training for BT and NQT mentors
- use of professional development portfolio
- targeted training programmes – eg early years of teaching/middle management
- peer-assisted training
- devolvement of targeted training funds to departments who have accountability for the outcome
- coaching skills taught
- professional standards linked to everyday practice
- promotion from within the organisation
- establishing mechanisms to create successful professional development for BTs and support staff through to leadership

## Headteachers' 10 top tips

the soft stuff is the hard stuff... Fullan, p39

Consider the following:

- Make your expectations very clear. Realistically high expectations lead to high performance.
- Find ways to value your staff. Arrange for tea/coffee at break; get a dishwasher. Arrange for a reflexologist to visit! Use equipment to enhance the job, eg laptops.
- Create occasions when your staff can get together socially – weekly volleyball or termly meal.
- Encourage sharing good practice; put up a notice-board in the staffroom about learning.
- Prioritise use of administration staff.
- Wherever possible reward – eg give time.
- Cut meetings to a minimum; insist on agendas.
- Create team areas so people can work together.
- Teach coaching skills and use mentors and buddies to support.
- Think about how you can induct people as quickly as possible.
- Know your school and, in particular your staff. Be visible and accessible.
- Set up the systems that support what you want to achieve.
- Keep it real – link standards to everyday practice.

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