



Resourceful leadership: how directors of children's services improve outcomes in schools and early years

Summary report

Resource

This targeted report has been published alongside a longer report, **Resourceful leadership: how directors of children’s services improve outcomes for children.**

Resourceful leadership puts the concept of resourcefulness at the heart of good leadership of children’s services.

As illustrated in figure 1, resourcefulness¹ is the ability to:

- assess and widen your resource base
- select and apply the best ‘mix’ of resources to address the type of challenge faced

The concept of a resourceful leader is helpful in thinking about the ways directors of children’s services (DCSs) are able to:

- assess their situation now and into the future
- actively seek to inform and shape the context they operate in to promote the interests of children and young people
- select a range of responses, drawing on both themselves and others as resources
- apply a response and see it through

Resourceful leadership defines eight core behaviours of resourcefulness. For the schools and early years theme, the study was able to identify the following resourceful behaviours:

- creating and sustaining commitment in the system by working closely with headteachers
- working collaboratively by drawing on partners, such as health and the police, to ensure that multifaceted problems get the right professional support and promote shared responsibility for children and young people in schools
- the ability to be open to possibilities and to focus on results by drawing on local and national research to ensure that problems are understood and appropriate actions taken, and by developing new models of delivery which are based around improving educational outcomes

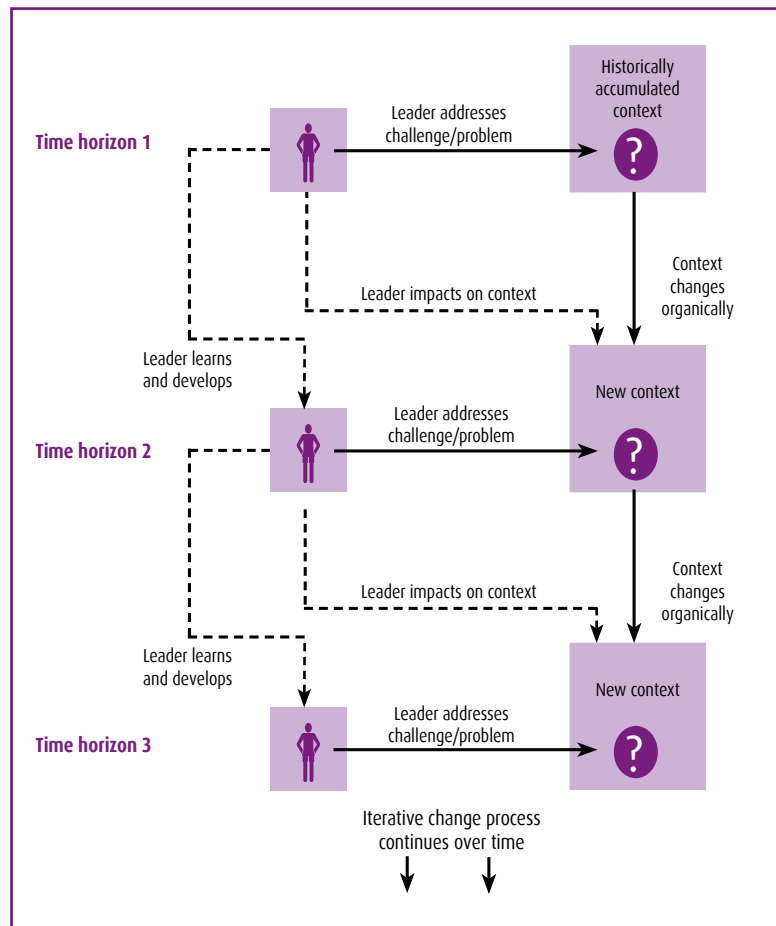


Figure 1 The dynamic relationship between leader and context over time

1. These are: openness to possibilities; the ability to collaborate; demonstration of belief in their team and people; personal resilience and tenacity; the ability to create and sustain commitment across a system; displaying a focus on results and outcomes; the ability to simplify; and the ability to learn continuously.

Evidence of effective practice

C4EO has produced a final summary and recommendations and a directors' summary for schools and communities and for early years. The reports include examples of effective practice in improving outcomes in schools and early years. They are based on international research and validated local practice and can be found at:

- <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/schools/default.aspx?themeid=6&accesstypeid=1>,
- <http://www.c4eo.org.uk/themes/earlyyears/default.aspx?themeid=1>

This report seeks to build on the current evidence-base by:

- identifying the leadership characteristics in DCSs and their senior leadership teams (SLT) which impact on schools and early years outcomes
- strengthening the body of knowledge on leadership and its impact on schools and early years outcomes
- using this knowledge-base to offer practical support to professionals in services for children

Creating and sustaining commitment in schools and early years

Improving standards in educational attainment has been a consistent priority both nationally and at local authority level. DCSs and other local authority leaders displayed deep commitment to improving outcomes across the local education system, in particular by developing strong relationships with headteachers.

Developing commitment and close working with headteachers

DCSs and other leaders of children's services recognised the pivotal role of headteachers in a child's education and the influence they have on other outcome areas. Consequently, leaders in children's services invested in building relationships with headteachers based on good communication to promote shared understanding of issues facing children and young people and the role of leaders in children's services in addressing them.

For example, all leaders established regular meetings with headteachers to improve understanding of how outcomes can be improved through work both in schools and in the community. In one authority leaders involved headteachers in discussion about the work of local integrated teams to identify where work with individual families could be used to reinforce outcomes for certain children.

Leaders have also engaged headteachers in addressing specific problems, such as special educational needs and exclusion, as illustrated in example 1. A further example is of a leader who included headteachers in behavioural, emotional and social difficulty reviews, which resulted in establishing fair access panels. These helped to reduce exclusions in the authority as issues were addressed with an understanding of alternative options to exclusion.

Example 1: Working with headteachers

In one local authority, leaders recognised that exclusion and special education were less effective options for improving outcomes than keeping children and young people in mainstream education. A number of collaborative meetings, strategic forums and directors' meetings were established to explore alternative options with headteachers and other involved parties, such as social workers.

Consequently, a 'managed move' system was developed. It involved designated teachers for safeguarding and child protection and dedicated social workers who were responsible for considering a range of options for each child or young person, so that exclusion and special education were regarded as a last resort.

Leading collaborative interventions

Promoting collaboration between schools and partners has been a priority for leaders over recent years. This was particularly true in authorities that chose schools as a hub for local service provision.

By creating and maintaining strong collaborative working practices, schools and partners were encouraged to take collective responsibility for outcomes for children and young people in schools and early years provision. Collaboration also helped to ensure that professionals from a number of different areas could intervene to address multifaceted problems and consequently improve outcomes.

For the majority of leaders, collaboration was seen as crucial in sharing the responsibility for securing efficiencies while protecting standards. Buy-in from partners has also been a key consideration when redesigning services, as discussed in the next section.

Building successful partnerships

Leaders in the sample recognised the value of forging links between schools and partners such as health and the police. These links were especially important to ensure successful interventions by the right professionals to address problems that children and young people experience.

For example, working with the police has helped leaders in one authority to work more effectively

Example 2: Collaboration between schools and health professionals

Leaders in one authority designed a collaborative approach to tackling under-18 conception rates and sexual health standards. They recognised that school nurses had the most relevant and specialist experience in dealing with these issues with children and young people in schools. However, the primary care trust (PCT) had put a freeze on school nurse posts, so an innovative approach to the problem needed to be found.

The proposal put forward by the SLT was jointly developed with PCT leaders and headteachers. A new, more senior post of 'school clinical practitioner' was created. The role was a broader school-based role with line management by the headteacher and clinical supervision by the PCT. Headteachers were asked to put funding into this approach as well as PCT. Early evidence suggested that this approach had a positive effect on conception and sexual health outcomes.

on child protection in schools through sharing information on cases. Good communication channels and positive, trusting relationships are fundamental to these working practices. These are built through developing relationships by holding regular meetings and involving police in strategy development.

Another instance of working with partners to address specific problems in schools is illustrated in example 2.

"Schools are the heart of partnerships based on mutual respect and trust."

Director of children's services

Openness to possibilities and focusing on results and outcomes: leading reform and redesign of school delivery

The recent change in government has resulted in substantial changes in schools' policy, including the freedom to set up more academies and the introduction of free schools. The majority of leaders were positive and pragmatic about the changes. Many leaders were proactive at looking at ways to reform and redesign services to fit with the new agenda. To do this, three actions came across strongly:

- drawing on local and national research to improve results
- gaining political support for redesign
- proactively identifying and addressing areas for reform and redesign

1. Drawing on local and national research to improve results

To identify and address areas for improvement and reform, leaders drew on front line experience, working with headteachers and with partners to assess possibilities and inform their decisions. For example, through regular local school and pupil referral unit visits, one leader commented that they "know the services well" and can involve staff in using their experience to contribute to decision-making.

In addition, leaders used local quantitative research to understand better the patterns and trends in outcomes. In one authority, leaders employed a researcher to investigate why certain children in reception were doing worse in maths than in other areas of the curriculum. With the research, they

identified that the problem could be prevented if intervention took place in early years. Leaders were able to break the problem down into localities and identify strategies in particular nurseries to address the issue.

Leaders also drew on national research from organisations such as C4EO to provide an understanding of good systems and practice used in other authorities. Several children's services leaders commented on the benefit of using this research alongside local evidence-based research to understand what strategy would be effective in their context.

2. Gaining political support for redesign

Leaders noted the importance of working closely with political figures, especially the lead member for schools, when seeking to understand the implications of funding and policy changes. Many leaders drew on established relationships with their lead member when identifying how best to address the new agenda.

For example, in one authority where a good relationship had been built with the Lead Member, the DCS was able to communicate openly with them to understand their reaction to the new agenda. The lead member had concerns that provision for vulnerable children would be compromised given potential reductions in funding for schools. The DCS was responsive to these concerns and worked closely with the lead member to articulate the potential issues and raise these with the secretary of state for education.

In authorities that embraced the new agenda, working with political figures often resulted in a

Example 3: Gaining political support for schools redesign

In one authority, the DCS proactively pulled together a position paper as a way of anticipating the change in policy. They drew on previous experience of working in grant maintained schools and set out plans to embrace academies and free schools but include them in a 'family of schools' structure, which would enable close working between schools and other services. As the DCS had already built "a really respectful partnership" with the lead member by helping to work on political priorities in the past, he was able to draw on the lead member to shape the debate on the new structure.

proactive, collaborative approach to redesign with full local political support, as illustrated in example 3. Leaders who took an active role in policy and initiated debates on priorities for children's services often found that they could gain support and constructive opinions from political colleagues, which enabled them to plan more effectively. For example, one DCS noted that the good relationship they had with the lead member had enabled constructive challenge with regards to school improvement plans.

3. Proactively identifying and addressing areas for reform and redesign

In addition to getting political buy-in for approaches to implementing new policy, leaders generated a number of innovative ideas for reform and had begun to plan for service redesign, including:

- setting up a structure whereby schools in the same geographical area were grouped into 'families' of five schools. It was hoped the approach would encourage lead members to consider issues across a number of areas outside their ward.
- embracing the academies agenda and incentivising schools to become academies. To do this, detailed planning for a quick transition to the new system had been started, including lead members in the planning and delivery.
- incorporating academies into wider plans for schools in the authority. For example, the DCS and lead member jointly set out a strategy to create networks of schools that provided for children and young people throughout their compulsory education. They devised a scheme to support this agenda by allowing schools to become academies providing that they incorporated Sure Start and primary provision.

Through each of these approaches, leaders sought to maintain positive collaboration between partners and political support for the agenda to enable effective work on and improvement of outcomes for children and young people.

Implications: questions for consideration

In light of these findings, we recommend that directors of children's services and their SLTs review their individual effectiveness and their organisational outcomes by addressing these questions for action:

Creating and sustaining commitment

How do you ensure that headteachers and children's services colleagues understand their respective roles in delivering outcomes and how they can work together effectively?

How do you ensure that you build commitment to shared objectives with your team? With headteachers?

How confident are you that communication and knowledge - sharing channels are effective between children's services, schools and early years teams?

Leading collaborative interventions

- What are you doing to ensure good working practices are embedded through children's services and partners?
- Who are the key players in schools and early years? How can you influence and work with them?
- How confident are you that communication and knowledge - sharing channels are effective within teams and between teams? With partners?

Openness to possibilities and focusing on results and outcomes

- How confident are you that you are drawing on all the available evidence to identify local need and inform priorities and decisions?
- Do you have a clear view of the priorities which are most important and cannot be compromised? What work are you doing now to ensure that these priorities are protected? How have you communicated these priorities across children's services and partners?
- Have you defined and agreed priorities and options in this area with corporate, political and children's services colleagues for the next month? Six months? Year? Longer term?
- Have you built strong working relationships and practices which enable you to consider a number of options with regard to schools and early years delivery? How well do you work with colleagues and partners to find innovative and alternative delivery models?

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