Inspiring leaders to
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National College
for School Leadership

Managing pupil mobility to maximise learning

Summary report

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Executive summary

Introduction

Meeting the learning needs of pupils in England who join and leave schools at various points in the year - termed mobile pupils here - is a significant challenge which has important educational leadership implications. The research reported here was carried out to learn about good practice in managing pupil mobility successfully and to enable the research to inform the practice of others.

The research

The research project sought to identify:

— factors leading to high levels of pupil mobility

— how schools manage mobility successfully

— the leadership behaviours and approaches that are important in managing pupil mobility

The project team undertook the research between November 2009 and March 2010. In the first stage, we reviewed relevant literature and policy-related documents. In the second stage, we researched case study schools in regions of high pupil mobility which we had identified by scrutinising Ofsted reports for references to high levels of pupil mobility combined with grade 1 ('outstanding') judgements for leadership and management, personal development and the effectiveness of teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs. We chose six case study schools which were widely dispersed throughout England.

During the data collection, we:

— scrutinised relevant documents

— interviewed governors, headteachers, members of senior leadership teams, teachers, pupils, parents, directors of children's services and other agency personnel

— observed classes, playground activity and other parts of the schools

The case study accounts were validated by respondents and then analysed for emergent themes. The outcomes of the literature review and the themes were synthesised and the implications identified.

Main findings

The successful management of pupil mobility requires high-quality educational leadership. The leadership and professional authority of the headteacher (or equivalent) were particularly significant. The school leaders had a sophisticated, wise and thoughtful approach to organisational change. They created a sense of collective educational leadership among their staff, who understood, and were committed to managing pupil mobility to maximise learning.

Supportive school-local authority relationships were important. These helped schools to manage pupil mobility effectively. Supportive relationships were based on high levels of trust. Service directors felt comfortable providing schools with the resources and the freedom to respond to the challenges posed by mobile pupils.

Governing bodies need to be effective. The members of the governing bodies understood the challenge their schools were facing. They supported the school leadership and sought to ensure that the school was functioning appropriately.

It was important to work with mobile pupils and their families together. The schools felt they were working with families - not just pupils and their parents - in the management of pupil mobility.

Schools that manage pupil mobility successfully are responsive to the challenge that pupil mobility presents. Being responsive in high-mobility settings entails:

— recognising that there is a matter to respond to

— taking the initiative

— becoming expert at receiving pupils who enter school at non-standard times of the academic year

— being flexible but within the constraints of what it means to run a good school

— developing the capacity to work with a wide range of agencies

Schools that manage pupil mobility successfully are professionally generous. Professional generosity is the commitment of a school's educational resources to enhance a pupil's learning. The resources were committed without regard to a beneficial return for the school itself.

Leaders of schools that manage pupil mobility successfully have high expectations. They have high expectations of themselves, their staff, the pupils and their parents, and all those connected with the school. High expectations partner professional generosity: the two go together.

Responding to the individual learning needs of mobile pupils is important. The learning needs of mobile pupils are likely to be complex and multifaceted. Responding to the individual learning needs of these pupils is therefore the most appropriate approach.

Addressing the affective learning needs of mobile pupils and ensuring their emotional wellbeing are of paramount importance. Mobile pupils may have experienced substantial disruption of attachments and relationships that are significant to them. These have to be addressed before the pupils can learn successfully.

Schools in high-mobility settings need to be safe, secure and stable. Mobile pupils benefit considerably from attending such schools. It enables them to explore their feelings and reflect on them, and to learn successfully.

A high level of financial expertise is required to manage pupil mobility successfully. Managing pupil mobility is both difficult and expensive. It is unpredictable, and pupils need individual attention. Often resources have to be deployed before funding is in place.

The schools from which mobile pupils depart have a significant responsibility for managing pupil mobility. That responsibility includes the transfer of information to the new school or college and also responding to the affective experience often associated with leaving a school.

Managing the learning of mobile pupils requires systemic educational leadership. Systemic leadership is the way in which people in the wider system with links to the school use their influence for the school's benefit. People in the wider system include parents, members of local communities and community leaders, local authority personnel and those of other educational institutions, local employers and members of public services. Headteachers have a responsibility for engendering systemic leadership.

Introduction

Meeting the learning needs of pupils in England who join and leave schools at various points in the year - termed mobile pupils here - is a significant challenge which has important implications for educational leadership. In recent years, a growing number of educational leaders have found themselves having to react to the issue of mobility for the first time. As might be expected, some leaders have responded to this new challenge very effectively, have learned lessons and have led the development of good practice. The research reported here was carried out to learn about that good practice and to enable it to inform the leadership practice of others.

Our intention in writing this report is to give an account of the research we undertook, report the findings, and highlight the most significant aspects of good practice in leading and managing schools that experience high levels of pupil mobility.

The report has five sections followed by references and bibliography. Following this introduction, the second section presents a literature review on the topic. The third section explains the research methodology. The fourth section explains the key findings. We summarise the good practice themes that emerged consistently throughout the study. The fifth section of concluding comments is followed by references and a bibliography.

Literature review

Introduction

This literature review is in two parts: that relating to pupil mobility, and a second section linking educational leadership and pupil mobility.

Pupil mobility

What is meant by pupil mobility?

Pupil mobility, which is often referred to as 'turbulence' in the literature, is defined as:

> a child joining or leaving school at a point other than the normal age in which children start or finish their education at that school, whether or not this involves a move of home.

Dobson & Henthorne, 1999:5

How many pupils are highly mobile?

Pupil mobility is in fact a substantial issue for all schools and its significance is often underplayed (Dobson, Henthorne & Lynas, 2000). Nationally, Goldstein, Burgess and McConnell (2007) report that 43 per cent of pupils who started Key Stage (KS) 1 in 2000 had moved schools by the subsequent KS2 test date. This high proportion does include changes of school between KS1 (perhaps an infant school) and KS2 (possibly a junior school). Importantly, however, they report that within-key stage mobility, where pupils move during a key stage, was also surprisingly high. They report that 15 per cent of pupils (about 1 in 7) who started KS2 in 2002 had changed school at least once by the end of the key stage. About 1 in 100 pupils moved schools at least twice during that KS2. Goldstein et al (2007) consider these figures, which some would regard as surprisingly high, to be underestimates. The underestimation has a number of explanations (for example, because the census data does not include pupils who move to private schools). Furthermore, these national figures mask considerable variation between different local authorities.

For example, Goldstein et al (2007) found that 39 per cent of pupils in Northamptonshire, 25 per cent of pupils in Staffordshire and 9 per cent in Hampshire moved schools during KS2.

What are the reasons for pupil mobility?

There are several reasons for pupil mobility. Typically, pupils change schools because their parents or family relocate or are relocated, or they are moved to different schools to meet their educational needs. The effects of mobility on pupils are complicated by their socio-economic status. Children experiencing high levels of socio-economic disadvantage are likely to incur a more substantial educational penalty than mobile pupils in relatively advantaged circumstances.

Parent or family relocation

Children in this group are from:

— economic/social migrant families that are moving to escape hardship of some kind (Strand & Demie, 2006)

— families seeking to further advance their circumstances; so-called lifestyle migrants (Knowles, 2003)

— relatively advantaged families that are required to move perhaps because the work of the wage-earner - typically the father - demands it. These families are the so-called 'reluctant movers' (Sell & DeJong, 1983; Mongeau, 1986)

Traveller families (Levinson & Sparkes, 2006) and military families (Jeffreys & Leitzel, 2000) are in the parent and family relocation group. Neither of these sub-groups is homogenous. These authors respectively record various and different levels of mobility among Traveller children and military families.

Mobility to meet educational needs

Pupils who are moved to meet their educational needs may be transferred because of learning or behavioural concerns identified in their previous school. These concerns may have been identified and responded to by the pupil's school.

For example, a pupil may be permanently excluded from a school or have educational needs that cannot be met by the school he or she is attending. The concerns may have been identified by the pupil's parents who then choose to withdraw their child from the school and arrange for her or him to attend another school.

The educational penalty that may be incurred by mobile pupils

The educational penalty resulting from mobility is lower than expected levels of attainment. The size of the educational penalty varies. Studies in the US and the UK (Pribesh & Downey, 1999 and Goldstein et al, 2007) show that many children who move schools achieve less well than those who remain at the same school. However, the effect is complicated by the more general effects of socio-economic disadvantage and/or migration (Strand & Demie, 2006).

Explanations of the sources of this educational penalty are founded on the notion of social capital, which is the relationship between the family, the community and the school. Social relationships between peers can also be a significant source of social capital. Coleman (1988) observes that the social connections between child and adult in different contexts can:

> provide the child with support and rewards from additional adults that reinforce those received from the first and can bring about norms and sanctions that could not be instituted by a single adult alone.

Coleman, 1988:593

Coleman (1988) found that pupils who moved school were more likely to drop out of high school because of this disruption to the social capital of their family and community. The loss of social capital and the opportunity to draw upon it result in the educational penalty.

Pupils may experience grief, a sense of loss and anxiety associated with the severing of significant relationships when they move. Thus attachment theory (Fonagy, 2001; Bowlby, 1969) may be valuable in explaining the disruption that can be experienced by mobile pupils and the educational penalty incurred.

Responding to the issue of pupil mobility

In recent years, central government has engaged with the growing pupil mobility issue by undertaking a number of in-depth studies. These studies have focused on how schools can best respond to the needs of turbulent pupils and their families. Examples include the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2003; 2004) and Dobson and Pooley (2006). The New Deal for Communities survey (Blank, Ellis & Goyder, 2004) supported previous studies in recognising that turbulent families lack social capital. Dobson and Pooley (2006) provide recommendations to service providers which include: sharing information between boroughs; supporting access for services; and building strong links with the local community. Guidance has been provided for schools through the New Arrivals Excellence programme published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF, 2007). The guidance uses case studies to make practical suggestions for induction programmes for newly arrived pupils. The significant educational leadership issues that are part of the development of induction programmes are not addressed directly in this guidance. Indeed, the educational leadership aspects of managing pupil mobility to maximise learning have not been addressed specifically in any policies or guidance.

Educational leadership and pupil mobility

Leadership and management

Educational leadership requires both leadership, which is an organising process of social influence, and management, which entails taking responsibility for ensuring the functioning of a system (Cuban, 1988; National College, 2006). The educational leadership of schools with high levels of pupil mobility requires a high level of leadership and management capability.

Educational leadership for the management of pupil mobility

High levels of pupil mobility represent a challenge for schools (Keys, Sharp, Greene & Grayson, 2003). The key point about any challenging circumstance is not that it is present but how the school responds (James, Connolly, Dunning & Elliott, 2006). The headteacher has a significant role in shaping this response.

Schools that manage the learning of mobile pupils successfully can be said to be effective because the pupils progress further than might be expected from a consideration of its intake (Mortimore, 1991). Headteachers have a significant role (albeit perhaps an indirect one) in ensuring effectiveness in this regard (Hallinger & Heck 1998; 1999). Several studies have illustrated the nature of headteachers' work in effective and successful schools, for example, Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995); Harris and Chapman (2002); Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll and Russ (2004); James et al (2006); National College (2006; 2010).

What headteachers of effective schools do is important but the way they do it is also significant. James et al (2006) identified the features of the mindsets of headteachers and staff of successful schools in disadvantaged settings which underpinned their overall approach. The mindset included:

— an empowered and proactive optimism

— a high level of reflectivity

— an accept-and-improve approach, which is an acceptance of various givens in a non-judgemental way, coupled with a drive to improve matters

— a both-and mentality, which is an ability to hold together apparent opposites without experiencing a sense of contradiction

— motivation by ideals and aspirations for the pupils

— high expectations of the pupils and themselves

— a willingness to praise

— a sense of pride in the school

— a powerful ethos of care

Research methodology

The research project questions were as follows:

1. What factors underpin high levels of mobility among children?

2. How do schools best manage mobility to ensure positive outcomes for the children and families involved?

3. What leadership behaviours/approaches are important in promoting the effectiveness of these strategies?

The project team undertook the research between November 2009 and March 2010. In the first stage, we reviewed the relevant literature and policy-related documents. In the second stage, we researched case study schools in regions of high pupil mobility, which we had identified by scrutinising Ofsted reports for references to high levels of pupil mobility combined with grade 1 ('outstanding') judgements for leadership and management, personal development and the effectiveness of teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs. We chose the following schools (names are anonymised), which were widely dispersed throughout England.

— Joan of Arc School: inner-city Sure Start nursery school

— Bees Hill Children's Centre: inner-city children's centre

— Kimber White School: inner-city primary school

— L S Lowry School: primary school on a military base

— Phoenix School: special needs school

— Esperanza School: inner-city secondary school

Research question 1 was answered by the review of the relevant literature, supplemented by the case study findings. Research questions 2 and 3 (in part) were answered by the analysis of the case study data. Research question 3 (in part) was answered by our interpretation of the case study findings.

During the data collection, we:

— scrutinised relevant documents

— interviewed governors, headteachers, members of senior leadership teams, teachers, pupils, parents and directors of children's services and other agency personnel

— observed classes, playground activity and other parts of the schools

The research was undertaken in accordance with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines for educational research. The case study accounts were validated by respondents and then analysed for emergent themes. The outcomes of the literature review and the themes were synthesised and the implications for school leaders, directors of children's services and their senior teams were identified.

The members of the project team, who were all members of the Department of Education, University of Bath were:

Chris James: Professor of Educational Leadership and Management (project co-director)

Hugh Lauder: Professor of Education and Political Economy (project co-director)

Ceri Brown: Researcher and consultant

Harry Daniels: Professor of Education: Culture and Pedagogy

Geraldine Jones: E-learning officer, web designer and consultant

Key findings

In this section, we summarise the main themes to emerge from the data. We focus in particular on the aspects of the practice of these schools that were particularly germane to the management of pupil mobility.

Main good practice themes

Introduction

This section sets out the strong messages in the data that relate to good practice in the management of pupil mobility in order to maximise pupils' learning. Practice was established as 'good' by eliciting the explanations of the participants themselves as to why they felt that what they were doing was valuable, and through our own rationalisations and interpretations.

Schools that manage pupil mobility to maximise learning were 'good schools'

It is important to note that schools that manage pupil mobility successfully are 'good schools'. They were chosen for study in the first place because Ofsted had assessed them as such. Our data more than confirmed the Ofsted assessments. Many had the characteristics of excellent schools. In reviewing the data, it was very apparent that the good practice in managing pupil mobility was simply (sic) part of leading and managing a good school. It was deeply embedded in good educational and leadership practices. That is an important outcome, which we refer to in section 5 as part of our concluding comments, but it also sets the scope of the themes that were of interest to us in the analysis.

It is clear from this study that managing pupil mobility well, in terms of maximising pupil learning, is difficult if the school is not functioning well. Further, it is hard for any school to function well without high-quality leadership from the headteacher in particular. We would argue that the core behaviours of headteachers that are required for the leadership of schools with high levels of pupil mobility are similar to those that are essential in all schools.

However, the way these behaviours are exhibited – relentlessly and with passion and commitment – is important, and there are other important behaviours as we discuss below.

The educational leadership challenge of managing schools with high levels of pupil mobility was substantial

The review of the literature revealed a large number of factors that may underpin pupil mobility. This study confirms and extends those findings. From the case studies, it was clear that many of the reasons for mobility were highly complex, multifaceted and interconnected, and all were potentially highly disturbing for the children involved. The disrupted home life of pupils may affect their behaviour as well as their educational attainment. Pupils may have witnessed domestic violence, especially if escaping such circumstances had been the cause of their mobility. Further, "children worry" as one headteacher put it. They are often very aware of the financial concerns of their families. They may worry about the precarious existence of their families if their parents are over-stayers whose entry visas have expired. At the other end of the scale, the disruption caused by socially and financially secure parents moving their families to advance themselves may still be very significant for the children. Even with children who move for educational reasons, the explanation for their educational need may lie in their disrupted, insecure or volatile home life. There was evidence that the housing policies of local authorities may contribute to unnecessary pupil mobility. Mobile families, perhaps those seeking asylum, or economic migrants, may be regularly re-housed in different locations in the authority, with new local schools for their children.

Pupil mobility presents significant challenges to educational leaders in high-pupil mobility settings

The challenge is real. The educational leadership challenge of managing mobile pupils to maximise learning is not an abstract, theoretical or hypothetical consideration. It is very real. The child and probably the family arrive at the school in person and require an appropriate response to their needs.

The challenge is immediate. The educational needs that some mobile pupils present often require an immediate response. It is professionally unacceptable to delay children's participation in education. Such a delay will only increase the already high penalty incurred by their mobility.

The challenge is complicated. The matter of pupil mobility will have educational implications. However, these may be set in an array of other, interconnected social and economic difficulties for the pupils' families.

The challenge is public. How the school responds to the mobile child will be on view to the parents. The way the school responds to the child and the family is very likely to become known in the wider community.

The challenge is unpredictable. Mobile pupils and their families may arrive at the school unannounced and may depart without warning.

The challenge may be political. Responding to mobile pupils has a political dimension. For example, not everyone agrees that economic migrants should be catered for and that resources should be provided to meet the educational needs of their children. There may also be political tensions among the various mobile pupil groups in school.

The challenge has blurred boundaries. The educational needs of pupils may be an integral part of their social and financial circumstances. There are decisions to be made about the scope of the school's involvement in these wider issues.

The challenge is not an excuse for poor educational practice. An important aspect of the challenge is that it should not be used to excuse:

— low standards of professional work: as in 'Why bother? These children will probably be gone again in a few weeks'

— low expectations of pupil attainment: as in 'There's no point expecting much from these mobile pupils with them moving schools so often'

The central issue here is that all the schools we studied experienced these challenges and responded appropriately. Interestingly, appropriateness for them included:

— having the will to solve problems and respond to issues and at the same time knowing that some concerns are not soluble and maybe just have to be lived with

— showing considerable passion and commitment but not naïvely so in rising to the challenges

— understanding that for mobile pupils and their families, the school represents a place of stability, wisdom, expertise, sensitivity, alertness, protection and care

These qualities were highly evident in all those we spoke to during the data collection.

It was clear from our study that the headteachers were pivotal in:

— leading and motivating others to respond appropriately on the basis of deeply held professional beliefs and values

— establishing systems and processes so that the institution was able to respond effectively to the learning needs of mobile pupils

— understanding and modelling professional generosity and high expectations, matters that we discuss below

High-quality educational leadership was important in managing pupil mobility

Not unexpectedly, the quality of the leadership of the headteachers and members of SLTs was a significant theme in the data. Headteachers modelled this high-level capability to ensure that it was developed and sustained in the staff group. It helped to engender a sense of collective educational leadership that understood and was fully committed to managing pupil mobility in order to maximise learning. The level of pupil mobility in a school may change and rise significantly and rapidly. The school leaders in this study demonstrated the capability to respond to such changes.

A very important educational leadership principle was that high levels of pupil mobility were not an excuse for poor educational provision or low levels of pupil attainment. In the words of one headteacher: "I get very annoyed with heads that use high mobility as an excuse for poor standards". Responding to the needs of mobile pupils was part of the commitment and motivation of the collective educational leadership to running a 'good school'.

Supportive school-local authority relationships were important

In the main, the schools had supportive relationships with their local authorities, which were very helpful in enabling the schools to manage pupil mobility effectively. These relationships were based on high levels of trust in which service directors felt comfortable giving schools the resources and autonomy to develop their practice. In turn this

enabled schools to respond readily to the challenges frequently posed by mobile pupils.

However, we also identified instances where school-local authority relationships were not positive, often for historical reasons. There was significant impact as a result. One school, which had merged recently with another, resented the lack of information and support from the local authority during the merger. In another instance, the local authority had split up the siblings of mobile families when allocating places. Some schools worked around local authority guidelines to put in place the provision they thought was necessary. In one school, a Sure Start nursery, the ratio of adults to children was approximately 1:8 which was high. The headteacher said:

> It's important to have more staff around that children can talk to, so we have more staff than [the local authority] considers necessary.

Headteacher

The implication here is that developing productive relationships with the local authority was part of managing pupil mobility successfully.

The schools' governing bodies were effective

In all the schools, the governing bodies functioned well, despite the challenges that turbulence and other related factors present, especially in recruiting governors. In one school, many parents were in the armed forces and often away on tours of duty. The second in command of the regiment and the regimental welfare officer were co-opted governing body members in this case. In another school, the chair of the governing body was also the school crossing patrol warden. As a result of her work, she knew all the parents and children and they knew her. The chairs of the governing bodies we spoke to typically had a powerful vision for their schools and what their schools were trying to do, especially in relation to mobile pupils.

In some of the schools, the governors, including and especially the chair of the governing body, were a significant presence in the school. Often they worked with newly arrived pupils and those with behavioural problems. Importantly, the members of governing bodies understood the challenges their schools were facing in managing mobile pupils and meeting their educational needs. They were supportive of the school leadership and worked to ensure that the school was functioning appropriately.

It was clear that the body responsible for the conduct of the school – the governing body – understood and in many instances provided additional leadership for the school.

Schools in high-mobility settings may be considered vulnerable as institutions because they face challenging circumstances. They need to be stewarded thoughtfully and with commitment. The governing body has the central role in this. Arguably, headteachers in all settings have a part to play in ensuring the school is well-governed but that is especially so in settings with high mobility. Local authorities also have an important role in ensuring good governance for maintained schools.

The headteacher's leadership and professional authority were important

Many of the headteachers in the schools we studied had been in post for a long time. They had developed considerable expertise during that period. The teachers we spoke to held their headteachers in very high regard. At one school in particular, all the members of staff spoke of their respect and admiration for the headteacher, his passionate caring for others and the way he made sure everyone felt special and valued. In the words of the head of care at the school:

> Everyone counts in [the headteacher's] world and the children know that he cares about them and knows their world, as well as the staff's world.

Head of care

Some of the headteachers had been appointed to their schools when the schools had not been functioning well, and had led radical change since that time. In one school, the headteacher had been appointed in 1998 following the previous headteacher's retirement. At that time, the nursery was failing with an Ofsted inspection report describing 27 per cent of the teaching as unsatisfactory. As a result, the school was placed in special measures. Since then, the headteacher in close collaboration with the deputy headteacher had built up a strong team of staff and the school had progressed considerably as a result. The school had been awarded a grade 1 ('outstanding') judgement in most categories at its most recent Ofsted inspection.

The key point is that in a range of ways the headteachers worked to set the tone of the organisation and the way it responded to the needs of mobile pupils.

The principles underpinning their practice included ensuring that:

— the individual learning needs of mobile pupils were identified, made clear and responded to

— there were sufficient resources to meet the learning needs of mobile pupils

— organisational and educational practices in the school were managed properly to ensure their high quality and continual improvement

— they modelled high standards of generous and responsive educational professionalism

It was important that teachers were authorised to work professionally and to develop a shared sense of good practice

There was a sense of collective authority among the staffs of the schools. It appeared to be significant in leading the institution so that mobile pupils were effectively managed. In one school, the headteacher referred to the staff group as her 'dream team', so delighted was she with the high standard of their collective work. In another, which was part of a federation, joint planning by groups of staff enabled an appropriate, individualised response to the learning needs of mobile pupils. Curriculum provision was devised weekly by all the teachers in the same year groups from all three schools. Planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time was organised so that all the same year-group teachers had this time together. As a result there were always three very experienced teachers involved in lesson planning, and teachers were able to take the lead in advising on their own subject specialism. This continual revision and updating fostered a very strong understanding of the curriculum. The key issue here is that professional teachers worked together and developed a collective leadership capacity. This capacity was deliberately encouraged by the headteachers and other members of the school leadership teams.

A high level of responsiveness was required to manage pupil mobility effectively

The schools understood the need to respond to the learning needs of mobile pupils and were ready to do so, in terms of their overall approach and the systems they had in place. Leadership practice in all the schools rose to and met the challenges of managing pupil mobility.

The challenging issue that is being responded to - in this case high levels of pupil mobility - does not go away because it has been responded to. Pupil mobility may indeed be a long-term challenge for schools in particular areas. Over time, being responsive in a particular way may shape the school and the way it works. There was evidence that schools in an area where there was a high inflow from a particular ethnic group had gained a reputation for working with new arrivals from a particular community. In one of the schools, children of recently arrived immigrant families of a range of nationalities attended the school including Lithuanian, Polish, South American and Somalian. The last group in particular was growing and as the deputy headteacher observed: "We are becoming the Somalian school of choice" in the locality. This reputation was likely to change the school over time.

Specifically, being responsive may mean the following.

1. Taking the initiative

As one headteacher said "If we have a group of people asking for information, then we realise we need to do something". Thus being responsive was not simply a matter of being passive and reacting to circumstances. It was important to take the initiative and intervene in a pre-emptive way. The headteacher and staff of the military school were proactive in visiting the school where the regiment that was just about to arrive was garrisoned. They took the initiative to find out about the pupils who would be joining the school in order to establish a sense of school community before the pupils arrived.

2. Schools becoming experts in receiving all non-standard entry time pupils

There was evidence that some schools which have become adept at receiving pupils who are perhaps from economic migrant families are also skilful at receiving pupils who have been excluded from nearby schools for behavioural reasons. In one school we studied, the deputy headteacher, who was also the inclusions manager, explained that the school had particular success among schools in the locality with mid-phase transition children accepted according to a formally agreed protocol. This protocol was an agreement between headteachers in the locality to transfer children to a new school as an alternative to permanent exclusion. The school was particularly successful with these children, very few of whom were excluded from the school.

3. Being flexible but within the constraints of what it means to run a good school

The schools' flexible and adaptable processes were embedded within and constrained by the practices required to run a good school. There were thus varying degrees of flexibility – some were highly flexible in their overall approach. The chair of the governing body of one such school was very clear about the school's overarching drive to be flexible in meeting the needs of families and what it meant:

> Flexibility: be the willow not the oak. Don't set it in stone. If you set it in stone you're limited. You have to bend, and that's what's given us an outstanding Ofsted.

Chair of governing body

Whilst setting clear boundaries enabled mobile pupils to settle in, how those boundaries were worked with was very important. In one of the schools, although consistency in approach was central, there was flexibility which took the context into account. Consistency was not the application of a rigid framework which did not take account of the context. The head of care at the school acknowledged that flexibility was required in order to be sensitive to the individual needs of pupils:

> Staff must have empathy and understand, and must not believe in ruling with an iron fist.

Head of care

Consideration for context and personal circumstance therefore guided all staff responses to managing pupils' behaviour. The headteacher recognised that:

> When new pupils come in, it's a dual learning process; we are learning about them at the same time as they are learning about us. Therefore it's a process of working out what works.

Headteacher

Flexible boundaries therefore referred to the need to accept fallibility and move on, both of the child and staff:

> We are human, we get things wrong sometimes but have to feel safe to hold up our hand and admit it and ask for help.

Headteacher

Flexible boundaries also referred to the way this headteacher worked with the local authority in the admission of new pupils. Sometimes he would take on a pupil before the statementing process had been completed. This practice was against local authority policy but was preferred because it prioritised the pupil's needs.

One school, a secondary, had a racially mixed intake with a high proportion of Muslim pupils including Muslim girls. We were surprised by the apparently very strict classroom and behavioural management practices. These practices worked well in the school and the mobile pupils rapidly realised what the expectations were. The strict rule may have been effective because of the age of the pupils. Flexibility may have been exploited unhelpfully by older pupils. Also, the school was the largest we studied. There may have been a need to ensure that such a large organisation was secure. The way boundaries were managed may have helped to provide a stable and safe environment for a mixed-gender school where girls may have been unwilling to assert themselves as learners.

4. Recognising that there is a matter to respond to

The schools in this study had recognised that increasing numbers of pupils arriving and leaving at non-standard times was an issue to respond to and that their practice needed to adapt accordingly. This aspect of good practice also encompassed a recognition that the issue being responded to may change. For example, the level of mobility may change, or different ethnic groups may feature more prominently in the mobile pupil group. In one school, there was a large influx of Somalian children four or five years ago from families who were new arrivals to the UK. Since then, there had been fewer new arrival Somalian families and a growing number of newly arriving Punjabi children.

5. Developing the capacity to work flexibly with a wide range of agencies

The data indicated that the capacity for working with a wide range of different agencies and organisations was an important aspect of responsiveness. Responding appropriately may mean engaging with a range of other agencies to provide an appropriate response. This involved establishing good relationships with external agencies in order to share a vision with external representatives as to how to manage pupil mobility successfully. One of the schools we studied, a children's centre, had an advisory board in addition to the school governing body. The board comprised representatives from the external agencies it worked with:

— the charity Barnardos, which works with families

in difficulties

— health visitors

— advisers in social security services

— social services

The key point is that leading a school that has to be highly responsive in the way that the schools we studied were differs substantially from leading a school where the context and pupil learning needs require a lower level and different kind of responsiveness.

Developing a particular approach to change is important

The schools we studied appeared to be very secure, stable and established places despite the high level of pupil mobility. This characteristic did not mean that they lacked the capability to respond to changing circumstances. Change occurred within the frame of their professional insight and understanding and how they felt a good school should be. So, although the schools were ready to make changes, they made them within that particular frame. Thus change was typically incremental and built on established successful practice. Possible changes were talked through and the potential implications and unintended outcomes explored. There was a high level of professional educational expertise in these schools on which such discussions could be based. This approach seemed to minimise mistakes and added to the sense of the security of organisational and educational practices.

Managing mobile pupils requires professional generosity

There was a strong impression of a high level of professional generosity in the schools. So, for example, although the staff in one school understood the implications of pupils from another country arriving unexpectedly three weeks before national tests were undertaken, they responded positively. The newly arrived pupils were not viewed negatively. These schools readily committed resources to enable mobile pupils to settle in. The sudden departure of pupils was also accepted and the likely reasons for it understood. Indeed, if a pupil's departure was anticipated, additional professional resources might be deployed to enable the pupils to move on successfully.

The schools were not naïve in their generosity; far from it. They had a very sophisticated view of their work. It was simply (sic) that they configured their

work in this way. Their motivation was not to get the best SATs/GCSE results in the borough. Their motivation was to meet the educational needs of the child and if another school gained the benefit of their work through the pupils' good test or examination results when the pupils moved on, then so be it.

Part of the professional generosity equation appears to be having high expectations of the pupils. All those we spoke to had very high expectations of the pupils in terms of how they approached their learning and what they could achieve. There was no evidence of the 'poor dab' syndrome (James et al, 2006), where a pupil's unfortunate and difficult experiences and situation become an excuse for low educational attainment and achievement. Very importantly, the schools – teachers, leadership teams, governors – were generous with themselves and what they gave to the pupils. However, in return, the pupils and indeed their families had to do their bit.

It was important to work with mobile pupils and their families together

The schools worked with families in the management of pupil mobility and not just with pupils and their parents. The extent to which a particular pupil was able to settle into the school appeared to be significantly influenced by her or his siblings and extended family. This matter was particularly important with younger pupils. In the words of the headteacher of the nursery school we studied: "We want to know what the care arrangements are in the home".

The schools were places where families accessed information. The schools were seen as important conduits of information about the social system in general, such as how to find out about access to welfare benefits, where to find information about work opportunities, and how to get advice on legal matters.

Many schools appeared to feel they had a role in educating parents about what were acceptable wider cultural norms. The reference to 'the Cinderella syndrome' in one of the case studies illustrates this point. The syndrome refers to typical family behaviour in which families move to enhance educational opportunities for their children, but then require their children to work long hours in the family business, thus detracting from settling in and learning. The schools felt they had a responsibility to counter this practice. A number of participants referred directly or indirectly to the idea that parents may want to help their child's learning but may

not know how to. Many of the schools responded by educating parents so they could help with their children's learning. Schools also helped parents to access language education. Some schools intervened on behalf of families, helping with housing for example, attending court as witnesses on behalf of over-stayers and acting as advocates on other matters.

Arguably, the leaders of schools in high-mobility settings need to be ready to place their schools at the heart of their communities and to work with pupils and their families.

The rapid and sensitive assessment of the learning needs of mobile pupils was important

Mobile pupils may have a multiplicity of personal and social needs which interact with a potentially complex set of learning needs. These needs were expressed in the context of being in transition, ie leaving one place and entering another. The assessment of the arriving pupils' learning needs had to be rapid but sensitively managed.

Early assessment was particularly significant in cases of special educational needs. One teacher we interviewed was clear that it may not be helpful to explain to a parent whose child has been in the school a very short time that her child has some quite serious learning needs. It may set back the settling-in process or reduce the parents' willingness to co-operate in enabling the pupil's learning needs to be met.

There was evidence that the sometimes protracted nature of the statementing process could be very difficult for schools. They may have needed to assign additional resources to support such pupils while the statementing process was being completed. In one of the schools where this matter was significant, the local authority had a system where funding was provided much more quickly for students just below the level where a statement would be appropriate.

Managing the full cost of responding to the learning needs of mobile pupils is important

The management of mobile pupils is costly and includes hidden costs. For example, a pupil may arrive and clearly have complex learning needs that would require a statement so that his or her learning can be supported. That process takes time, and provision has to be made in advance of the funding arriving.

One school had a very good reputation locally. It could easily start each year full and the school would be fully funded. However, the headteacher always decided to leave spaces available for pupils who were almost certain to arrive during the year. As the deputy headteacher put it, "[The headteacher] holds places back".

Schools that manage pupil mobility well have to invest resources in developing relationships with parents. The initial interviews, follow-up discussions and other meetings to discuss a particular learning need all take time.

The proactive securing of resources, especially in the form of grants, to support their work with this pupil group contributed to the success of these schools in managing pupil mobility.

The effective management of pupil mobility required astute, sophisticated and proactive management of the school's budget by the headteacher and the governing body. Such management ensured that resources were available for mobile pupils and should be seen by educational leaders as an integral part of maximising pupil attainment. Even with careful management, rapid changes in pupil numbers could put a strain on a school's finances.

Developing and implementing thorough induction and departure programmes is important

The schools had well-established induction routines to manage the arrival of mobile pupils. Typically, such programmes would involve the parents and would endeavour to:

— establish quickly a sense of partnership with parents

— build foundations for the development of trust and secure relationship-building

— understand the individual needs of the pupil

— recognise the family's history and home environment

The initial contact with parents appeared to be crucial. However, there was evidence that the schools sustained those contacts and that they have engaged in a long-term learning relationship with the parents as well as the pupils. Induction may be a lengthy process for many pupils, especially if they have experienced serious disruption as a result of mobility.

One particular school invested heavily in an induction programme for new pupils despite the cost. This

induction included the following.

— Once the child had been offered a place, invitations to visit the school were sent to the child's parents in English and in the parents' mother tongue.

— Two school visits took place in which parents met members of the SLT and saw the children at play.

— Schools visits were followed up by a home visit by the child's key worker and a member of the support staff who would act as interpreter if necessary.

— During the home visits, the key worker took the role of building relationships with the parents whilst support staff members played with the children. Building this relationship involved listening to parents' perspectives on their children's needs and discussing appropriate strategies for them.

— Admission on the first day was arranged to coincide with the availability of language support staff.

— A personalised induction strategy assessed how long the child should attend school for initially and whether he or she should be accompanied. Some children required a six-month induction before attending a full session.

Many schools had departure programmes in addition to induction programmes. These helped the pupils to leave and join their new schools using various learning activities and provided their receiving schools with important and useful information.

Monitoring has increased significance in schools with a high level of pupil mobility, as does target-setting. The schools concentrated on checking the progress of newly arrived pupils and helping the pupils to be proactive in their own settling in and to take responsibility for it.

Acknowledging pupils' culture and history was important. In many instances, different cultures were celebrated and provided opportunities for learning. One headteacher reported a conversation with a parent which was aimed at encouraging the family to speak in their own language, and not to neglect their home language in their eagerness to become fluent in English. This approach was seen as a way of retaining the connection with their culture and history. It also recognised that literacy development in English is aided by literacy development in the child's home language.

The data reinforced the notion that for pupils, their school was an important aspect of their own history

and identity. Some schools went out of their way to show to departing pupils that they had been important to the school and that the pupils would not be forgotten.

As with so many aspects of school leadership, the capacity to organise matters within the school, in this instance pupil induction and departure programmes, is crucial and has significant pedagogic implications. However, in order to avoid school leaders having to reinvent the wheel on this specific issue, good practice in the organisation of induction and departure programmes should be widely shared. Such a strategy will be of benefit to all schools, even those with a relatively stable pupil population.

Pupil mobility should be viewed as a pedagogic issue and an opportunity

Although being a mobile pupil may incur a penalty, if being mobile is managed well, that penalty may be reduced. Further, it can be used as an opportunity for learning in both a cognitive and an affective sense and for mobile and non-mobile pupils. Existing pupils benefited from the insights gained through learning something of the culture, background and experiences of mobile pupils. They also benefited from the opportunity to participate in the process of including new pupils into the school community. The issue of mobility enabled pupils to learn about and to reflect on their feelings, emotions and moods and those of other pupils. Mobile pupils brought new insights and have new experiences as a result of their mobility. The experience of mobility may enable them to gain an enhanced understanding of their feelings and how they express them.

Many of the schools used buddying systems where an existing pupil would be paired with a new pupil to help the latter settle in. These arrangements enhanced understanding for all concerned, assisted with the induction process, and helped new pupils to feel safe, secure and less anxious. Importantly, it helped to raise the self-esteem of all pupils, which was an important feature in the management of pupil behaviour.

Arguably, all high-quality teachers and educational leaders can recognise and take advantage of the opportunities for learning that arise from particular circumstances and events. This approach is an essential requirement for the leaders of schools in high-mobility settings.

The pupils' emotional wellbeing was of paramount importance

A significant theme in the data was that social

and emotional wellbeing underpinned all learning. Thus addressing pupils' emotional needs as they deal with disruption in their home circumstances, their relationships with peers and teachers in their previous school, and the new circumstances they now face was important. Further, a very strong message from the school leaders and teaching staff we spoke to was that the social and emotional development and wellbeing of pupils must be attended to before any formal learning can take place. Building self-esteem was considered to be important. A teacher at one of the schools identified three factors that were important in building the self-esteem of mobile pupils. They were:

— developing a sense of belonging

— building the pupils' sense of their identity

— enhancing the pupils' own sense of their personal power

Mobile pupils are likely to have their sense of belonging, identity and authority compromised and undermined. The schools therefore endeavoured to create an ethos which addressed these aspects directly. The approach included:

— building relationships with pupils by making them feel noticed and valued as individuals

— celebrating achievements

— giving pupils the skills to make friends with others

— having a behavioural policy based on positive choices

Addressing the social and emotional needs of pupils required a highly thoughtful approach that encouraged reflectivity in pupils. Those we spoke to were clear that there were opportunities for enhanced personal learning for the mobile pupils themselves and all those who have relationships with them.

School leaders need to take the lead in ensuring that the emotional needs of pupils are met and that their emotional wellbeing is ensured. There may be professional development needs here for headteachers.

It was important to create a secure, safe and routine school environment

This theme represents a significant aspect of the organisation of all schools. However, it appeared to be more important in the successful management of mobile pupils. This theme had several aspects:

— **A stable staff group:** in all the schools there was a relatively low turnover of staff and new members of staff were appointed with care.

— **Predictable routines:** the schools gave the impression of having well-established routines – 'the way things were done' was established, clear and widely known.

— **A visible and consistent behaviour and learning policy:** the expectations of pupils were very securely established. Pupils knew what they were joining and were made very well aware (by staff and fellow pupils) what was expected of them.

The metaphor of family featured significantly in interviewees' responses to describe what they were attempting to create in their schools.

In essence, transition may have disrupted children's educational trajectories and as a result they may lose balance. For some mobile groups, school was the secure place in a disrupted home life. It was essential to build a routine, recognisable, knowable school environment.

School leaders should take the lead in ensuring that the school provides a safe, secure and routine school environment for mobile pupils.

Provision for mobile pupils was individualised and needs-led

In all the schools, there was a strong sense that it was important to:

— recognise each (mobile) pupil as an individual

— make the time and space to understand the needs of each pupil

— fit resources and ways of working according to the pupil's needs, not the other way round

High-quality communication among members of staff was important in meeting pupils' individual learning needs and there was ample evidence of some sophisticated systems of communication – formal and informal – about individual pupils in the school we studied.

Typically, English language learning needs were significant and extensive, not only for pupils but their families as well. In many of the schools, the members of staff collectively had considerable and diverse language capability. Interestingly, although this need was recognised and responded to, there was evidence that pupils were encouraged to use their indigenous language, both at home and at school.

All the schools we studied monitored the progress of newly arrived pupils very closely. In some settings, notably in early years, this monitoring included cognitive and affective development and data collection involved pupil observation. In addition to monitoring, the schools used the information collected to modify and adapt pupil learning programmes.

School leaders ensured that provision was individualised and needs-led for mobile pupils and that newly arrived pupils were appropriately monitored.

Systemic leadership was important

The educational leadership necessary to maximise the learning of mobile pupils required the development of high-quality relationships with a large number and wide range of individuals, groups and organisations. Thus leaders of high-mobility schools needed a systemic perspective. Their leadership responsibility extended to galvanising those in the wider system to positively influence the work of the school. They needed to engender systemic leadership for their schools (James et al, 2007).

The central notion was that a school with a high level of pupil mobility was embedded in a range of varied and interconnecting relationships with individuals, agencies, organisations and communities. Energising all those individuals and organisations to work in the school's interest was an important task for the school leadership.

All the aspects of good practice were interconnected

In identifying these themes for interpretation, and indeed in considering all the themes from the whole data set, we were conscious of their interconnected nature. All the themes were significant and they were all part of other themes. The schools we studied were perhaps successful because they worked with all the themes and were thereby able to gain benefit from the synergies between them.

Concluding comments

In this study, we have been concerned to identify what the case study schools do that is special in relation to meeting the needs of mobile pupils and to distinguish those aspects from what one might expect in any 'good school'. Another perspective on why these schools are good at managing pupils to maximise pupil learning is that they are good schools in mobile contexts and that mobile pupils, because of their needs, require good schools. Such an assertion begs the question: what constitutes a good school? The question raises two important issues. First, we know quite a lot about good schools, and we have known that for some while. These schools display those characteristics. The second issue is that of responsiveness. What these schools were especially good at was being responsive to the needs of all those connected with the school. In being responsive, they were also generous, a quality that was in turn complemented by having high expectations. An interesting point here is that the first issue (what constitutes a 'good school'?) shapes practice in relation to the second issue (how should a school be responsive?). These matters are worthy of further exploration.

The final point is that many of these schools were, in a sense, vulnerable. They rely on having good members of staff, who may leave, and they are undertaking difficult and sophisticated work. They are working with young people who are experiencing or who have experienced extreme upset verging on trauma. We have been in awe of the considerable professional knowledge displayed by the headteachers we interviewed and the members of their staff and indeed by the governors we spoke to. They all carry a considerable burden, which adds to the impression of vulnerability. Protecting against this vulnerability requires the inter-linked, joined-up and collective support of all those connected with such schools.

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