National College
for School Leadership

Experiences of new headteachers in cities

Full report

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Introduction

A team from the London Centre for Leadership in Learning (LCLL) at the Institute of Education was commissioned by the National College in March 2011 to undertake a three-month research study to investigate how urban school leaders are prepared for headship and the challenges and experiences they face during their first year in post.

This small-scale study investigates the experiences of five new heads from London and one new head from Midlands inner-city who were interviewed and observed for one day. Interview data was also derived from six more experienced heads (ie, those in post for between two and four years) who were asked to reflect on the early years of headship. An online discussion forum provided a small amount of additional data.

From these sources of data, which were collected only from the headteachers themselves, six case studies and four vignettes were written that illustrate the experiences of new heads in a variety of contexts in large cities. The case studies include a series of reflective prompts or questions for the reader to consider.

This research report also includes a review of current literature since 2000 into the training, development and support of newly appointed heads (part B).

Part C discusses the main findings of the research, especially in relation to challenges faced, preparation for headship, loneliness of headship, and mentoring and other forms of support. It also considers the practice of headship and heads' views of the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and teaching schools.

Part D considers the implications of the findings for leadership and leader development.

Part E consists of the six case study accounts of the experiences of new heads within a variety of urban contexts whilst part F includes four vignettes of more experienced heads.

Key findings from the research

Challenges

The issues faced by new, urban heads in this study are consistent with previous research findings. The review of literature showed a consistent picture of the experiences of new heads regardless of location (in the UK or overseas) and regardless of context. The challenges experienced by newly appointed heads were many and varied.

Many of the new urban heads in this study were taking up headships where there was a need for the school to raise standards and for change to be introduced. They were very conscious of the high-stakes, accountability culture in which they operated.

The speed with which change was needed and the manner in which it was introduced was an issue. Decisions were influenced by the competence and capability of existing staff and the possibility of making new appointments, especially to the senior leadership team. Reading the context of the school and its capacity for change were key components of managing change.

The new heads wished to share and distribute leadership but did not know staff well enough to be able to do so with confidence. As a result, the early days were much harder and demanding for some than expected.

The experience of heads in managing their new situations and taking control was similar to the five stages of 'taking charge' described by Gabarro (1987). The new heads were still experiencing the first two stages and the more experienced heads were in the latter stages. Gabarro characterises the first six months as 'taking hold', which involves intense learning, understanding the problems, establishing priorities and taking corrective actions. The second six months or 'immersion' stage involves relatively little organisational change activity as leaders develop a better understanding of the basic issues and underlying problems. 'Reshaping', 'consolidation' and 'refining' of change follows over the next one or two years.

Preparation

New heads in the study felt that they had benefited most from a wealth of experience in assistant and deputy headship roles and referred to the benefits of working with heads who had been concerned with their professional and career development. Experience under heads who have seen it as part of their role to develop the deputy for headship by giving them stretching tasks and sharing responsibilities was very important.

Some new heads had had roles outside the school in their previous posts, for example as an advanced skills teacher (AST) or local authority adviser. They had found this valuable preparation in giving them experience of a range of schools and work with a variety of people.

There was a view that it was difficult to predict what would be met in the first year of headship and that no preparation programme could be sufficiently bespoke or comprehensive to cover every eventuality.

Loneliness

The loneliness that headship brings and the isolation of the role were recognised pre-appointment but nevertheless came as a shock to respondents. There was a feeling that it would be very hard to prepare heads for the felt experience of isolation, accountability and relentlessness although the literature did highlight examples of how pre-appointment programmes have successfully prepared participants for the shock of their first headship role.

Mentors and other forms of support

Mentoring was a very important form of support and critical friendship. Respondents referred to mentoring from a variety of sources - the National College (Head Start), the London Leadership Strategy (Moving to New Headship), the local authority, the diocese and elsewhere. Several heads continued to access support from their previous headteachers.

Different mentors were needed at different times for different purposes and heads spoke of requiring a range of people on whom they could call depending on the need or issue in question.

Networks are important in the support and development of headteachers. In this study, these were many and varied, more real than virtual, and often maintained from the past to support them in their new headships. Different networks were used for different purposes.

Some new heads had been able to spend time in their school in the term between appointment and taking up post and, where this was the case, they had found it very valuable. Time had been used to build an understanding of context and in identifying priorities for change and quick wins. Establishing a relationship with the chair of governors in the term before taking up post was mentioned several times. For posts where the opportunity to spend time in the school prior to appointment was not available, the new heads felt strongly that there should be an expectation of a proper handover before a new head takes up post.

Advice for new heads

Although the respondents were not specifically asked to offer advice to new heads, several of them did so. The following suggestions were made:

— Everything you do should be centred on outcomes for children.

— Make every child feel listened to.

— Don't change things too quickly, find out what's working and what's not working.

— Be strategic in everything you do, but you've got to be organised to be strategic.

— Give yourself time to reflect.

— Be friendly with staff, but don't expect to be friends with them.

— Use the most appropriate leadership style for the situation – sometimes democratic, but at other times more assertive.

— Deal with issues openly, honestly and directly with people.

— Praise and thank stakeholders to make people feel appreciated.

— Hold open meetings with parents to show that the head is accessible and interested in their views.

The practice of headship

As in previous studies, heads found the work fast-paced, stressful, relentless, fragmented, involving a wide variety and range of activities, and responsive to the needs of others in the school. These heads spoke of the high-priority issues that could interrupt their planned days, with large amounts of time often required to sort out complex, urgent issues for the child and families. Liaison with other professionals such as the police and social services teams was involved as part of such cases. Heads were also keen to be seen as visible, open and accessible, devoting time to walkabouts, which included many interactions with pupils, parents and staff.

On the observation days for this study, new headteachers spent nearly half their time (46 per cent) on management. This was defined to include meetings with staff, budget and finance matters, behavioural issues, health and safety, premises, shortlisting and interviewing new staff, assessment and examination issues, walkabouts with management-centred interactions, playground and lunch duties, special educational needs (SEN) and inclusion, and parents and governors.

Approximately a third (32 per cent) of time was spent on leadership. This was defined to include strategic planning, leadership meetings, classroom observations, self-evaluation activity, school improvement planning, walkabouts with learning-centred interactions, staff development and the governing body.

Administration occupied 17 per cent of heads' time. All the heads started and ended the days by dealing with emails and general administration. Several arrived early, from 7am, in order to do this before the start of the school day and any unplanned interruptions.

The remainder of the time (5 per cent) was spent on teaching, continuing professional development (CPD) or as personal time.

NPQH

The research heads had taken NPQH at various times between 2003 and 2010 and thus had experienced different versions of the programme. Views regarding the experience of NPQH were varied, with most finding it interesting and helpful.

The practical opportunities for apprenticeship, visiting other schools and hands-on experience contributed most to the feeling of readiness to take on the headship role. However, heads felt that practical opportunities should be supported by opportunities for learning and reflection.

Face-to-face learning opportunities and networking were preferred to virtual contact.

Improvements suggested (some of which are already in place) were:

— team development and management skills, distributed leadership and the key concept of trust

— information and guidance about the statutory responsibilities of headteachers, for example in safeguarding

— how to set a budget and handle a deficit budget

— information about redundancy and capability procedures

— information about how faith schools work

— assignment of a personal mentor to support the journey to graduation and into a first headship

— ensuring that participants understand the importance of situational leadership, and its application in their new context

— scenario-based sessions to work out how to address the unexpected issues that arise (heating breakdown, closing the school, serious student pastoral or behavioural issues) and key learning from such situations

— development and support of existing staff and recruitment

Teaching schools

The heads were aware of the proposed introduction of teaching schools but several felt they needed more details and were unsure what they would look like in practice.

Most were supportive and many wished to be involved. They welcomed the opportunity for first-hand experience of teaching schools to improve training for teachers and for excellent schools to open up their practice.

Concerns were expressed by some heads in the study, for example the need to balance the needs of trainee teachers with those of children, especially within a context of high external accountability for test results. There was a concern that funding would be insufficient to deliver what was promised and fears that resources and opportunities would be taken away from other schools.

Implications of the research

Support during preparation, induction and beyond should be flexible, individualised and negotiable.

Pre-headship preparation programmes should include practical opportunities such as visiting other schools, observing good practice, project work that provides real-life insights, but there should be an appropriate balance with theory, learning and reflection.

Preparation programmes should make participants aware of the full extent of their statutory responsibilities and should offer practical sessions on finance, human resources and legal issues.

The time between being selected and taking up a headship should be used to ensure an effective handover, with a high priority given to allowing the incoming head time in school to gather information and build relationships with staff and governors. The National College is well placed to produce effective guidance on handovers.

Being assigned a personal mentor, preferably an experienced head, should be considered crucial during preparation, induction and the first few years of headship. Research evidence into effective selection of and matching between an experienced head and the context, needs and personality of the new head should be used, as well as what is known about preparation of both mentors and mentees. There should be a process of checks and corrections to ensure that a supportive mentor mentee relationship is maintained throughout induction and beyond.

Chairs of governors should be prepared for their role in ensuring effective support for new heads. Training programmes should provide expectations and guidance on the chair's role.

Membership of a range of effective networks is important in supporting new heads. The National College should continue to promote networks, especially those that encourage face-to-face interaction. It should use its influence to assist aspiring and new heads in securing access and socialisation into effective support networks.

The intended impact of remodelling and related initiatives on dedicated headship time warrants further research. What, if anything, has changed as a result of these initiatives?

Although headteachers gain confidence in their second year in post, the need for challenge and support, time for reflection and professional development and strategies to address the problem of loneliness remain. There is a continuing need for leadership development, mentoring/coaching and membership of networks. Being involved in the research, particularly the observation or shadowing component, was reported by the case study heads as being a valuable form of leadership development which encouraged reflection on practice.

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Part A: The study

A team from the London Centre for Leadership in Learning (LCLL) at the Institute of Education was commissioned by the National College in March 2011 to undertake a three-month research study investigating how urban school leaders are prepared for headship and the challenges and experiences they face in their first year in post. The team was led by Professor Peter Earley and consisted of Rebecca Nelson, Rob Higham, Sara Bubb, Vivienne Porritt and Max Coates. The key research questions explored how newly appointed urban heads were faring in the light of the many changes currently affecting the education system, such as the changes outlined in the recent white paper (HM Government, 2010) and wider contextual challenges such as reducing local authority support, new curriculum and accountability demands, funding pressures and so on. More specifically, the investigation wished to focus on the key leadership and management challenges faced, how these were being addressed, the preparations newly appointed heads feel they needed for taking on the role and the support available to them both during their first year of headship and pre-headship. The research also aimed, through shadowing, to gain insights into a head's typical day. In addition, the National College was keen to gain views and opinions on the implications for leadership and the College as the NPQH is redesigned and a national network of teaching schools developed.

Newly appointed heads were located in London and Midlands inner-city who were able to be interviewed and shadowed for a full day by a member of the research team. From these sources of data the intention was to produce six in-depth case studies that illustrate the experiences of new heads within a variety of contexts in large cities. From a list provided by the National College, the new heads were approached and all agreed to be involved in the research. Clearly the heads involved in the research are not necessarily representative of new heads in cities or in general. The sample of heads were all known to the College through its regional networks. The interviews and shadowing days took place over April and May 2011.

Interviews, either face to face or by telephone, were also conducted with London heads who had been in post for between two and four years to reflect on this period. It was felt that interviews with a similar number (six) of more experienced heads – but those not too far removed from the experience of early headship – would provide further insights into the early headship experience. These more experienced heads were located with the assistance of London Challenge after contact was made with the chief adviser for London schools. From the list kindly provided several experienced heads were approached and six selected for interview. From these six London heads four short vignettes were written up.

Comments offered by headteachers to an online discussion forum which was set up by the College in April 2011 were used as an additional source of data. A total of 16 heads provided responses to a set of questions on their first year of headship.

As part of the project design, the College held a seminar in early June to discuss the emerging research findings. The seminar invited the case study heads, and two were able to attend along with a national leader of education (NLE) and senior College staff. The seminar was facilitated by the project director along with an LCLL colleague. Some interesting ideas emerged from the discussion of the findings, including that of asking the six case study heads to write a short reflective postscript about their experience of being involved in the research. All six heads wrote brief reflections which have been included as part of each case study.

It needs to be noted that the data from the interviews, the observation and the online discussion forum are derived only from the headteachers themselves. Like so many other research studies of headteachers this report is based solely on heads' perceptions. Views were not sought from other people such as teachers and support staff, chairs of governing bodies or students and parents. As such the study therefore has its limitations and must be seen as a view from heads themselves.

The next section (part B) of this report includes a review of current literature since 2000 along with a summary of the main themes. Part C discusses the main findings of the research, especially in relation to challenges faced, preparation for headship, leadership development, training, induction and support. It also considers views of NPQH and teaching schools.

Part D considers the implications of the findings for leadership and leader development. Part E consists of the six case study accounts of the experiences of new heads in a variety of urban contexts. The case studies have been written to include a number of reflective prompts or questions for the reader to consider and they also include the heads' reflections on the experience. Lastly, four vignettes of more experienced heads can be found in part F.

Part B: Literature review

Introduction and summary

This literature review summarises some recent research which has as its primary focus those issues facing newly appointed headteachers. There are several comprehensive studies that consider the challenges faced by all headteachers, for example, Bristow et al (2007), MacBeath et al (2009), West-Burnham (2009), which are not considered in detail here. The following keywords were used as a basis for the literature search:

— new, novice, beginning, early, becoming, first-year, newly-appointed, first-time + headteacher, head, principal, leader, headship, principalship

— prepare, preparation, develop, development + headteacher, principal, leader, leadership, principalship

A selection has been made from a large number of studies emerging in the last 10 years or so to present the findings most relevant to this study. In considering research from 2000, this review has drawn on comprehensive and authoritative summary reports which were published in the first part of the decade (Earley and Weindling, 2004; Hobson et al, 2003; Hobson and Sharp, 2005; Holligan et al, 2006; Weindling and Dimmock, 2006).

Studies of early headship prior to 2007 are notable for the consistency of findings (Hobson et al, 2003; Holligan et al, 2006; Daresh and Male, 2000). Findings from more recent studies, including those contributing to the International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP), have tended to replicate, in general terms, those summarised in earlier reviews of research. The challenges and experiences reported by headteachers new to the role, together with the elements of preparation and support they find valuable, have been shown to be independent of culture, geographical location, and size or phase of school.

However, recent research has further reinforced the importance of contextual factors on the practice of headship in its early stages. Research has also enabled greater insight into the measures that best prepare new heads prior to appointment for context-specific challenges and those that best support them once in post. Prominent among these are the use of mentoring/coaching, project work and support from networks. There remains a lack of detail about what makes coaching and/or mentoring successful and how effective networks are established and maintained. The latter issue may be particularly significant in the light of the recent development in England of an increasing number of peer networks, such as extended school clusters, City Challenge partnerships and those centring on teaching schools.

Bristow et al's (2007) study to look at 'the nature of the working lives and practices of contemporary headteachers' with a particular focus on wellbeing issues noted the lack of previous research with this focus. The comprehensive report prepared by MacBeath et al (2009) for the Scottish government in response to concerns about the recruitment and retention of headteachers adds substantially to the evidence presented in the English study. However there remains a relatively small amount of relevant research with a specific focus on headteachers new in post. Research by Quong (2006) and Duke and Salmonowicz (2010) suggest an alternative way of looking at the day-to-day decision-making of headteachers to assist those taking on the role.

NPQH was introduced in England in 1997 in order to help prepare aspiring headteachers for leadership and management responsibilities. It has undergone a number of evaluations and revisions since then (eg, Crawford and Earley, 2011). It became mandatory as a qualification for newly appointed heads of maintained schools in 2009. There has also been a range of evaluated support programmes for the induction of newly appointed heads, both those organised by local authorities or under the auspices of the National College. England is relatively unusual, both in having a mandatory preparation programme and in the length of time over which it has evolved, although the OECD's global review of school leadership development (Pont et al, 2008) and McKinsey's more recent review of how some of the world's highest performing school systems support leadership (2010) indicates that policymakers around the world are increasingly adopting such approaches backed by strong support for on-the-job talent identification and development.

What did studies prior to 2007 tell us about challenges for new heads?

'Beginning [in] a headship or school principalship for the first time is an exciting, exhilarating, but complex and difficult experience.'

Weindling and Dimmock, 2006:326

Above is the conclusion of Weindling and Dimmock in their review of studies carried out in England between 1982 and 2004. They noted that the challenges reported by new headteachers had remained similar over the 20-year period, with most of the differences relating to changes in government policy. Key challenges were summarised as those of managing the transition from the previous head, leading change in established cultures and behaviours, dealing with ineffective staff and improving the image of the school.

Notable among the studies reviewed by Weindling and Dimmock were the longitudinal work of Weindling and Earley (1987), Earley and Weindling (2004) and the systematic review of research literature by Hobson et al (2003). Earley and Weindling's work originally for the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), documented the experience of a sample of secondary headteachers who took up their first post in 1982/83 in England and Wales, both during the first two years of their appointment and, in later phases, after 5, 10 and 20 years in post. The main problems reported by novice heads were:

— difficulties caused by the style and practice of the previous head

— estate (buildings) issues

— communications with staff

— improving the public image of the school

— coping with an ineffective member of the senior team

— dealing with ineffective or incompetent staff

— low staff morale

As time went on, and as reported in the later phases of the work, most problems lessened. However, dealing with ineffective or incompetent staff remained a key challenge and the management of time and priorities and working with governors became more challenging as the length of time in post increased.

In the NFER study, Earley and Weindling (2004) asked the heads – now experienced practitioners – what advice they would give to a new head. They note that:

'Most emphasis was placed on the importance of interpersonal skills and relationships, political power and teamwork, all factors embedded in the school context. While formal study during preparation programmes tends to emphasise technical skills, the advice these heads offered after ten years on the job emphasised the skills and processes that Gabarro (1987) argued distinguished between those managers who were successful and those who were not:

1. assessing the organization and diagnosing its problems;

2. building a management team focused on a set of shared expectations; and

3. bringing about timely changes that address organisational problems.

The NFER heads' advice illustrates these points. They offered the following:

— Assess school needs.

— Build an effective senior management team but make sure it isn't separated from the body of the staff.

— Delegated team management is essential for a successful school; allow all staff to be involved in the development of the school.

— Remember that the staff are your most important resource.

— Ensure a good working relationship with the chair of governors as quickly as possible. Err on the side of over-informing your governors.

— Cultivate your governors... you need their support and trust if you are to be free to manage.

— Have a vision for the school; share it with colleagues and students. Believe in others as well as yourself and consult widely.

— Have your vision, yes, but carry your staff, your governors, your parents and your children with you. Keep in touch all the time.

— Accept that change will be constant, some of it turbulent.

— Make good use of your honeymoon period, but don't arrive with too many preconceived ideas or make too many changes too quickly. Don't import too much from your last school.

— Be clear about your values. Trust your own judgment.

— Establish clear principles and priorities and communicate them.

— Be prepared to lead from the front.'

Earley and Weindling, 2004: 19-20

Weindling and Dimmock note that the period of time covered by the study saw major changes to the educational system in England, including introduction of local management of schools, the national curriculum, league tables and Ofsted inspections. All of these are likely to have had a significant impact on the workload and challenge experienced by headteachers. More recently, Crow (2007) and MacBeath (2011) talk of new heads having to operate in a context of school reform.

In the early years of the 21st century, the National College for School Leadership commissioned a systematic review of research investigating the problems and support strategies experienced by new headteachers (Hobson et al, 2003). This review encompassed a wide range of international and UK research. Hobson et al concluded that the problems experienced by newly appointed heads were very similar, despite differences in the experience and background of individuals and the different countries and types of school covered. The main problems experienced were:

— feelings of professional isolation and loneliness

— dealing with the legacy, practice and style of the previous head

— dealing with multiple tasks, managing time and priorities

— managing the school budget

— dealing with ineffective staff

— implementing new government initiatives

— problems with school buildings and site management

Weindling and Dimmock explain the consistency of findings of research into the challenges facing new heads as being an inevitable part of the process of socialisation, as new leaders, whether in school or any other context, come to understand their new role and to exercise leadership. They conclude that formal training programmes will enable better knowledge and awareness of challenges but that

> 'No amount of experience or preparation – whether through formal training or through experience as a deputy – can provide a sufficient induction to what is a demanding and complex job. A major and essential part of learning to be a headteacher is acquired through living the experience. This has to be so. There are few, if any, shortcuts; and the most valuable learning is bound to take place through socialization while in the role.'

<div align="right">Weindling and Dimmock, 2006: 338</div>

This 'socialization while in the role' is further analysed by Crow (2006, 2007). In addition to getting to know issues specific to the school and its context, which Crow terms 'organisational socialisation' or 'how things are done here' (Crow, 2007: 318), he also identifies the importance of 'personal socialisation', a process during which the new headteacher assumes a new identity as he or she adopts the new role. Crow argues that the beliefs, values and attitudes of novice headteachers are critical in assuring successful personal socialisation in an increasingly complex and challenging context of external change, and that preparation programmes should address the need for learning that will develop values and dispositions to enable successful role-identity change.

Weindling and Dimmock suggested that the headteacher must be in post before the learning required for effective organisational and personal socialisation can take place, a point also supported by Daresh and Male (2000), who note that the 'culture shock' of taking on a headship role and assuming a new identity was not affected by the preparation and training received beforehand. However, Browne-Ferrigno's (2003) study considered the changes in participants on a principal preparation programme in the US as they moved towards, and in one case into principalship, and found that the process of role-identity change can begin as aspiring principals prepare for the role.

What did studies prior to 2007 tell us about the effectiveness of support for new heads?

Hobson et al's (2003) study also sought evidence of the effectiveness of support strategies for new heads. They were able to locate little evidence of the effectiveness of such support but found, as did Daresh and Male (2000), that support networks and mentoring were frequently mentioned. The importance of ensuring that support provision is flexible, individualised and negotiable was also a key finding from their review of the literature.

A large-scale study of new headteachers in England in 2003-04 sought their personal perspectives on what was needed in terms of professional development support (Holligan et al, 2006). Questionnaires were sent to all headteachers taking up their post in the course of the year and the conclusions of the study are based on responses to these (365 questionnaires were returned from the 795 distributed) and on 10 detailed case studies. At the time of the research, most of the newly appointed heads had completed NPQH and many had also taken part in the Headship Induction Programme (HIP). The most useful aspects of NPQH were found to be opportunities for networking and the strong focus on leadership, with several different practical items, such as finance and budget management, human resources (HR) and legal issues, given as development needs. Participants recorded high levels of confidence in relation to strategic leadership and the leading of teaching and learning in their schools, with lower levels of confidence in relation to 'dealing with ineffective staff', 'managing budgets' and 'transforming the school workforce'. Contextual policy issues current at that time included implementation of the national agreement between the then government and unions to reduce workload and raise standards (TDA, 2003) and changes to responsibility allowances for teachers (DfE, 2010). The need for individualised support and advice that could respond to wide variations in context, background and changing development needs was a key finding from the research.

Mentoring emerged as one of the most mentioned aspects of support in Hobson et al's 2003 review of literature. Focusing on this issue, Hobson and Sharp (2005) reported on findings from a systematic review of international research on the mentoring of new headteachers and other leaders, covering all publications published in English. Although they were able to report that programmes of mentoring for new heads have been effective, they commented that there was a lack of tangible or consistent evidence on the benefits of such programmes.

What more have we learned since 2007?

More recent studies have continued to provide evidence consistent with the themes identified above. Research and evaluation into pre-service and in-service leadership development programmes in the US (Darling-Hammond et al, 2007; US Dept of Education, 2004) shows that there are common factors associated with effective programmes. Studies of 14 exemplary programmes (10 pre-service and 4 in-service) in the US (5 of the schemes had 1-year internships like the National College's Future Leaders programme) found a number of key factors stood out. The exemplary programmes were found to have:

— a powerful, guiding vision for the scheme

— effective recruitment strategies

— rigorous selection procedures

— a training programme focused on teaching and learning and school improvement

— instructional design based on adult learning theory and using problem-based learning, case studies etc

— intensive and highly focused induction experience at the beginning

— a cohort structure that encouraged collaboration and mutual support

— lengthy school-based internships (ideally one year) doing meaningful leadership work

— regular support from expert coaches and mentors

— programme champions who promote its values and drive the scheme

More recently, individual studies have investigated, through case studies, the extent to which newly appointed headteachers feel prepared for their post in different countries and school systems (eg, Kelly and Saunders, 2010; Walker and Dimmock, 2008; Cooner et al, 2008, Bush and Oduro, 2006; Cheung and Walker 2006; Wong, 2004). As well as individual studies, a major development in taking forward research into early headship and the preparation for this was the formation of the International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP) network which involves researchers and recently appointed principals from Australia, Canada, England, Germany, Jamaica, Mexico, New Zealand, Scotland, South Africa, Tanzania, Turkey, the US and China. Formed in 2006, the network's members aim to contribute towards answering their key research question: 'How useful are principal preparation programs to novice principals?' (ISPP, 2010). Further detail of the development work of the network will be described in forthcoming work by Cowie and Crawford.

Papers published by members of this network have further extended the range of case study evidence. The following quote from one of these papers (Mentz et al, 2010) is typical of the findings from international studies and illustrates their consistency:

'In this subproject of the International Study of Principal Preparation that covers the pre-appointment preparation of principals, two groups of novice and relatively inexperienced principals were involved in discussions about their own pre-appointment preparation as principals. A group of Canadian and South African principals shared their views in telephone and online discussions. It emerged that although their contexts differed considerably, they agreed on many points, including the inadequacy of their own preparation to provide them with all the skills they wanted, their appreciation of informal preparation (such as mentoring) and an understanding of the significant role of values in their work. The cross-cultural dialogue among the principals confirmed much of the standard view on principalship

but showed, not surprisingly, that context is very important in the work of school leaders. That is, it is possible to speak of principals' pre-appointment preparation in general terms, but it is a construct that depends on its setting.'

Mentz et al, 2010: 155

Further evidence for categorisation of the context-related socialisation challenges of new headship into 'organisational', 'professional' and 'personal' (Crow, 2006, 2007) also emerges from ISPP research. For example, Nelson et al's (2008) study into beginning principals in Texas used a terminology of 'systemworld' and 'lifeworld' to capture these themes in their findings, concluding on the need to support new principals in negotiating the tensions between the two in order for them to maintain a focus on instructional leadership.

Perhaps surprisingly, case study evidence from countries in which there is no established preparation programme for aspiring headteachers shows that the challenges faced by new heads are not only consistent with those found in earlier studies but also continue to be very similar to those in countries with well-established preparation programmes. Two examples from the range provided through ISPP members are given below to illustrate this point.

Working with novice headteachers in Western Australia, which at the time of the study did not have a headteacher preparation programme, Clarke et al (2011) categorise the key challenges faced into those of 'dealing with place', 'dealing with people', 'dealing with system' and 'dealing with self'. They found that the aspects of work considered most challenging were: managing paperwork (system), dealing with poorly performing staff (people), achieving a work life balance (self) and balancing system imperatives with local needs (system). Aspects considered to be the least challenging were: working with parents (people) and acquiring appropriate resources (system). They felt least well prepared for dealing with poorly performing staff and balancing system imperatives.

Cowie and Crawford (2008), in their study of five new headteachers in Scotland, which in the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) has a well-developed preparation programme, likewise found that incidents and issues identified by the principals were similar to those in earlier studies, citing those by Hobson et al (2003) and Holligan et al (2006), discussed above. Issues were found to relate to the context in which principals found themselves, such as those arising from the legacy of the previous head, those involving relationships, such as dealing with ineffective staff, practical matters such as budget and those arising from coping with a multiplicity of tasks and time management.

Whilst replicating findings of earlier research in relation to the challenges faced by new headteachers, recent research does provide additional insight into the effectiveness of preparation and support strategies that aim to meet the need for both individualised and context-specific support.

Cowie and Crawford's work also provides clear evidence that the preparatory experiences, including SQH, had made a difference to the headteachers that they studied (Cowie and Crawford, forthcoming). They adopted a three-phase approach to their research, interviewing headteachers at the end of their first year and again between two and two and a half years later. In between the interviews, headteachers completed monthly logs.

The first round of interviews at the end of the first year in post helped to identify other significant aspects of successful preparation. Examples included the importance of being talent spotted and given opportunities to take on responsibilities to broaden leadership experience, together with promotion, including for some an acting headship role. Cowie and Crawford highlight the significance of such experiences, not simply for the opportunity to gain further technical expertise, but more importantly to increase confidence and self-belief, in other words, to begin role-identity change by enabling them to begin to see themselves entering a headteacher role. The learning identified as most helpful during the preparation programme included intellectually challenging elements that developed reflective practice and integration of theory, values, beliefs and practice. These new heads had been able to assume the role identity of a head without the culture shock and loss of confidence reported in earlier work (Daresh and Male, 2000). The logs completed by these new headteachers show a relentless, complex and emotionally demanding workload, but Cowie and Crawford found that this was managed and the headteachers' reports that SQH had indeed helped them cope with the demands of the job was exemplified through a review of critical incidents recorded in the logs.

Furthermore, the heads continued to be mindful, in the face of the familiar challenges of early headship discussed above, of a longer term strategic perspective which laid the foundations for strategic change and improvement in the coming years.

Kelly and Saunders' (2010) study of three new headteachers in England also affords an encouraging picture of the early stages of headship. This indicates that the participants in their study were well prepared to overcome the initial shock in relation to the relentless demands of dealing with complex issues and the consequent implications for time management and work-life balance. Using a frame which references the professional, organisational and personal socialisation of the headteachers into their new role, Kelly and Saunders identified two stages which develop in the year following appointment and beyond. 'Entry, orientation and immersion' is the initial stage in which a high proportion of time is spent in understanding the school context and inherited culture and securing initial acceptance and credibility. In this phase new heads established relationships and alliances, for example in networks with other heads, to secure support for changes. The subsequent stage of 'control and action' begins to consolidate the professional identity of the headteacher in his or her new role with increasing confidence and self-awareness and acceptance of the need for 'control'. In this period, more time is spent on leading and managing changes within their schools. Gabarro's older model of how new leaders take charge or 'take control' is also helpful and used in the next section to make sense of the research (Gabarro, 1987).

Several recent studies have confirmed the effectiveness of mentoring support during preparation and induction (Kelly and Saunders, 2010; Scott, 2010; Searby, 2010; Silver et al, 2009) thus providing the tangible evidence missing at the time of Hobson and Sharp's (2005) review. The personalised and context-specific nature of this type of support are cited by new principals as being most important. Silver et al's (2010) evaluation is of a 'coaching', as contrasted with a 'mentoring' relationship, supported for the first three years of new principalship in a mid-Western state in the US. Support provided was practical, for example, answering questions or, in one case, accompanying a new principal on a classroom walkthrough to build confidence. Silver et al suggest that this type of coaching support is particularly important in the early stage of principalship and should lead to a mentoring relationship in order to encourage reflective dialogue at a later stage. The Canadian mentoring programme for new principals evaluated by Scott (2010) as part of the ISPP research also found that it was the informal, personalised, timely and practical elements of support that were found most valuable to new principals. Moral support and encouragement in facing challenging situations, for example with parents and staff members, were very highly valued. In both of these recent, detailed evaluations, which sought views from both mentors and mentees, a good match between an experienced principal to the context, needs and personality of the new principal was found to be extremely important. When this was achieved, a close personal relationship and frequent communication were established.

John MacBeath, in an overview of leadership development programmes in England and Scotland (MacBeath, 2011), is clear on the benefits of coaching and mentoring, both to the individual and to school improvement, citing evaluation evidence from both countries to support this claim. He provides welcome clarity about what is meant:

'Whatever the model and whatever the terminology, headteachers benefit from a listening ear, a trusted source, and a degree of challenge which pushes them beyond their comfort zone to a new level of awareness and self-confidence. This does not describe, however, someone who is simply a good ally and sympathiser, but someone who brings a high level of skill in listening to content, feeling and meaning, and with that, the connoisseurship insight able to offer a well judged degree of challenge.'

MacBeath, 2011:118

Evidence for the benefits of project work to give real-life insights into headship as part of preparation has also been reinforced in recent studies. Sherman (2008) reported on the use of an approach in Canada in which participants were asked to visualise and work through the details of a potentially negative situation in their own school. The exercise was to write a detailed scenario and actions which gave a successful outcome. In the two cases described, these scenarios were later worked through in practice because the participants were promoted to the principalship in their own schools. When these principals were interviewed six months after taking up post, both found that the exercise had helped boost their confidence and resolve in taking action on difficult issues (both involved working with challenging staff), although progress had not been as

rapid as they had envisaged. The authors suggest that the technique may be a useful element of preparation programmes, although they comment that the situation was unusual in that the principals had been promoted in their own school and so already had a very good understanding of the issues and culture of the school.

In New Zealand, Pigott-Irvine (2011) collected data from 120 aspiring principals working on a year-long project element of the National Aspiring Principal Pilot (NAPP) during 2008/09, a programme which was based on the Kiwi Leadership for Principals (KLP) (Ministry of Education, 2008). The intention of the project, for which participants were provided with mentor support, was to provide realistic experience of the organisational issues that they were likely to face when they themselves took up a principalship. When initial concerns about lack of clarity and problems of scope had been resolved, evaluation comments were positive, with recognised benefits to both the participants and their schools.

The value of professional networks to enhance the 'significant relationships with a wide network of fellow professionals' (West-Burnham, 2009: 3), which West-Burnham identifies as one of the factors that distinguishes outstanding heads is also mentioned in other recent research on new headteachers (Walker and Dimmock, 2008). The characteristics of an effective network is described in some detail by Cowie and Crawford (forthcoming). In describing the networks formed by new principals during their participation in the Scottish Qualification for Headship (SQH) and maintained as they moved into headship positions, they say:

> 'Through collaborative activity and networking with colleagues, a sense of trust appears to have been developed which allows the new principals to share and learn from each other's experience... These networks appear to have developed into... a conduit through which new learning is developed and knowledge is shared... more than a support group.'

<div align="right">Cowie and Crawford, forthcoming</div>

The research also found, however, that the learning potential of this network formed in the preparation phase had not been sustained to the later phases of their ongoing project (Cowie and Crawford, forthcoming).

What does the day-to-day life of a newly appointed headteacher look and feel like?

The National College report A life in the day of a headteacher (Bristow, Ireson and Coleman, 2007), based on a sample of 34 heads, examined the working lives and practices of headteachers in England. The study focused particularly on issues of wellbeing, work life balance, stress and job satisfaction for both new and experienced leaders. Participants in the study were asked to complete a journal over a period of two weeks, and were both observed at work and interviewed by members of the research team. Long hours of demanding, varied and complex work were completed by the heads in the course of this study, confirming the commonly held view of headship as pressured, highly accountable and stressful. A relatively small amount of time was devoted to strategic leadership, with an analysis of activities showing that only seven per cent, on average, of headteachers' time was directly related to this. Administration (broadly defined), meetings with external stakeholders (including for example network meetings and time with governors) and management tasks accounted for much of heads' time.

The deeply held, children-centred values and commitment of headteachers were revealed very strongly in this study as they were in West-Burnham's 2009 study of outstanding leaders. These were revealed both when they were asked about the main sources of satisfaction in the job and what sustained them through difficult periods, thus echoing Crow's (2006, 2007) earlier remarks about the importance of developing the beliefs, values and attitudes of novice headteachers to assure successful personal socialisation in an increasingly complex and challenging context of external change. External factors, such as the high levels of bureaucracy and, in particular, high accountability through examination league tables and Ofsted inspections, were the aspects of the work that headteachers in Bristow et al's study most wanted to change.

Bristow et al's report included a literature review of earlier research which had focused on the issues of wellbeing, work life balance, stress and job satisfaction. As well as noting a limited amount of earlier evidence relevant to headteachers in general, their review revealed a gap in knowledge about these issues specifically in relation to those new in post. Although A life in the day of a headteacher provides valuable insight in relation to headteachers overall, the impact of these factors on the initial stages of headship was

not determined.

A life in the week of a headteacher forms part of the comprehensive research study commissioned by the Scottish government into the recruitment and retention of headteachers (MacBeath et al, 2009). To inform the report, serving headteachers of all levels of experience were surveyed and interviewed and within the report is a description of a typical working week and detailed information on areas discussed in the earlier English study. MacBeath et al's findings replicate those of Bristow et al (2007), giving a similar picture of the relentless nature of the workload, the way in which time was spent and the deep commitment to and satisfaction in making a difference to children which sustained headteachers. The report also noted the impact of external factors on both stress and workload and, in a later piece, MacBeath (2011) succinctly summarises the challenges resulting from externally imposed change in both Scotland and in England:

'The unremitting nature of change was also a prevailing theme. It was less the imperative of change that sapped energy and enthusiasm but the source of change, driven by external demands, undermining the latitude and discretion of headteachers to exercise the leadership talents for which they were recruited. Instead many described themselves as in compliant managerial roles, delivering agendas decided elsewhere but for which they were nonetheless held to account.'

MacBeath 2011: 107

The data collection methods of many recent case studies, including those of the ISPP, point to a wealth of detailed evidence which might provide further insight into the typical day, the nature of the problems faced and specific details of how these are addressed. For example, 'dealing with ineffective staff' is a challenge that has been and which continues to be faced by new and experienced heads in all contexts and cultures and whether or not preparation programmes, induction support or continuing professional development (CPD) is available. What is lacking in the published literature reviewed for this report is a detailed picture of the problems presented by ineffective staff that heads must deal with and how these are tackled, successfully or otherwise. If such detail were available, this might help to suggest the impact that training and support can provide and, importantly, how it might be improved.

A rare and refreshing example of detailed and specific evidence is provided by Terry Quong (2006) from Western Australia. Appointed as a primary school principal in January 2004, Quong considered research about the issues for new principals, for example that of Hobson et al (2003) discussed above. However, he found that:

'While these were interesting to me... they seemed uninformative... they did not reflect in any but the most general way the problems that have most concerned me in my first years as a principal and in developing my leadership in the first year of my job.'

Quong, 2006: 377

Describing his own approach to learning during his first year in post, with the stated hope that his story might benefit others new to principalship, Quong kept a detailed daily journal which focused on the problems with which he engaged. To support his reflection he followed an action learning model of planning, implementation and review, based on his reading of Martin and Robertson (2003). A crucial part of his learning process was the formation of a 'tripod', a formal learning arrangement with two experienced principal colleagues with whom he discussed his plans, problems and actions and from whom he received constructive feedback. Towards the end of his first year, he interviewed six other novice primary school principals in similar contexts, partly to see whether their experiences were the same, but also with the specific intention of building a network with others in similar circumstances for ongoing support as their experience of principalship developed. From these colleagues, he collected additional lists of specific and challenging problems faced. As illustration, from his own list, are:

'What are we going to do about Aaron (a high needs student with Asperger's syndrome)? What do we do to build student enrolments? We need ten more to keep a teacher. What am I to do with the school administrator who has been at the school for many years and refuses to accept change to front office procedures?'

Rather than analysing the problems into different categories (Clarke et al, 2010), Quong concluded that, as new leaders keen to make a difference, it was most useful to simplify issues faced to a common, complex problem: 'when to act and when not to act' (Quong, 2006: 382). As well as prioritising issues to be addressed, the novice leader needs to judge the timing of key decisions and actions to be tackled in the first year and balance the risks of moving too quickly or too slowly. Achieving that balance is, Quong suggests, 'among the beginning principal's most stressful dilemmas' and that this was, in his own case, addressed through the deliberately reflective framework he developed and used, in conjunction with his regular discussions with two experienced colleagues in the learning tripod.

A further detailed picture of how and when a new leader takes day-to-day action to address challenging issues in his or her school is provided by Duke and Salmonowicz (2010). Focusing not on entrants to principalship but on the first year of a 'turnaround principal', trained and appointed to make rapid improvement in a low-performing, urban school in Virginia, their study identifies and analyses decisions made by this principal to address the three top priorities for improving the school. Interestingly, the definition they use of a decision as 'a conscious choice made after consideration of two or more alternatives' (Duke and Salmonowicz, 2010: 38) is not dissimilar to Quong's simplification, 'when to act and when not to act' and, indeed, the authors go on to say:

'In some cases, the decision involved a choice between acting and not acting. In other cases, a variety of possibilities were [sic] considered.'

Duke and Salmonowicz, 2010: 38

Through monthly interviews throughout the first year of the principalship, researchers compiled and analysed in detail a list of 49 distinct decisions, the consequences following each decision and what could be learned from each about school improvement. Their conclusion recommends that a similar approach is used to guide all beginning principals:

'It is the responsibility of those who prepare principals, especially principals charged with turning around low-performing schools, to do whatever they can to promote sound decision-making. One step in this process is to increase understanding of the specific kinds of decisions principals like Wilma Williams must make in the course of addressing the conditions inhibiting student success. In addition, prospective principals need guidance in 'reading' the local context in which they are expected to lead and in anticipating the consequences of their decisions.'

Duke and Salmonowicz, 2010: 57

Forms of support

Although the value of mentoring support now seems well established, there is still a relative lack of clarity from the literature about whether the practical or coaching elements are more or less significant than the support for reflection within the stages of early headship. Woods et al's (2009) survey evidence covering the perceived CPD needs of new and experienced heads in Scotland found that a need for more time and opportunities for reflection was reiterated throughout their responses. New headteachers in their survey referred more to technical challenges, developing and maintaining confidence, and improved support and information. Established headteachers particularly emphasised the value of sabbaticals, secondments and time for reflection.

The relationship between mentor and mentee has been identified as important to effectiveness by Scott (2010), but there is little detail about how matches of appropriate pairings are optimally formed and how a good working relationship is best established and maintained. The selection of mentors and preparation of both mentor and mentees also merit further investigation.

Although networks are mentioned frequently throughout the literature on headship preparation and support, there remains a lack of clarity about how aspiring or new heads can be assured that they have access to and are socialised into effective support networks. MacBeath et al (2009) report the importance of supportive

networks and regular engagement with other headteachers. However, several heads interviewed as part of this extensive research in Scotland did not have access to such activities and 'it was these heads that talked with deep feeling about the isolation they experienced in their roles' (MacBeath et al, 2009:27). Recent developments in England, such as extended schools clusters and the partnerships formed as part of City Challenge have increased the range of peer networks available to headteachers, but little is known about the influence of these networks in supporting new headteachers.

The 2011 publication Lessons Learned from London (London Challenge, 2011) attempts to evaluate the impact of London Challenge's Moving to New Headship (M2NH) programme, which is part of the London Leadership Strategy. This gives an entitlement of coaching support to all new heads for their first four terms of headship. It notes that 'the mentor heads are all individually matched and support is tailored to the needs of the mentee and reflects the context of their school' (London Challenge, 2011: 35). Half-termly development sessions are held for the mentor heads and each term the mentee and mentor heads meet as a larger group 'and through structured discussion and informal networking, leadership development opportunities are provided' (ibid, 36). The feedback from new heads on the programme has been very positive and they note their gains in confidence and their application of improved understanding of their schools before implementing changes. They also report 'gaining the objectivity and insight they need to assess the potential impact of these changes and to minimise the potential for making mistakes' (London Challenge, 2011: 36). The evaluation of the programme also reports the benefits accrued for the coaches and mentors on the programme. The report notes:

'Over 90 London colleagues in a new headship have been involved with 40 experienced heads providing support. The feedback is overwhelmingly positive and the bedrock of headship is being strengthened continually.'

London Challenge, 2011: 36

The implications of the above literature review are further considered in part D of this report, which addresses the implications of the findings from the current research for leadership and leadership development. It also notes how the reconfigured and newly designed NPQH addresses some of the issues raised in the reviewed literature (eg, mentoring and the role of the professional partner).

Part C: Key findings

In this section of the report consideration is given to the main research findings especially in relation to leadership challenges faced by the new heads, leadership development and training, and preparation, support and induction for newly appointed headteachers. Also considered is the practice of headship and the views of new heads on NPQH and teaching schools. The implications of the main findings for school leaders and the National College are considered in part D.

Leadership challenges faced by new heads

The literature review in part B has shown a consistent picture of the experiences of new heads regardless of location (in the UK or overseas) and regardless of context. Reading and understanding context are crucial but the same sets of issues reported in the literature were found, perhaps unsurprisingly, among the heads involved in this research. The main challenges experienced by newly appointed heads were:

— feelings of professional isolation and loneliness

— managing staff who thought the school was better than it actually was

— inaccurate inspection judgements

— improving teaching and learning

— improving pupil progress and raising standards at a rapid pace

— effecting improvements rapidly

— developing staff, especially in preparation for change

— developing resilience in coping with emotional and traumatic situations

— dealing with multiple tasks, and managing time and priorities

— managing the school budget, especially those in deficit

— dealing with ineffective staff

— implementing initiatives

— restructuring staffing, especially of the leadership team

— dealing with the legacy of the previous head

— developing a culture of accountability

— engaging governors and parents for greater impact

— problems with school buildings and site management

It is noteworthy that many of the above challenges might be seen as generic rather than specific to an urban setting, and issues found in the literature review often related to the context in which the new heads found themselves. In the urban schools involved in this research, the context was often one where there was a need for rapid improvement and change. Challenges in city schools frequently involved relationships, such as dealing with ineffective staff or more practical matters such as budgets and financial planning and those arising from coping with a multiplicity of tasks and managing time effectively. All headteachers, but perhaps urban heads more than others, need to demonstrate the qualities of resilience, persistence and emotional and contextual intelligence (see also Riley and West-Burnham's 2004 study of educational leadership in London).

As the case studies (part E) and vignettes (part F) show in detail, all the above matters were raised by the heads involved in the research albeit to varying degrees. For many of the new heads they were taking up headships where there was a need for the school to raise levels of attainment and for change to be introduced, be it at curriculum, pedagogic or systems level. Almost all the heads made reference to issues concerning teaching and learning and the need to raise the quality of teaching in order to raise standards and meet the expectations of inspectors. New heads were only too aware that without increasing or maintaining standards, their jobs were on the line – they were very conscious of the high stakes accountability culture in which they operated, especially those who had taken over failing schools or those in an inspection category.

What was as much an issue for the new heads was the speed of change and the manner in which it was introduced. How quickly would they be able to bring about these much-needed changes? In the current context of high stakes accountability and ongoing reform, just how long should they take to implement? These decisions were often tempered by the competence and capability of existing staff, especially those in leadership positions, and the possibility of making new appointments especially to the senior leadership team. Advice was sought from a variety of sources but reading the context of the school and its capacity for change and improvement were key.

For example, the interview with Tim, an experienced or more senior head (SH), noted how it had taken him longer than expected to accomplish the things he had planned to do. He had found that reshaping the leadership team, and improving the progress of children and the quality of teaching and learning were more difficult and lengthier tasks than originally expected. On coming into the post he had soon realised that 'it is a marathon not a sprint... it doesn't happen like that, you can't move a school that quickly'. Some of the things he started to put in place in the first year are only beginning to be complete several years later.

Several headteachers noted how hard it was working with a group of staff whom they did not yet know well enough to be able to distribute leadership and allocate responsibilities. The new heads wished to share and distribute leadership but were not yet in a strong position to do so. As a result, those early days were much harder and more demanding for some than expected. The heads were finding themselves responsible for virtually everything, a situation which they hoped was only temporary as they worked towards flatter, more distributed forms of leadership. As one head noted:

> "We are talking a lot about distributed leadership with the staff. It is about recognising that the headteacher cannot do it all and that other people need to be encouraged to share responsibility."

Headteacher

Similarly Nina, a new head (NH) interviewed in case study 6, noted that her priority for the following year was to make sure the senior team had the capacity to carry out its own strategic role through a distributed leadership approach, which she hoped would be made possible through planned new appointments. However, she wanted to go through this first yearly cycle to see how things worked and would then pass on and delegate to other colleagues from the following year onwards.

Taking charge

At this point it is worth referring to the literature about how new leaders are said to manage their new situations and take control. There is a lot of similarity with the research heads' experiences outlined in the case studies and vignettes and Gabarro's (1987) theory of succession management. Nearly 25 years ago Gabarro conducted research on senior management successions in business and industry in the US and Europe (3 of his 17 case studies were in the UK), examining the activities and problems facing new managers after they take up post. He calls this process 'taking charge' or establishing mastery and influence in a new assignment. By mastery, he means:

'Acquiring a grounded understanding of the organisation, its tasks, people, environment, and problems. By influence, I mean having an impact on the organisation, its structure, practices, and performance. The process begins when a manager starts a new assignment and ends when he or she has mastered it in sufficient depth to be managing the organisation as efficiently as the resources, constraints, and the manager's own ability allow.'

Gabarro, 1987

Gabarro characterised 'taking charge' as a series of five predictable, chronological stages of learning and action. The timings cover a three-year period and are approximate but would cover all the 12 heads involved in the current research. The new heads were still experiencing the first two stages whilst the more experienced heads were in the latter stages. The five stages are:

1. **Taking hold (the first 6 months)**

This period involves intense learning as the new leader develops a cognitive map of the organisation using processes of orientation, evaluation (an assessment of staff, understanding where the problems lie) and establishing priorities. 'Corrective' actions are taken to address emerging problems and 'turnaround' actions to deal with urgent problems.

2. **Immersion (6–12 months)**

This very important period of deeper learning and diagnosis involves relatively little organisational change activity. Leaders develop a much better understanding of the basic issues and underlying problems. They often question more sharply if they have the right people in place as they understand their strengths and weaknesses.

3. **Reshaping (12–21 months)**

This is a time of major change, organisational reconfiguration and implementation. The transition to reshaping often involves the use of task groups and external consultants.

4. **Consolidation (21–27 months)**

Earlier changes are consolidated. Learning and diagnosis tend to be evaluative. The manager and key colleagues assess the consequences and unanticipated problems of earlier changes and take corrective actions.

5. **Refinement (27–36 months)**

This is a period of fine-tuning with relatively little major additional learning. The organisational leaders had 'taken charge', were no longer new and had either established their credibility and powerbase, or had not. This relative calm could be disturbed by changes in the external world (cited in Earley and Weindling, 2004: 26-27).

Gabarro found that the organisational changes managers/leaders made as they worked through these stages characteristically occurred in three waves: the first wave occurs during the taking-hold stage; the second, and typically largest, during the reshaping stage, and the last and smallest during the consolidation stage.

The main leadership challenge for many of the new heads in the current study was to identify the best time to introduce change, given that much change was often seen as necessary and/or urgent and the schools were operating in a context of ongoing and major educational reform, especially from central government and its agencies, such as Ofsted.

These stage and wave patterns, Gabarro suggests, are found in successful transitions regardless of the kind of succession (insider versus outsider; turnaround versus non-turnaround cases), the industry of the organisation involved (public or private), or the leader/manager's prior functional background or speciality. This is an important finding and it is a model of leadership succession that can usefully be applied to the heads involved in the current project as their headships evolve over time. Further research would help to determine whether Gabarro's timeframe of stages is still appropriate in the light of heads in England operating in the high stakes accountability context of education in the 2010s.

Gabarro's stage model of learning and action also has important implications for leadership preparation because no matter how good the preparation programmes and the new heads' prior experience, a major transition occurs when a school leader takes on a new formal leadership role that requires tailored responses to that particular situation. As Earley and Weindling have consequently argued:

'Fixation on pre- or post-appointment training, formal and informal processes, and the curricula of programmes leaves new school leaders wanting. More attention to the induction or taking-charge stage is needed, because it always is problematic and requires careful analysis and action in situ.'

Earley and Weindling, 2004: 22

The role of the recently introduced Head Start programme is important here, as is the professional partner role associated with NPQH. The literature review also concluded that formal training programmes will enable better knowledge and awareness of challenges – and our urban heads had no shortage of challenges (see above and as documented in the case studies and vignettes), but as Weindling and Dimmock note:

'No amount of experience or preparation – whether through formal training or through experience as a deputy – can provide a sufficient induction to what is a demanding and complex job. A major and essential part of learning to be a headteacher is acquired through living the experience. This has to be so. There are few, if any, shortcuts; and the most valuable learning is bound to take place through socialization while in the role.'

Weindling and Dimmock, 2006: 338

This may be the case and this point will be revisited, but the experiences as a deputy and formal training prior to taking on the role, such as NPQH, can give new heads a head start and better prepare them for taking charge and developing a cognitive map of the organisation.

Preparation

For the heads involved in the current study there was no shortage of reference to the kind of rounded learning experiences they had had in their previous posts and to the heads they had worked with previously who were concerned with their professional and career development and helped prepare them for headship by providing a range of experiences and stretch assignments. Individuals had the benefit of gaining a wealth of experience through working in different settings (eg, different schools, the local authority) and/or working for what Collins (2001) calls 'level 5' leaders.

At this point it is helpful to consider the experiences of some of the new heads involved in the research and their views on their preparation for headship and the support they received during Gabarro's all-important 'taking hold' and 'immersion' stages. Two of our experienced headteacher respondents said this of their preparation:

"Most important for my own preparation was my experience of senior management as assistant head teacher and deputy headteacher in two schools (five years in total). This has been the most effective preparation, particularly in developing my intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences and skills."

Experienced headteacher

"[Given my range of previous experiences]... I don't think anything else could have prepared me for headship, other than some work around finance, managing deficit budgets! Perhaps some more work around governance - these were the two areas where I had the least experience."

Experienced headteacher

There was a view that it would be difficult to know how anyone could predict what they would meet in their first year of headship and whether any programme, NPQH included, could be sufficiently bespoke to meet the new heads' needs. Interestingly heads could be said to arrive at a different understanding of preparedness once they are actually in post (Earley et al, 2002).

Perhaps the most common feature of headship was never knowing what's going to come in through the door and how one could prepare 'to the nth degree' but without a guarantee of success. One of the experienced heads commented:

> "Day one was scary. I felt apprehensive but strangely composed. I made sure I was confident and humorous with staff. I worked hard at establishing relationships. I felt as mentally prepared as I could be. I can't think of anything that would have made me feel even more prepared. When you start a headship you're on your own, it's up to you – you're the new person – you need to establish yourself."

Experienced headteacher

However, there are degrees of preparedness. Elaine, a new head (Case study 1), considered that her experience as a deputy in three different schools, in different local authorities and working under three different heads had ensured she had gained good leadership and management knowledge and skills across the range required for headship, as well as a broad expertise in the varied needs encountered in special schools. She said: 'working in my previous roles, there wasn't a lot I hadn't done' and the heads she had worked under had all seen it as part of their role to develop the deputy. Working with her previous head on areas such as finance and premises had enabled her to learn 'a massive amount' and to gain confidence in unfamiliar areas of work. Although she had been proactive in taking opportunities to learn and develop throughout her career, she commented that:

> "It's the people who prepare you the most. I've been lucky in that, by and large, I've worked with people who wanted to share. Sometimes you can be blocked – that didn't happen to me."

New headteacher

For Matthew, another new head (Case study 2), his experience as a deputy in two different schools, in different local authorities and working under three different heads, together with a higher degree, NPQH and experience of several Ofsted inspections had ensured good knowledge and skills across the range required for headship. The various headteachers had all, in different ways, been influential in his development as a senior leader.

Similarly, Ann, a new head (Case study 4), noted that by far the best preparation for headship had been working closely with her previous headteacher. She spoke of learning through stretch assignments, the opportunity to lead day-to-day management of the school and managing change in the face of resistance as all proving invaluable. She compared the encouragement and freedom to learn and develop under that headteacher to her other headteachers who had been more directive and with whom she had learnt less, but she also noted that the freedom and accountability in which she had developed had not been beneficial to all of her colleagues. She clearly and reflectively drew on this prior experience in her headship, from leading whole-school curriculum change to still using a system of daily folders in which longer, non-urgent tasks could be stored in the knowledge that they would be revisited.

Experiences outside the school were also commented on. New head Rose (Case study 5) found her experience as an AST very useful preparation as the outreach role required her to manage change in many different schools and work with a variety of people. New heads Nina (Case study 6) and Matthew (Case study 2) also spoke of their time working in a local authority role as an inspector or adviser and the advantages that had brought.

If, as Weindling and Dimmock (2006) argue, the most valuable learning takes place through socialisation while in the role, a better understanding of those initial days, weeks and months of headship, as provided by our case studies for example (which include reflective prompts), will help better prepare people for the unknown. As one experienced head said:

> "The main surprise has been the feeling that 'Nothing like doing the job, not even the acting headship could prepare you for the job'. This captured the sense of both isolation and accountability. These were recognised to be part of the role in advance but it was still a surprise when they were felt in actuality."

Experienced headteacher

Tim (SH) also noted that despite his experience as a deputy, being fully accountable now as a head and coming to terms with that had been a considerable challenge. Even Megan (SH) as an internal appointment found she wasn't prepared for the role and was surprised by the sense of being overwhelmed, isolated and accountable all at the same time.

The loneliness of headship

The loneliness that headship brings and the isolation of the role were also recognised pre-appointment but nevertheless came as a shock to some, even internal appointments, on taking up post. Despite her experiences as a deputy, Elaine, a new head, was surprised at how lonely she felt as head and how long it was taking her to get used to the sense of isolation that headship brings. This was perceived as an intrinsic part of the role, rather than being about personalities (or role incumbents): her previous head had said that 'at the beginning he felt completely alone'. Elaine had found it particularly difficult leading a school with a long-established body of staff, faced with significant externally driven change.

One new head acknowledged the sense of headship being lonely. always the leader, rarely the team member but she saw this as necessary and that being part of the school's external social life was not possible or even desirable at least at this early stage of her tenure.

In a similar vein, new head Matthew noted that regardless of his previous experience, excellent preparation and a good first day ('on day one I was OK, but there was an element of ignorance is bliss'), he was very surprised by the feeling of isolation in the role and how lonely he felt, especially during his first term. He also described 'that sense of the buck stops here – nothing can ultimately prepare you for that'. In the second term, his surprise was at the sheer relentlessness of the role and the tasks he needed to tackle.

Matthew was perplexed by his own surprise at not having thought of feeling so isolated and was also aware that this feeling was not always helped by not having a really close relationship with the deputy. Relationships developed at senior level were crucial in a number of ways but especially in providing support and helping to break down feelings of isolation and loneliness. Interestingly, several case study heads were able to appoint new deputies and in at least two cases appointed teachers from their previous schools as they knew these people and their teaching and leadership abilities. Having a close colleague who could be trusted and with whom one could be open and honest was an important feature in helping to alleviate feelings of loneliness and provide support. When a deputy head, working with three different headteachers, Matthew had experienced very positive and close working relationships but had found this to be difficult in his new role with his own deputy. This he saw as a major challenge. Although his deputy had acted as head for part of the year preceding his taking up the post and had not applied for the post, he does not feel this 'crucial' relationship' (with the deputy) and the 'team vision for the school' have yet been achieved.

The school deputy had also supported another case study head who couldn't imagine trying to deal with a welter of difficult issues without a deputy who was completely on board: 'it would be impossible'. The deputy had helped influence people in informal ways, 'swapped good cop/bad cop roles', supported the strategic direction, modelled good practice and led on improving teaching.

For new head Ann the most important contribution to her wellbeing, including overcoming feelings of isolation, was her relationship with her deputy. They shared values, could laugh at themselves or act positively in the face of pressure, which was highly therapeutic. For Rose, being able to make four key appointments to her school including a new deputy, who was the acting deputy at her previous school had helped her leadership because they knew each other well and '[the deputy] is really excellent at teaching and learning'. Rose said she didn't find headship a lonely job because she received great support from the governors and local authority and this has sustained her in difficult times with staff. Her faith and her family were also very important to her. Her attitude towards the job was best summed up in the motto on a poster in her office: 'Be friendly to everyone but nobody's friend'.

Mentors and other sources of support

When asked about the support they received in that all-important first post, the heads spoke of colleagues (especially fellow heads), mentors and coaches, networks, school improvement partners (SIPs), local authority personnel, family and friends. For example, online contributors wrote:

'I have accessed a huge amount of support from a very supportive SIP and from other headteachers, including my professional partner — different heads for different purposes. I have found colleagues are honest and empathetic and you can crib loads of ideas!'

'Fellow heads have been fantastic. The local authority's induction programme for newly appointed heads has been really useful and our school SIP has also been incredibly supportive.'

Mentoring was a very important form of support and critical friendship. Interestingly, reference was made to mentoring from a number of sources – National College (Head Start), London Leadership Strategy (M2NH), the local authority, the diocese and elsewhere.

Not all the heads involved in the study had access to mentors or coaches for a variety of reasons. For example, new head Elaine felt strongly that having a mentor in place, whose role was to provide professional and personal support would have helped her greatly. Despite her wide experience and preparation, arriving on the first day was 'a very daunting situation' but no suitable mentor with special school experience was identified through the Head Start or M2NH programme in London and her efforts to make contact with the colleagues suggested nationally were not successful. She has had to rely on personal contacts and networks. Her previous head has been supportive and it was to him that she often turned for advice and guidance.

What was deemed essential however were the skills and qualities of the individuals providing the mentoring: 'the interpersonal skills of the mentor heads need to be very high' (Will, senior head). Elaine, a new head, stressed the importance of the coach-mentor and remarked, 'You need someone who is a reflective colleague: you don't need someone who has been in the job for 20 years'. Different mentors were needed at different times for different purposes and heads spoke of requiring a range of people whom they could call on depending on the need or issue in question.

It was suggested that mentors, with relevant experience and understanding of the issues, should be available to all new headteachers which of course in theory, they are through NPQH, Head Start, professional partners and other more local schemes. How much heads were prepared to reveal in their conversations with mentors and coaches would depend on levels of confidentiality and how far their agenda was the sole agenda of the coach-mentor. Coaches were there to help fill any gaps in the new heads' professional knowledge and to offer words of advice or guidance. Where the relationship was not seen as beneficial, the new head minimised his or her time commitment to it and meetings became occasional or did not take place at all. An environment of trust where new heads could show uncertainty was essential, as were contacts for appropriate people who could match the needs of the new head.

New head Ann had no difficulty in asking for support when she needed it 'to get us back on track' and felt 'the best people to do that are those schools who had similar experiences, or a senior leadership team that has had those [problems]'.

A good example of how heads were able to draw on a range of people for support was given by new head Matthew. During the first year he was able to draw on very good relationships with a number of colleagues and regularly asked his previous head for advice on practical matters. He has a mentor (a fellow head from the borough) and a very good relationship with and support from his local authority link inspector and his SIP, whom he will continue to employ as an independent adviser. He is also a member of several networks, in particular an extended schools cluster. The local authority has provided an induction programme for new headteachers, as well as funding the mentor, and this has also led to the formation of a supportive network of headteachers in a similar position. The programme itself was helpful and stimulating; for example participants were asked to read the National College's Learning texts (Conner et al, undated) and to make a group presentation on their individual readings. Overall, Matthew felt very well supported on a range of fronts 'basically, I know a lot of heads I can ask'.

One of the new heads involved in the online discussion forum when asked where she went for support illustrated the tendency for heads to derive it from a number of sources. She wrote:

"My governors have been brilliant, they have supported and believed in me whilst still being challenging. My [Early Headship Programme] colleagues and trainers have been fantastic in providing support and ideas. My 'others' network [is] people from my NPQH and other authority networks and my SIP and people from outside education. I have had less support from the local authority but I have to say I haven't asked them either."

New headteacher

Rose (NH) similarly felt very well supported and considers that she could want for nothing more. This support comes from:

— a Head Start coach, who is head of another local church school, chosen from the NPQH website

— a longstanding mentor appointed by the local authority when Rose was an acting head, who is a retired church school head

— a new mentor who is an experienced primary head in the local authority

— a school improvement partner from the local authority

— informal contacts with many people such as the head of her first school

Networks were also important in the support and development of headteachers. These were many and varied, more real than virtual, and often maintained from the past to support them in their new headships. Different networks were used for different purposes. For example, one experienced head commented:

"I am a part of a local authority Catholic headteacher network, they are very useful in understanding how Catholic schools operate (I'm not a Catholic). This group also works collaboratively on a number of issues to do with school improvement. The school is also a part of an informal partnership with two schools, each from different boroughs, one a Catholic primary and the other an infant school. Both groups provide me and my staff with [in-service training] opportunities, sharing of resources and all pupils a chance to work together for a variety of purposes. With the current government developments, both partnerships are allowing me to explore and seek new and creative ways of establishing school-to-school improvement."

Experienced headteacher

Advice for new heads

Although respondents were not specifically asked to offer advice to new heads, several of them offered it. For example, new head Rose's advice to new headteachers was:

— You must prioritise. It's the child that's at the centre of it all.

— Make every child feel listened to.

— Don't change things too quickly – see what's working and what's not working.

— Be strategic in everything you do but you've got to be organised to be a strategic thinker.

— Give yourself time to reflect.

— Be friendly with staff, but that doesn't mean being friends with them.

— Use the most appropriate leadership style for the situation – sometimes democratic but at other times more assertive.

One of the heads involved in the online discussion forum noted the lessons she had learnt as: 'being up front and dealing with issues openly, honestly and directly with people'. She went on:

> "Praising and thanking stakeholders really makes people feel appreciated - sprinkle that positivity! Always have that vision as a touchstone and everything you do should be centred around outcomes for children (even our staff are saying this now!)."

Headteacher

Matthew (NH) felt that headship needed to change in order to increase the focus on the leadership of teaching and learning. This, he believed, could be achieved by raising the profile of the school business manager (SBM) and the SBM's responsibility for finance and for premises. He also recommended holding open meetings with parents to demonstrate that the head is accessible and interested in their views.

As good practice in preparing to take on a new headship role, he advised seizing opportunities for building knowledge and relationships in the school in the term before taking up post. Rose noted how in the half-term before she took up the post, she spent a day a week (her planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time) at the school getting to know people, discovering what needed doing and planning a strategy. She found this very valuable. She also considered that taking on a headship in the summer term was beneficial because she could use the last term of the year to bring about quick wins and get people on board before making bigger changes in the new school year. Another new head felt that a high priority should be given to an effective handover in the term preceding starting in post, with prospective headteachers able to receive comprehensive information about the school and the opportunity to build relationships with staff and with governors. Although this head made contact with governors and read documents, she felt that there should be an expectation of a proper handover before a new head takes up their post: 'There were things I wasn't told – some things should be passed on'. Time in the summer term before taking up post for meeting staff and governors was useful preparation for gaining knowledge of school systems and helped to identify key areas for change during the first year.

Governors were an area several heads referred to: the importance of engagement with governors was said to be a surprise. Some spoke of how much time they had had to spend with the governing body, which was not expected. Elaine had to spend a lot of time and energy on building relationships and working with governors. However, it has proved worthwhile and she now feels that she has a good relationship and receives good support from them.

Several heads made reference to the importance of dedicated headship time. Rose (NH) was hoping to take off half a day a term for leadership time offsite, but hadn't yet felt able to do so, whilst Matthew (NH) was keen to reinstate a regular slot, termed by the previous head as 'head's day'. Until recently he had wanted to be in school, but felt that it would now be really valuable to have reflective time away from the school environment.

The practice of headship: how a day is spent

It is known that the work of headteachers is fast paced, stressful, relentless, fragmented, involving a wide variety and range of activities ('no such thing as a typical day') and responsive to the needs of others in the school. Heads spend much of their time dealing with the administrative and managerial aspects of the job. They like to be highly visible and 'walk the talk'. However, McKinsey's recent report (2010) notes that heads in England spent 14 per cent of their time outside school on official business, 34 per cent in school but outside the office and over half of their time (52 per cent) in the head's office. Weekly logs recently completed by new headteachers in Scotland show a relentless, complex and emotionally demanding workload (MacBeath et al, 2009).

In order to gain insights into how the research heads spent their time, the researchers spent a day with each of the six case study new heads. Initially the team used the same categorisation of activities identified in A life in the day of a headteacher (Bristow et al, 2007). Bristow et al identified 54 different activities that fell within 7 broad areas of strategic leadership, management, administration, external and internal stakeholders, CPD and personnel. However, for the purposes of this research a revised categorisation was constructed which included the new category of 'teaching' and the observation data were reanalysed. This new categorisation with its 5 groups and 48 activities or sub-headings is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Categorisation of headteacher activities

Leadership

1. Strategic planning
2. Leadership meetings
3. Classroom observations
4. Self-evaluation form
5. School improvement plan
6. Walkabouts, with learning-centred interactions
7. Staff development
8. Governing body

Management

9. Staff
10. Budget and finance management
11. Behavioural issues
12. Health and safety issues
13. Premises management
14. Restructuring
15. Shortlisting and interviewing new staff
16. Assessment and examination issues
17. Walkabouts, with management-centred interactions
18. Playground and lunchtime duties
19. SEN and inclusion
20. Parents
21. Governors

Administration

22. General administration
23. Supply cover
24. Travel
25. School trips
26. Staff briefing
27. Admissions and appeals
28. Phone calls
29. Emails and post
30. Newsletter, website, etc
31. Letters
32. References

Teaching

33. Teaching
34. Assemblies
35. Clubs
36. Trips with pupils

Continuous professional development

37. Courses, programmes and conferences
38. Meeting other headteachers
39. Reading
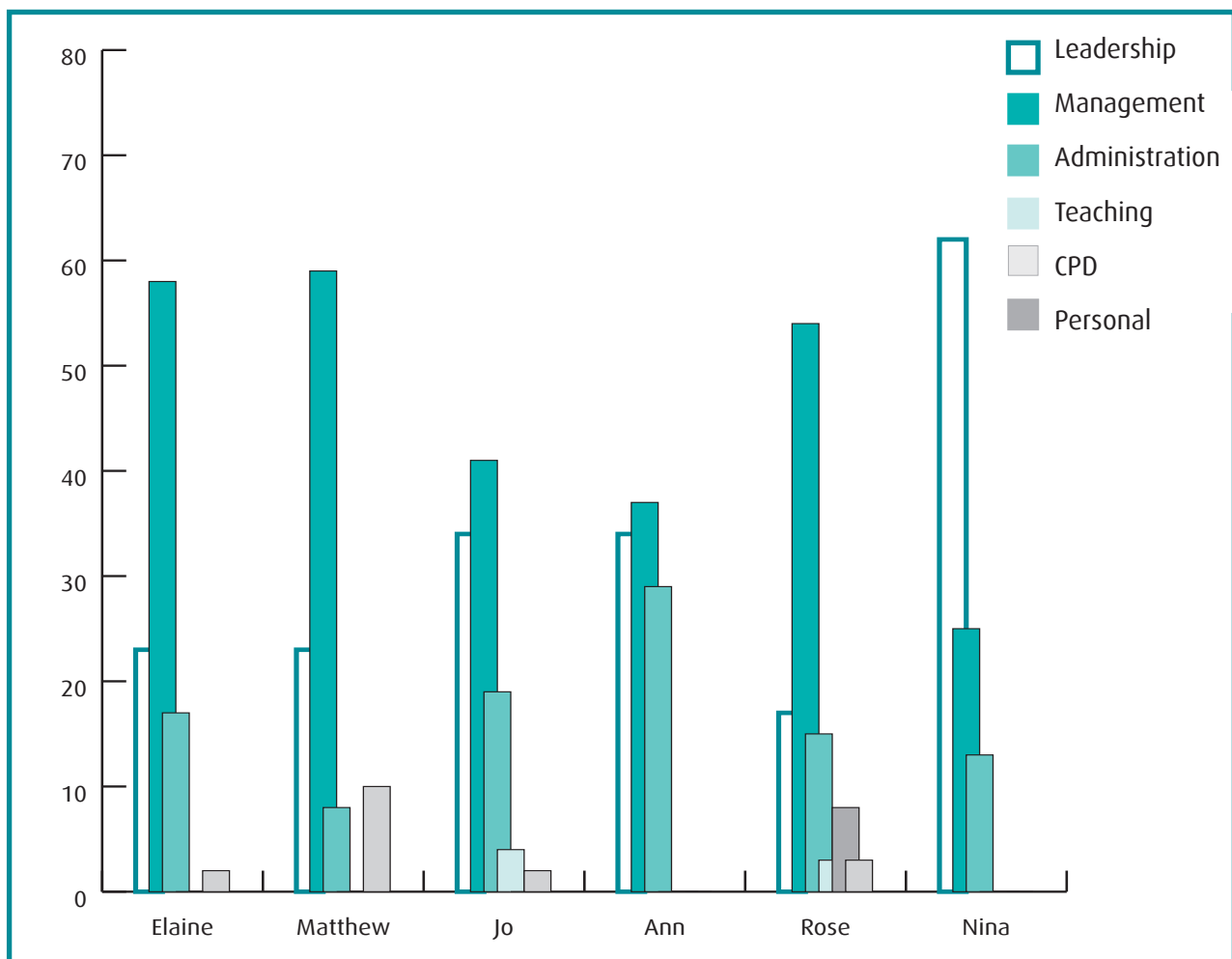40. Reflection time
41. Mentoring and coaching
42. Visitors

Personal

43. Personal time (breaks and lunch)
44. Doctor and dentist appointments
45. Family
46. Funeral
47. Travel
48. Exercise

The practice of the six case study heads was analysed and a pie chart created for each one to show the breakdown of their activities using the above categories. A typical day commenced at 7am and did not finish until the early evening with work often being taken home. The figures for the individual case studies are shown in part E of this report. When these observational data were analysed across all six new headteachers there was some variation in their practices. Table 1 shows for example that the percentage of the day spent on 'leadership' varied from 17 per cent (Rose) to 62 per cent (Nina) but this can be misleading as the case study account shows this was largely as a result of an impending Ofsted visit, so it may not have been a typical day. Averages can therefore be misleading but Table 1 shows that about one-third of the heads' day was taken up with 'leadership' with nearly one-half devoted to 'management'. These observational data are also shown in a bar and pie charts (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

	Elaine	Matthew	Jo	Ann	Rose	Nina	Composite
Leadership	23	23	34	34	17	62	32
Management	58	59	41	37	54	25	46
Administration	17	8	19	29	15	13	17
Teaching	0	0	4	0	3	0	1
CPD	0	0	0	0	8	0	1
Personal	2	10	2	0	3	0	3

Figure 2: Heads' use of time (percentages)

Figure 3: Headteachers' use of time (a composite of six heads)

Pie chart showing:
- Leadership: 32%
- Management: 46%
- Administration: 17%
- Teaching: 1%
- CPD: 1%
- Personal: 3%
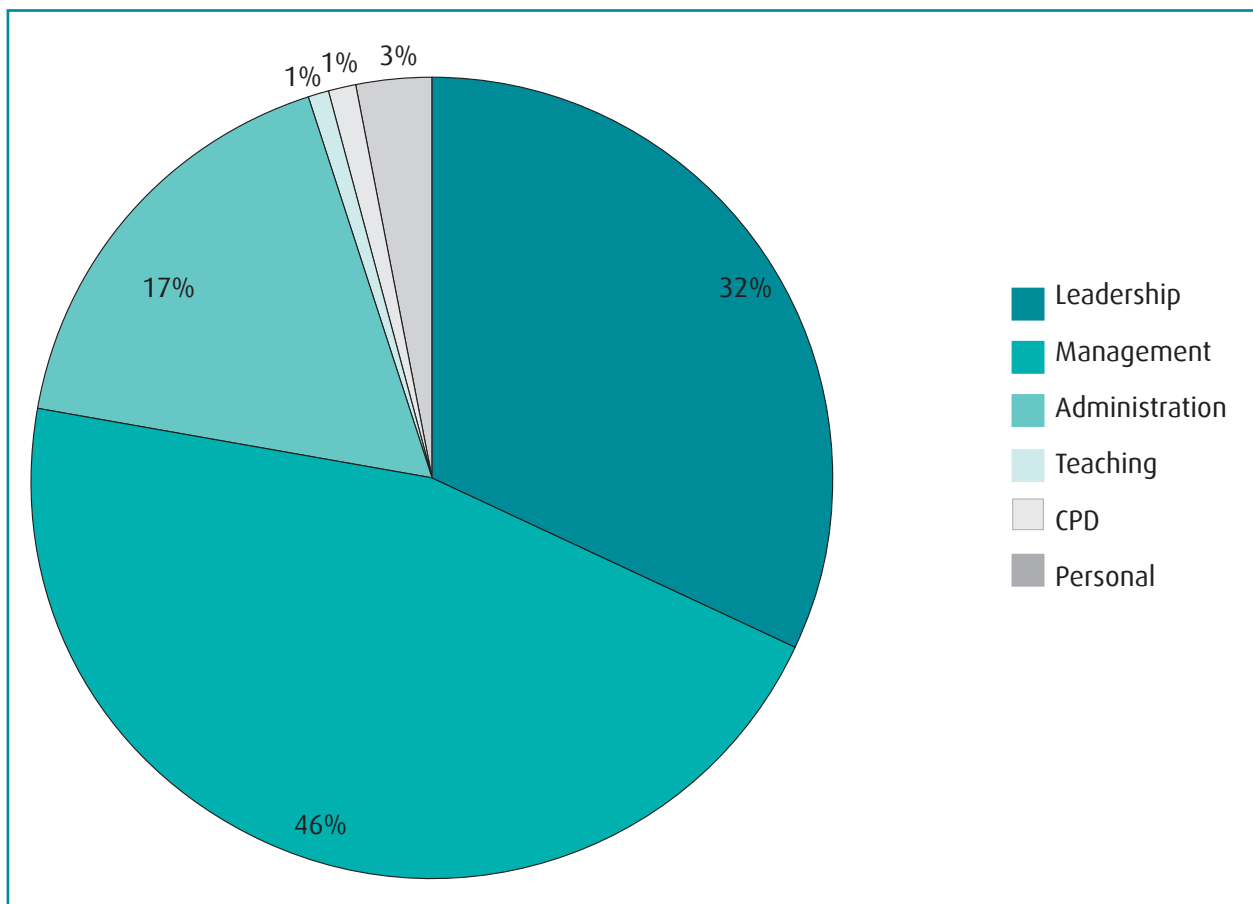
Table 1: Heads' use of time (percentages)

Our research confirmed the picture portrayed in the literature review of the relentless nature of heads' workload, the way in which time was spent and the deep commitment to and satisfaction in making a difference to children which sustained headteachers. The unremitting nature of change, driven by external demands, was also found to be a prevailing theme.

The heads involved in this research were keen to be seen as open and accessible. They appreciated they needed to earn respect and credibility, build trust and lead by example. They also wished over time to develop leadership in others and not be seen as responsible for everything. Online participants also provided some insights about how they wished to lead their schools. They were asked what they have learned about leadership in their first year.

"I have to fight hard against 'the bunker syndrome' so much can come at you that if I'm not careful I find I hardly get out of my office into the real world where there's children and joy and happiness and creativity.

Not to shut yourself away in your office but to be seen around the school by both the pupils and out on the playground by the parents. That you cannot be everybody's friend and that you are going to upset some of the team with the decisions that you have to make. Always to keep the child at the centre of your thoughts."

An assessor for NPQH who contributed to the forum wrote:

"Last week I listened to the speaker at a trainee heads' regional introductory day, an outstanding headteacher who has been in post for five years. He made a similar point, saying that EVERY DAY he cuts one hour out of his diary to walk his school and making sure this happens in practice. How successful are you all with making/keeping the time to be this highly visible leader?"

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Being a head was a bit like being on a roller-coaster and 'it is the worst of jobs and the best of jobs'. One head wrote on the forum: 'it can be fun, enjoy the good bits and don't dwell on difficulties'. The case study heads were asked what being a head in London (orMidlands inner-city) meant to them and a range of answers was offered (see the case studies in part E).

Several case study heads remarked how being shadowed had been helpful as it had provided them with the 'chance to reflect and think about the issues discussed' and that 'the opportunity to step back and reflect on what has happened and been accomplished is very positive'. The interview and observation day had been helpful in providing an opportunity to 'just talk about the role'. It was suggested that this kind of opportunity would be valuable for all new heads in their first year and would help them to focus on their strategic goals and successes.

NPQH

NPQH was introduced in England in 1997 in order to better prepare aspiring headteachers for leadership and management responsibilities. It has undergone a number of revisions since then and became mandatory as a qualification for newly appointed heads in maintained schools in 2009. The research wished to gain respondents' thoughts on the implications for leadership and the National College as NPQH is redesigned in 2011. The qualification had been taken by the 12 research heads at various times between 2003 and 2010, and thus they had experienced different versions of the programme. Views regarding their own experience of NPQH were varied but most found it interesting and insightful. One head considered that:

"It helped me derive and articulate my vision and strengthened me in how to work towards that vision. It helped me with dealing with unenthusiastic staff – that has been my strength."

Headteacher

The practical opportunities for apprenticeship and hands-on experience afforded by NPQH contributed most to the feeling of readiness to take on the headship role.

Negative comments were received from a few heads. One saw the qualification and the attendant support as 'peripheral' to the actual execution of the role. He considered that the training he had experienced was too remote from practice and that the assessment days in particular were 'too much', with irrelevant activities that might potentially deter very good prospective heads. He had not had time to take advantage of the online courses which were an important part of the programme. Others noted that they preferred face-to-face rather than virtual contact.

Heads were in favour of NPQH being more practical as long as there was an appropriate balance between theory and practice. One spoke of the need to make sure any in-school experiences were real and involved the key job of leadership – influencing people. 'The focus should be on how the task of leadership will improve learning - leadership impact or the leadership of learning - and how to influence people to achieve this'. These aspects were both absent when this head completed NPQH.

The improvements heads suggested (some of which are already in place) include:

— team development and management skills, distributed leadership ('the heads who tend to go under are the ones who try to do it all') and the key concept of trust

— information and guidance about the statutory responsibilities of headteachers, for example in safeguarding

— how to set a budget and handle a budget deficit

— information about redundancy and capability procedures

— information about how church schools work, eg, building regulations, who owns the premises officer's house, etc

— more shadowing of headteachers

— assignment of a personal mentor to support the journey to graduation and into a first headship

— ensuring that participants understand the importance of situational leadership, and how to apply it in their new context

— scenario-based sessions to work out how to address the unexpected issues that arise (heating breakdown, closing the school, serious student pastoral or behavioural issues) and the key learning from such situations

— development of and support for existing staff, and recruitment

Visiting other effective heads was considered helpful. One head spoke positively of her school placement during NPQH. The head of the leadership development school subsequently became her mentor and the two schools have worked closely since with other staff involved in visits and shared training. The NPQH placement school has since acted as a coaching school. This new head had been proactive in seeking out a placement school with an ethos that reflected her own passions and where she thought that she would be able to learn. Because of this she has been able to build an extremely productive relationship. Another head had a concern that headship, which is complex and challenging at the best of times, can be enacted in a number of ways and that there can be no single model to follow. As the concept of headship evolves, and as the need for distributed leadership becomes more acute, the National College will need to ensure that NPQH equips new heads with the appropriate outlook and skills.

Teaching schools

The heads were aware of the proposed introduction of teaching schools but several felt they needed more details and were unsure what they would actually look like in practice. Most were supportive and open to the idea – 'the initiative is excellent and the rationale exciting'. Many wished to be involved and some had even made applications with other schools or the local authority to become involved in this development.

One of the new heads was very keen on the idea because

> "With all due respect to people working in local authorities, some of them haven't seen the four walls of the classroom for so long. It'll be good to have the first-hand experience of teaching schools."

New headteacher

Another remarked that it should lead to improvements, with teachers better prepared and more effective but that there was a risk of 'taking your eyes off your own school' and balancing the needs of trainee teachers with those of the children. This he noted 'is especially the case in a context where SATs and Ofsted are so important'. For another head, teaching schools would work as training grounds and open themselves up to other schools to see their practice and enable prospective heads to see more of other heads in action.

One experienced head spoke of the possible implications for the whole system and believed that some matters still needed resolving (eg, governance and accountability): 'there are still unanswered questions such as who has the authority/power to do what, when and to whom?'. In his view the development of collegiate practices based on trust was essential for the concept to work. Another head had concerns about too much of a school-based model of leadership development. She thought that there should be 'a model where leaders learn together, not just where they do things together' and cited a need for rigour and a focus on learning. In her view London Challenge had worked because leaders and schools came together to learn. She also felt that universities need to be involved (as they will be) to include the academic dimension.

Several aired concerns about funding. There was a concern that teaching schools would either:

— be under-resourced and therefore not be able to deliver what was promised; or

— take resources and opportunities away from other schools

As one headteacher said, 'It's a fine balance to get it right'.

Part D: The implications of the findings for leadership and leader development

The implications of the main findings of the research are considered in this part of the report. The data derived from the headteachers themselves (parts C, E and F) along with the main themes emerging from the literature review (part B) are drawn upon to raise a number of issues for consideration by the National College and others responsible for leader and leadership development.

The review of the relevant literature has shown that the elements of preparation and support that new heads find valuable and the challenges and experiences they typically face are independent of size or phase of school, culture or geographical location. Despite the different experiences and background of individuals and the different countries and types of school covered, the literature review showed that the problems experienced by newly appointed heads were very similar. Similarities outweighed the differences. However, the importance of contextual factors on the practice of early headship has been noted, especially those involving relationships, such as dealing with ineffective staff or more practical matters such as budgets and financial planning and those arising from multitasking and managing time effectively. Heads need to demonstrate many qualities and traits including resilience, persistence and emotional and contextual intelligence.

Being a head is a complex and challenging role but the literature review suggests the challenges reported have remained broadly similar over the last 20 years or so, with most of the differences relating to changes in government policy and the ongoing educational reform agenda. Change management skills are crucial. A leadership challenge for many of the new heads in the current study was to know the best time to introduce change, given that much change was often required. Dealing with ineffective staff is a challenge that has been and continues to be faced by new and experienced heads in all contexts and cultures, whether or not preparation programmes, induction support or CPD are available. Similarly, knowing 'when to act and when not to act', prioritising the issues to be addressed and judging the timing of key decisions and actions to be tackled were key issues and among the new heads' most stressful dilemmas.

The implications of the main findings of the research are reported by considering themes and issues in a sequential manner, namely as they relate to: preparation and support for becoming a head; the pre-appointment phase; the first year of headship; and ongoing support from year two and beyond.

Preparation and support for becoming a head

Formal training and development programmes will enable better knowledge and awareness of challenges that urban and other heads face but the literature suggests that no amount of experience or preparation – whether through formal training or through experience as a deputy – can provide a sufficient induction to what is a demanding and complex job. A major and essential part of learning to be a headteacher is acquired through living the experience while in the role and this re-emphasises the importance of heads' role as developers of leaders (Collins' (2001) level 5 leaders) and which much recent College work has stressed through notions of greenhouse schools and succession planning initiatives (NCSL, 2007a, 2007b). The experiences as a senior school leader and formal training and development such as NPQH prior to taking on the role can give new heads a head start and better prepare them for taking charge and developing a cognitive map of the organisation that Gabarro (1987) and others make reference to.

Headship qualifications, such as NPQH in England or SQH in Scotland, can aid preparation in many ways, for example, by providing practical opportunities for apprenticeship and hands-on experience. For the heads in this research, such features contributed most to the feeling of readiness to take on the headship role. They were in favour of NPQH being more practical as long as there was an appropriate balance between theory and practice. It was felt that the focus for any preparation for headship qualification should be on how leadership will improve learning, leadership impact or the leadership of learning and how to influence people to achieve this. Suggestions for improving NPQH were noted in part C (some of which are already in place) including developing emotional, contextual and spiritual intelligences in individual leaders and

ensuring that the importance of situational leadership and its application in their new context is understood. Other useful aspects of NPQH were found to be opportunities for networking and the strong focus on leadership, with practical sessions on such areas as finance and budget management, HR and legal issues also deemed highly relevant. Stretch assignments and project work that provide real-life insights into headship were also welcomed.

Pre-headship or principal preparation programmes needed to develop in participants a number of skills and qualities as well as make them aware of the full range of their responsibilities, including statutory ones such as safeguarding and knowledge of redundancy and capability procedures. The opportunity to visit other schools (leadership development schools) and to observe good practice in situ were further suggestions to enhance pre-appointment preparation. The bespoke or personalised nature of NPQH has also been recognised as a strength (Crawford and Earley, 2011).

Being assigned a personal mentor prior to taking up a first headship was considered crucial and has now been recognised through the introduction of the Head Start programme and professional partner scheme (a discussion of mentoring and other forms of support follows below). There is no single way of enacting leadership, and as models of headship evolve and develop over time the National College will need to ensure NPQH equips new heads with the appropriate outlook and skills, in a manner that supports politically desired educational reform and ongoing improvement, all without it leading to a 'politically-driven intervention to acculturate headteachers and other senior school staff into transformational and distributed leadership' (Wallace et al, 2011: 261).

International evidence shows clearly that there are a number of common factors associated with effective leadership development and principal preparation programmes (Darling-Hammond et al, 2007; Earley and Jones, 2010). Context was very important in the work of school leaders and although it is possible to speak of principals' pre-appointment preparation in general terms, so much depends on the setting in which that work takes place. However, learning identified as most helpful during the preparation programme include intellectually challenging elements that help develop reflective practice and integration of theory, values, beliefs and practice which is said to help reduce or minimise the 'culture shock' of taking up a headship.

However, no preparation programme will be able to provide heads with all the skills they want or need, which is a reminder of the importance of mentoring and other forms of support once in post.

Pre-appointment

The pre-appointment phase – the time between being selected and taking up the headship post, often as long as six months – was mentioned by several of the current research heads as worth investigating further as it was felt that this period was not always used well. This is not a new insight (Weindling and Earley, 1987) but clearly it is an area which needs further consideration if it is to facilitate the transition to 'taking hold' and enable new heads to use the first phase of headship (Gabarro, 1987) to good effect.

How might valued opportunities for building knowledge and developing relationships in the school in the term before taking up appointment be created? One of the research heads spent a day a week (her PPA time) in the half-term before she took up the post at the school getting to know people, discovering what needed doing and planning a strategy. An effective handover in the term preceding starting in post was suggested, with prospective headteachers having opportunities to gather information and build relationships with staff and governors. There was a need for a 'proper handover before a new head takes up their post'. Time in the school term before taking up post would also help identify the key areas for change during the first year and the speed of the change process. The College is well placed to produce guidance on good practice in handovers.

First year of headship

As the literature review noted, no matter how good the new heads' preparation programmes and their prior experience, a major transition occurs when a school leader takes on a new headship that requires tailored responses to a particular situation. It was therefore suggested that attention is given to the induction or taking-charge stage as it is invariably problematic, requiring careful analysis and action in situ (Earley and Weindling, 2004).

Formal training programmes such as NPQH increase knowledge and awareness of challenges but no amount of experience or preparation – whether through formal training or through experience as a deputy or acting head – can provide a sufficient induction to what is a demanding and complex job. However, the role of the recently introduced professional partner and other forms of support are important in helping new heads to address the context-specific challenges faced including those of 'dealing with place', 'dealing with people', 'dealing with system' and 'dealing with self' (Clarke et al, 2011).

Individual and collective sources of support (eg, other heads, mentors, coaches, networks and SIPs or equivalents) should be readily available to help the new head to develop a cognitive map of the organisation using processes of orientation, evaluation (an assessment of staff, understanding where the problems lie) and establishing priorities (Gabarro, 1987). This initial stage of 'entry, orientation and immersion' is when a high proportion of time is spent in understanding the school context and inherited culture and securing initial acceptance and credibility. In this phase new heads are concerned with relationship-building and increasing confidence and self-awareness and acceptance of the need for control. Leading and managing change within the school will be important and the advice, guidance and support derived from the above sources is of great value.

It will also be invaluable to help overcome the loneliness that headship brings and the isolation of the role. These features were frequently recognised pre-appointment but nevertheless come as a shock to some, even internal appointments, on taking up the post.

Mentoring/coaching is now recognised as crucial to the support and development of new heads, during preparation, induction and the first few years of headship. The personalised and context-specific nature of support and challenge from mentors and coaches is often cited by heads – and not only new ones as being most important. Heads may require a range of individuals to call upon: a bespoke service, depending on the issue at stake. The skills and qualities of the individuals providing the mentoring/coaching were deemed to be hugely important especially the skills to ask the right questions and to be a reflective and challenging colleague providing a degree of challenge which pushes new heads beyond their comfort zone to a new level of awareness and self-confidence (MacBeath, 2011).

Not all heads were seen as possessing mentoring skills and different mentors were needed at different times for different purposes. New heads needed to be able to access a number of trusted sources according to the issue in question. The literature review pointed to the informal, personalised, timely and practical elements of support that were found most valuable. A good match between an experienced head to the context, needs and personality of the new head was found to be extremely important. The London Challenge M2NH programme, for example, spent a lot of time to ensure this worked. There is a growing body of knowledge about how matches of appropriate pairings are optimally formed and how a good working relationship is best established and maintained. The selection of mentors and the preparation of both mentor and mentees are crucial as a form of leadership development for both parties.

Given the key role of mentoring, a practical suggestion is to put in place a mechanism that ensures headteachers receive effective mentoring support through the Head Start programme or professional partner scheme and that the College seeks early feedback from the head to check that this is working well. It was not for one of our case study heads and the issue of having an effective mentor or mentoring system in place had yet to be resolved. The College may wish to explore an appropriate strategy to address any problems associated with acquiring an effective mentor. The new head may be seen as having personal responsibility for his or her own development and making appropriate mentoring arrangements but the chair of governors too may be seen as having a responsibility to ask such questions. This may be relevant for the College as it develops its programmes for chairs of governors.

A related area which may also require the attention of the College is the issue of networks. There is a growing body of knowledge about what makes them effective. Heads, especially new ones, benefit from membership of good, face-to-face, headteacher networks, both for practical help (eg, what to do about an admissions issue in this borough) and also for learning and development. Of course, the College is not solely responsible for the formation and maintenance of networks but it might wish to contribute even further to them. A current example was given by an online contributor who mentioned that the College was hosting a series of small-scale regional events to support newly appointed headteachers in leading at a time of great change:

> "The events will provide opportunities to network with other new heads, explore the wealth of support available to you and learn about other opportunities the College can provide for you and your leadership teams."

<div align="right">Online contributor</div>

Although networks are seen as important there remains a lack of clarity about how aspiring or new heads can be assured that they have access to and are socialised into effective support networks.

Recent research on new heads and outstanding leaders (eg, West-Burnham, 2009; Walker and Dimmock, 2008) points to the value of heads having access to a wide network of fellow professionals, where trust and new learning are developed and knowledge is shared, and which is perceived as more than a support group. MacBeath et al (2009) report the importance of supportive networks and regular engagement with other headteachers. Networks, both real and virtual, were important in the support and development of heads and different networks were used for different purposes.

Several heads made reference to the importance of dedicated headship time which would allow them to take some time each term to work offsite on leadership matters. New heads invariably wish to be in school as much as possible but recognise the value of reflective time away from the school environment. The intended impact of remodelling and related initiatives on wellbeing and dedicated headship time warrants further research. What, if anything, has changed as a result of these initiatives?

Ongoing support from year two onwards

Although headteachers gain confidence in their second year in post, many of the earlier documented issues do not disappear. The need for challenge and support, making time for reflection and professional development, and the problems of loneliness and isolation remain. Both new and more experienced heads need time and opportunities for reflection and in the context of the ongoing educational reform agenda there are always new things to learn and new initiatives to implement. Interestingly, the case study heads involvement in the research, particularly the shadowing component, was perceived as being a valuable form of leadership development which encouraged reflection on practice (see the postscripts in individual case studies in part E).

Building leadership and management teams that are focused on a set of shared expectations takes time; and the second year of headship is likely to see such work continue with many of the earlier identified challenges continuing to be addressed. As heads move into the consolidation and refinement stages (Gabarro, 1987) there will be a continuing need for leadership development, mentoring/coaching, opportunities for reflection, and membership of networks. It will also be important for heads to see themselves as having a role in staff development, especially for the identification and development of the next generation of future leaders (Davies and Davies, 2011; Earley and Jones, 2010; Fink, 2010).

Conclusion

This part of the report has identified some of the implications of the research findings for leadership development. This research, along with the review of the literature into newly appointed heads, contributes to the growing knowledge-base about their experiences, the typical challenges they face and how they are being addressed. Recurring themes included the importance of work-based development, pre-appointment training, support networks, mentoring/coaching and opportunities for reflection. Ensuring that support provision is flexible, individualised and negotiable was also a key finding from both the research and the literature review. The use of mentoring/coaching and support from networks and other sources are key measures that best prepare new heads both before and after appointment for the many context-specific challenges they face. How effective networks, mentoring and other forms of support are maintained, especially as heads move into their second and subsequent years is important to investigate, particularly in the light of recent developments in England including those of teaching schools, an initiative which most of the new heads involved in this research supported, seeing it as leading to improvements, with teachers better prepared and more effective for their role.

Part E: Case studies

This part of the report consists of six case studies of newly appointed headteachers in one special school, three primaries and one secondary school in London, and one primary school in Midlands inner-city. They are based on the data derived from the interviews and the shadowing or observation day. Their names have been anonymised and the details of each school slightly altered to prevent easy identification. The case studies conclude with some reflections from the observed heads themselves. Also included are reflective prompts or questions which we hope the reader will find of interest (no answers are provided). Some questions to consider once all the case studies have been read are offered below.

Questions for reflection on the case studies

Having read the case studies, spend some time reflecting on the following questions.

— What are the most common leadership challenges identified and how would you address them?

— How can new headteachers ensure that they devote the necessary time to leading teaching and learning?

— If someone shadowed you for a day, what kind of balance do you think they would find in your activities?

— What are three things headteachers can do to help prepare their aspiring heads for future headship?

— What forms of support and development outlined in the report would be most helpful to you and why?

— In what ways could new headteachers find ways to address their sense of loneliness?

— What strategies do you have or know about to help you focus on your own wellbeing?

Case study 1: A special school head from an inner London borough

Introduction

Elaine is the headteacher of a secondary special school in an inner London borough. The school has 125 pupils, of whom just over half are entitled to free school meals. The largest group is from white British backgrounds, the next largest groups are from black Caribbean and black African backgrounds. About 15 per cent speak English as an additional language. The school is planning to relocate in two years' time, with a planned reduction in roll. At the time of the last Ofsted inspection, it was described in the following terms:

'All students have a statement of special educational needs. The range of needs is very wide, including: speech and language; social, emotional and behavioural; moderate learning; severe learning; autistic spectrum and specific learning difficulties. The number of students on the autistic spectrum has risen significantly since the last inspection. A minority also have additional mobility and medical needs.'

Ofsted (2010)

Ofsted found the school to be 'good' and awarded a grade 2 for 'overall effectiveness' and grade 2 for 'capacity for sustained improvement'. Prior to Elaine's appointment in September 2010 and following the inspection, the governing body agreed that the then headteacher should work part time, with the days when she was not in school covered by the deputy as acting head. This deputy applied for the substantive headship but was not appointed, remaining in post as deputy under Elaine's leadership.

> ### Reflect:
>
> What advice would you give to Elaine about developing the relationship with the deputy head who applied for her post?

Staff at the school and in particular the members of the senior leadership team (SLT) tend to have worked at the school for a long time. Several are planning to finish their careers when the move is made to the new building. The new head is much younger than the members of her SLT.

Elaine started her teaching career in 1990, working initially in a mainstream secondary school. Prior to gaining this headship, she had held three deputy headships in special schools. The first of these was in the north west and it was during her time in this post that she gained NPQH, in May 2005. Her other two experiences of deputy headship were in London, with the most recent in the same borough as she is now working as a head.

Elaine had not actively sought a promotion to headship, and this headship is the only one that she has ever applied for, but shortly before her application she was subject to a potential headhunt from an independent special school. She admits to thinking prior to this, 'maybe when we have had the Ofsted [inspection], I'll think of moving somewhere else', but the experience of being headhunted had prompted her to make an application. She also says that her husband has long believed her capable of headship and encouraged her application. The appointment process was relatively late in the year, at the very end of May 2010. There was thus a relatively short period from appointment to taking up the post in September 2010.

> ### Reflect:
>
> Given the short time between appointment and taking up post, what would you consider the top priorities for action?

Key leadership and management challenges

Leadership challenges

Despite the Ofsted grade of 'good', on arrival in the school as headteacher, Elaine found that systems for safeguarding were inadequate and this became an urgent leadership priority in the first term. Many systems that she considered essential were not in place. For example, all staff needed training in safe physical handling and there was a requirement to establish systems for recording and informing parents.

Much of this urgent work was completed in the first term. All staff had two days of training to ensure safe physical handing and the benefits are being seen. There are now regular health and safety walkabouts. Electronic recording systems have been introduced so that accurate and full records of incidents are in place.

Another key priority for the headteacher on taking up post was to build relationships with all staff. Elaine had one-to-one meetings with each staff member, totalling over 50 meetings. The biggest single issue emerging from these meetings was the need for improved communication and clarity. During the period when the previous head had been working, part-time staff said they 'weren't sure who to go to'. The improvements to the staffroom and working area should support better communication. More forums have also been put in place, and presentations on key findings from the meetings have been shared with the SLT and with governors, and there has been a lot of discussion with staff. A wellbeing group has been introduced and the first staff social function was well attended. Two small teaching groups have been introduced to enable more focused teaching for some of the most challenging pupils.

> "When I step back from it, there's a lot that has happened. A lot has happened to get the basics in place and for me this is especially on safeguarding."

Elaine, new headteacher

Despite the progress made, Elaine feels that there is still much work to be done:

> "[We need to get] the school to a position where it has robust and consistent systems so it can move forward as a whole school and is ready for moving into a new building."

Elaine, new headteacher

As well as the planned move to a new building, due in September 2013, and a reduction in roll, the school is increasingly taking pupils with more severe and complex needs, with combinations of physical and learning needs. September 2012 will see an intake which has a bigger range of needs, with more pupils with very complex conditions than staff have experienced in the past. Ensuring that staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet these needs is identified as a key challenge, both now and in the future. This is being addressed through staff training, with an external consultant working alongside staff to identify gaps in skills and knowledge and to help arrange the necessary training.

Because staff have worked in the school for a long time and also because several are planning to end their careers in the near future, this head has found motivating staff to change and move on is a difficult challenge. She has found it hard to develop a whole-team ethos. She works hard to build and maintain relationships and she takes advantage of both planned meetings and unplanned opportunities for informal discussions with staff, to share information and to include them in the change process. Establishing credibility with staff by being seen to work with children and demonstrating the expertise she has acquired through experience in several different special schools is a key strategy for building trust. She ensures that she is visible within the school and that she works with the children every day.

She has also worked hard to build relationships with the governing body and to ensure that the governors understand the challenges facing the school. On the observation day (see part A above), a meeting with governors to discuss the proposed appointment of speech and language therapists exemplified how this has been achieved. Elaine took the time to ensure that the governors present fully understood the reasons for this appointment, and she actively sought their advice on strategies to help make the posts attractive. She has been successful in this and feels well supported by governors, especially the chair. The chair of governors had been proactive in contacting her and arranging a meeting with her in the term between appointment and arrival in post:

"Governors now understand the changes that need to be made, for example, the need for more staff training to meet the needs of the changing cohort of children.... yes... there's been a lot to celebrate."

Elaine, new headteacher

Reflect:

Do you have other suggestions for ways in which Elaine could motivate her staff and develop a whole-team ethos?

Management challenges

Punctuality to lessons had been an issue, for both pupils and for staff, and this has been improved by the simple measure of introducing a bell. School attendance has also improved, as has pupil behaviour and staff now understand the need for consistency of expectation and management of behaviour. Although there have still been exclusions, there is now a behaviour contract which is signed by the pupil before he or she returns to school.

Several improvements have been made to the physical environment, including the remodelling of the staffroom.

Reflect:

What is your view of Elaine's decision to spend money on improvements to the staffroom at this stage?

Preparation and support for heads

Experience as a deputy in three different schools, in different local authorities and working under three different heads had ensured good leadership and management knowledge and skills across the range required for headship, as well as a broad expertise in the varied needs encountered in special schools; 'working in my previous roles, there wasn't a lot I hadn't done'. The headteachers Elaine had worked under had all seen it as part of their role to develop the deputy. In particular, her most recent school experience had enabled her to learn a great deal. Working together with a head who was also new on areas such as finance and premises had enabled her to learn 'a massive amount' and to gain confidence in unfamiliar areas of work. For example, her confidence in taking forward some of the premises improvements she has put in place in her own school was attributed to having had the opportunity to gain this experience. Although Elaine considers that she has been proactive in taking opportunities to learn and develop throughout her career, she commented:

"It's the people who prepare you the most. I've been lucky in that, by and large, I've worked with people who wanted to share. Sometimes you can be blocked – that didn't happen to me."

Elaine, new headteacher

Having worked as a deputy in the same local authority and having some prior knowledge of the school was also helpful preparation and, when in post, 'knowing who to go to in the local authority' was a useful source of support. However, because of the short lead-in time between appointment and start date and also because of the part-time role of the previous head during the term preceding appointment, there were fewer opportunities to visit the school to obtain detailed knowledge of issues and build relationships than she would have wished. Although she made contact with governors and read documents, she feels that there should be an expectation of a proper handover before a new head takes up their post. 'There were things I wasn't told – some things should be passed on'.

Despite her experience and preparation, arriving on the first day was 'a very daunting situation' and Elaine feels strongly that having a mentor in place whose role was to provide professional and personal support would have helped her greatly. No suitable mentor with special school experience was identified through the Head Start or M2NH programmes in London and her efforts to make contact with the colleagues suggested nationally were not successful either. She has had to rely on her personal contacts and networks. Her previous head has been supportive and, for example, it was to him that she turned for reassurance about her professional decision when she had to exclude a pupil in her very first week in post. An educational psychologist whom she knows in the local authority has also provided personal support and helped her at the end of the first term at a very low point, when school pressures were very high and she fell ill. Her chair of governors has been supportive and has, through her own professional contacts, identified an experienced special school headteacher in a neighbouring local authority with whom Elaine has had two useful conversations. However, Elaine admits:

> "It's not the same as having a mentor, another head who understands the issues. You need someone who is a reflective colleague; you don't need someone who has been in the job for 20 years."

Elaine, new headteacher

Elaine attends the local authority's special school headteacher network, which meets every half term and finds this useful, partly because she already knows colleagues from schools and the local authority. She has also attended the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) special school network and intends to do so again. Although she felt she could not leave the school to attend the borough's headteacher conference this year, she will try to go in the future. She would like to build relationships with other schools, especially local academies.

Reflect:

Where are the networks that you might access for support, practical advice and mutual learning?

Since gaining NPQH in 2005, Elaine has taken up opportunities that have been offered through the National College and found them interesting. However, she did not find them directly relevant as she 'did not want to take up a headship just for the sake of it'. She is positive about the role of the National College in keeping in touch, but feels that it provides more of a tracking role than actual support. She used online forums and online resources in the term preceding her appointment, but has not had time to access these since.

Reflect:

What suggestions do you have for helping Elaine find the time to access online forums and resources?

The practice of headship

A typical day in school begins at 7am with administration ('paperwork, emails') and ends at 6.30pm or 7pm, again with paperwork and emails. There are key activities that Elaine performs every day she is in school such as meeting the deputy to run through the day, a staff briefing and getting out into the playground at breaktimes and lunchtimes. She prioritises visiting classrooms and working with children every day, and her relationships with children and seeing tangible evidence of the progress they are making are highlights of the job for her. She also works with staff and a further highlight is in making a difference through this. Much of the day is spent in meetings on various issues both related to the day-to-day management of the school, such as finance or attendance, or meetings with staff, but also in connection with the bigger changes facing the school, such as meetings about the new buildings. On a good day 'a team works together through a problem or issue and finds a solution and achieves something'. Typical days may also be interrupted by problems that disrupt the day, such as accidents or serious behaviour incidents.

For Elaine, 'big jobs are done at home... two or three days in a half-term, four days at Easter... that's when the thinking time happens'. An example is planning for the incoming cohort of Year 7 pupils. She had met the external consultant during the Easter break to consider in detail the individual needs of pupils in the cohort and to devise groupings and the best allocation of staffing and rooms. She is very aware that it is a job with 'no boundaries' where it is necessary to set priorities, but 'at the same time dealing with the very real day-to-day issues that arise in the special school'.

Despite her experiences as a deputy, Elaine was surprised at how lonely she has felt as head and how long it is taking her to get used to the sense of isolation that headship brings. She believes that the issue is largely about accepting that the experience of isolation in becoming a headteacher is an intrinsic part of the role, rather than about the personalities, 'my previous head said that at the beginning he felt completely alone'. She has found it particularly difficult to come to a school with a long-established body of staff, faced with significant externally driven change.

A further surprise has been how much of her work has been with governors, and the amount of time and energy she has had to devote to building relationships and working with them. She is satisfied with her success here, feeling that she has a good relationship with members of the governing body and that she gets good support from them.

A current area of uncertainty is in working through the challenge of reducing staff absence. This has been highlighted by governors and has been included in her performance management targets for the year. Although she has sought advice from the local authority HR team, she is not convinced that their recommendation of a return-to-work interview for all cases of staff absence is the right approach and she feels she needs to work harder to find a solution which will not antagonise staff. Generally she cites HR issues as those where she can feel uncertain.

What makes the headship role satisfying and rewarding for Elaine are those elements that are apparent on a good day and she has:

— spent time with the children

— made a difference in working with a member of staff

— seen children leave smiling

— seen a team work through a problem together, find a solution and achieve something

The observation day

What has sustained this head through difficult times are her strongly held values and beliefs about the vocation of headship and making a difference for children: 'the moral compass, that's what keeps me coming in'. These beliefs and values were clearly seen to influence her leadership practice on the day when Elaine was observed at work.

The observation day followed the general pattern of a typical day, although she commented:

> "It was quiet in terms of children's behaviour. The children were calmer than usual, so there were fewer interruptions; there were fewer phone calls than usual."
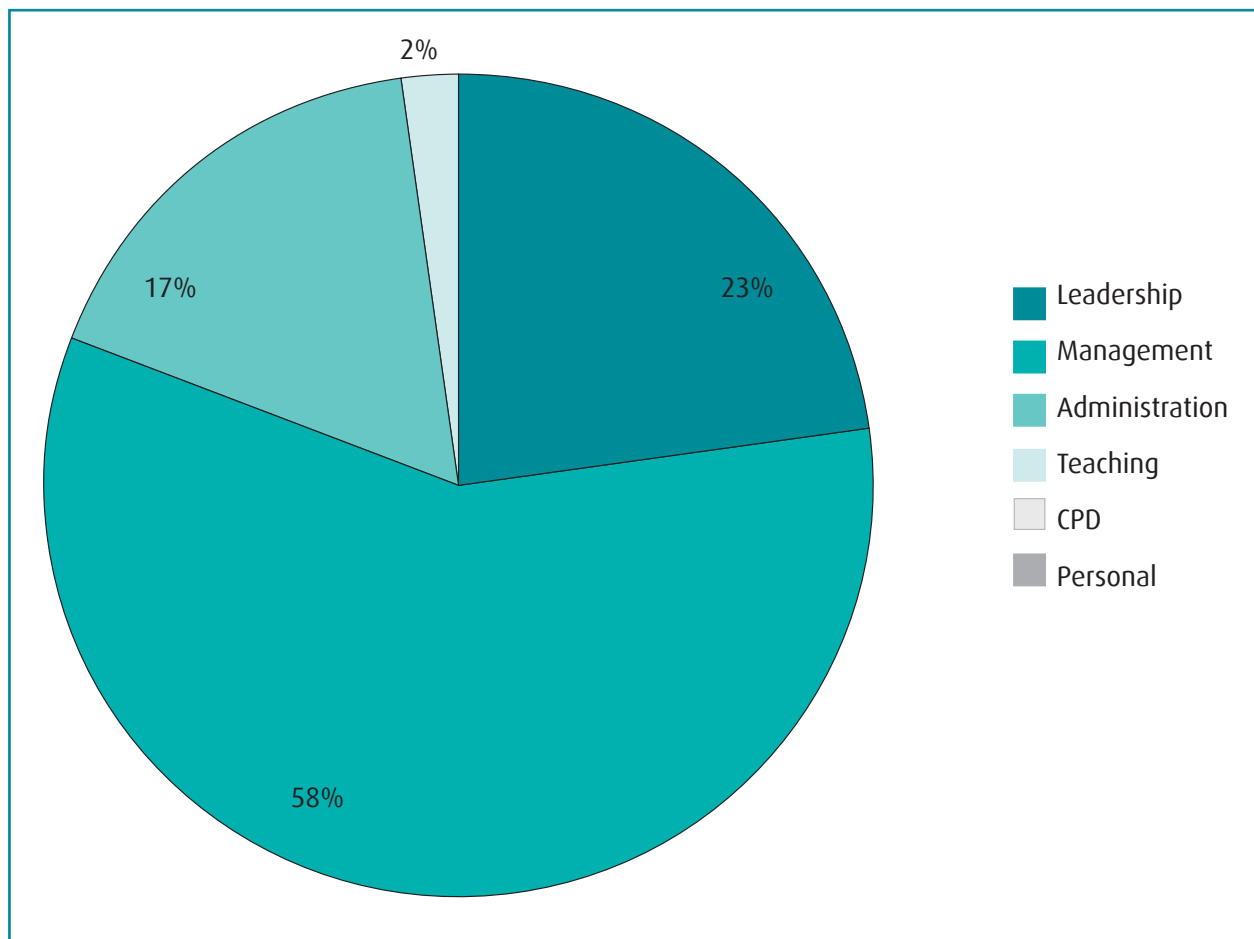
Elaine, new headteacher

The day started at 7am and ended at 7pm with paperwork and emails. An overview of the diary for the day appears below.

7am	Administration in the headteacher's office, working through email correspondence. The door of the office is left open and several members of staff pop in. The deputy comes in for five minutes to provide a quick update on the action he had taken with a pupil the previous day, and a teacher comes in to confirm the arrangements for an annual review scheduled to take place later in the day. Three members of staff come in for advice in relation to specific pupils.
8.15am	Scheduled meeting with the deputy head to run through the day and discuss current leadership and management issues. These included discussion of CPD needs of teaching assistants and possible future options for a pupil who is nearing the end of his time in the school.
8.45am	Staff briefing, led by the deputy headteacher.
9am	Playground duty to greet pupils and send them off to classrooms, followed by a quick walk round classrooms. There are lots of short conversations with pupils using pupils' names, with speech supported by Makaton signing, which she uses to signal the start of the day's learning.
9.15am	Meeting with an external consultant, who is in school to support the head's change management strategy. He is working over time with a range of staff to help prepare them for the more complex needs of the incoming pupil cohort – this change management is seen in terms of skills and also the resources to use and the physical environment of the classrooms.
9.30am	Annual review meeting for one of the pupils. The parent, a class teacher, a local authority officer and, towards the end, the pupil, are present at the meeting. At the end of the meeting, the local authority officer is asked to stay for further discussion about several other pupils in the school.
11am	Meeting with the external consultant and two members of staff to discuss the impact of the future changes to the pupil cohort on their work. These staff leave the meeting at 12 noon and the discussion continues with the consultant on planned changes in staffing and accommodation to meet the increasingly complex needs of the incoming cohort of children.
12pm	Playground duty, walking round classrooms, talking to pupils and staff.
12.45pm	Lunch in office.
1pm	Playground duty, walking round classrooms, talking to pupils and staff.
2pm	Meeting with school business manager to discuss changes to accommodation for the complex needs class. This is followed by discussion about arrangements for two forthcoming disciplinary hearings and the meeting is joined by the deputy, who is to chair one of these hearings.
3pm	End of school day, on corridors, speaking to pupils and parents.
3.15pm	Teacher meeting at which the headteacher gives a presentation explaining the forthcoming changes, both in terms of the nature of pupil needs and how Year 7 will be organised. This is followed by the sharing of pupil-level information about the incoming cohort, questions and discussion. The headteacher emphasises that this meeting is part of a longer term change strategy. She has already had several meetings with staff most affected by the change in cohort and expects to have many more.
4.30pm	Meeting with the chair of governors and a parent governor, the school business manager and the deputy head, to discuss arrangements for the recruitment of two part-time speech and language therapists. These are new posts and the headteacher takes time to explain the rationale for the appointments with reference to the specific needs of the incoming cohort of children. The parent governor and the deputy leave the meeting at 5.30pm and there is continued discussion with the chair and the school business manager about changes within the school.
6.30pm	Checking emails.
7pm	Headteacher leaves for the day.

Figure 1.1: How Elaine's day was spent

The field note for the day is given below.

> This was an intense, busy day. There were several meetings with a range of stakeholders both internal and external. Meetings with external stakeholders included those with governors, a parent, an external consultant who works regularly with the school and a local authority officer. Most of the meetings were in the diary and planned in advance, with other meetings with members of staff inserted throughout the day. There were many interactions with pupils, both planned (for example, school walkabouts and an annual review meeting) and unplanned (pupils coming into the head's office, both voluntarily and when sent by a teacher). Task analysis based on the diary overview presents a misleading picture of the way in which this head exercised the leadership of change in the school.
>
> Although categorised in Figure 1.1. above as 'administration', the time spent in the playground and walking around the school was used for numerous brief interactions with children and with staff. Brief conversations with pupils demonstrated a real warmth and interest in the children and their learning. What was noticeable about all of the head's interactions with staff were how pupil learning, pupil outcomes and the change management process for the school entered every conversation, whether or not this was its explicit purpose. For example, a 'short word' a senior member of staff sought with the head about school reports was expanded into a conversation about CPD needs to ensure the best

pupil outcomes for the incoming cohort of children with very complex needs. Management meetings shared this feature too, so for example the meeting with governors to discuss the recruitment of speech and language therapists was used to ensure full understanding of the rationale behind the creation of the two new posts and the direction of change for the school. It was not possible to speak to this head without being made aware of her very strong belief in the entitlement of every pupil to the very best experience and learning and her commitment to ensuring this. Learning-centred or pedagogic leadership was thus threaded through all conversations. She was a leader of learning.

The day also saw several milestones in the longer term change strategy for the school. For example, there was the regular visit of an external consultant, a planned meeting with two staff to discuss the personal implications of change, a presentation at a teachers' meeting and the agreement of the governors to go ahead with the appointment of specialist therapists. More subtly, the head used her interactions with staff to share information, to seek views and to engage and include them in the process of change.

Another noticeable feature of the day was the congruence between what was said in the earlier interview and what was seen on the day. The importance of daily interaction with children as a 'high' was vividly brought to life by the warmth and care shown for the children on the day. The challenge of working with some colleagues was also evident.

One of the key points noted by this headteacher was a sense of isolation and loneliness. There was much support shown for the head on the day from the external consultant, the school business manager and the chair of governors. The lead was, however, always from the head, and the intensity and relentless pressure with which the head needs to work in order to drive the pace of change and meet the large number of challenges she faces were clearly seen. Repeated on a daily basis as it clearly is (this was considered a typical day although a bit quieter than usual) it was easy to see how such pressure could build.

Reflect:

Could any of these activities to have been led by other staff members and, if so, which ones?

Head's role and others' expectations

Elaine takes her responsibility for developing her staff team very seriously. In her previous school, the majority of staff were at relatively early stages in their careers and development opportunities such as the National College's Leadership Pathways were deemed suitable. In her current post, encouraging development has been much more challenging, because many staff are nearing the end of their careers. She is conscious of the need to address the development of all of the staff by broadening their experience and skills in working with children and is working with an external consultant to identify their learning and skills gaps and to arrange necessary training. She also wants to develop an interest in, and culture of, learning across the whole school - 'what you don't want is just to work with bright people... it's tempting, but you have to work with everyone'. She had hoped by this stage to have been doing more work with staff on teaching and learning than she has managed to achieve. The management and operational challenges she faced on coming to the school to ensure safeguarding had delayed a focus on teaching and learning.

In this school it is particularly important for pupils to have consistency and to understand boundaries. She feels strongly that pupils should be able to come to her and, both during her interview and during the observation day, pupils came into the headteacher's office to speak to her.

Elaine knows that her staff and governors expect her to lead change, both in preparation for externally imposed changes and also to existing systems. Staff wanted better communication and consistency and valued the opportunity to express their views in the one-to-one meetings she held at the beginning of her

first term in post. Now that governors are fully aware of the need for change, they want a strong lead from her and are also keen for stability and to know that she will not move on until the changes have been seen through.

Better communication was also wanted and expected by parents and they have appreciated having more opportunities to come into school and speak to the head. A parent survey is due to go out in the current half-term.

Wellbeing and welfare

Former colleagues have been the main source of personal support for Elaine. She goes out regularly with a group of former colleagues for both social and professional chat. She has also relied on former colleagues to 'just talk' through difficult issues and to find reflective space. She needed this particularly during her first half-term, which was extremely challenging; she says 'it's just how everything hits you'.

She tries to control her workload, not working on Saturdays and trying to finish early at least one day a week. However, she'd 'like to have my Sundays' and her wellbeing as a head would be improved if she could have a whole weekend off.

For Elaine, being a headteacher in London is:

> "unique to individual schools. It is a vocation, although it's not a fashionable word. You are so accountable. It is such a huge responsibility, like being a chief executive officer of an ever-changing corporation, without a personal assistant."

Elaine, new headteacher

Looking ahead

Elaine feels open to new proposals for headteacher development and support through a national network of teaching schools. She would like to be involved and feels that it could be a good way of providing what is needed:

> "I think it's about ongoing mentoring and relationships with people, to encourage people to apply for leadership roles and building the capacity of people."

Elaine, new headteacher

She gives an example of a participant on a consultant leaders course she attended saying to her, "I can't believe you are not already a head". She has found this personal touch important to her own confidence and believes that this is essential in the development of future leaders, as is experience of other schools, which a network could provide.

For her own career, Elaine would wish to retire early from headship, perhaps to pursue personal interests in working with adults with autism. She is not personally ambitious and feels a responsibility towards her current school, to learn more and to do more to meet the needs of the children in her care and also to oversee the move to the new building. She would hope that the skills and experience she has gained could be used to support others, and would be willing to be approached to mentor other new heads in the future.

To improve preparation and support for new heads in the future, Elaine believes that a mentor, with relevant experience and understanding of the issues, should be available to all new headteachers. High priority should be given to an effective handover in the term preceding starting in post, with prospective headteachers feeling able to push for comprehensive information about the school and the opportunity to build relationships with staff and with governors.

Reflect:

What has this case study made you think about your own leadership and school?

How will you change your leadership practice as a result of reading this case study?

Postscript: Elaine's reflections on the experience

The experience was entirely positive for me. I enjoy my job immensely and it was fascinating to read an account of my day broken down as it was in the study. There are many small interactions that we forget but which can be important.

I think the relentlessness of leading when new in post is something that came through the study and reflects how I feel at present. This does change as teams are formed and other leaders are supported to lead.

I'm very aware of being a role model for others and the experience of being shadowed gave me an insight into how I impact on others. It would be great if this experience could be repeated in a year or two years' time to see how things have changed.

The interview gave me time to reflect – to take time out from the leading and to think about the difference I want to make. Headship is a privilege and a huge responsibility. It is a duty of care to a community and a wonderful job. It's good to take time to reflect on that.

Case study 2: A primary school head from an outer London borough

Introduction

Matthew is the headteacher of a one-form-entry, community primary school in an outer London borough. There are nearly 200 pupils on roll of whom nearly 20 per cent are eligible for free school meals. Of the total school roll, 15 per cent have special needs but none has a statement. Just over half the pupils are from a white British background, with the remaining pupils coming from a variety of backgrounds. The school was newly built and opened in the early 2000s with one Reception class. It was last inspected in December 2007 when the oldest pupils were in Year 5.

Ofsted found the school to be 'outstanding' (grade 1) with 'an outstanding capacity to make even further improvements'. Children entered the school with a range of skills, but with the majority close to the expected level. Standards in national tests were found to be high and high levels of attainment have continued at this school.

The head was brought up in north London and trained as a teacher at a local university. He started his teaching career in inner London and stayed in his first school for five or six years, gaining promotion to senior teacher level. When the deputy head of this school left to take up a headship, Matthew followed as a deputy. After approximately 18 months and for family reasons, he moved to another deputy headship post in an outer London borough 'I always wanted to stay in London'. The head of this school retired and Matthew remained as deputy for another two or three years, establishing a very good relationship with the headteacher, going through an Ofsted inspection and gaining NPQH in 2008. He applied for a headship in the borough and although not successful, got good feedback from the local authority's director. He was seconded by the local authority for one day a week as an assessment for learning (AfL) consultant and, through this work, became familiar with many of the borough's schools and with the local authority teams. During this period he was continuing to actively look for opportunities to gain a headship. He was recommended to consider the school where he holds his current post by one of the local authority inspectors.

Key leadership and management challenges

Following his appointment in spring 2010, Matthew was able to request and use opportunities to come into his new school during the summer term to meet members of staff and establish a relationship with the chair of governors.

Leadership challenges

Matthew considers that the school ethos, pupil voice and the work of the school council are, and continue to be, excellent, but he rates the school as 'good' rather than 'outstanding'. His leadership challenge was to use what was already in place to improve standards and outcomes for the children, 'establishing a level of rigour in evaluating the impact of what was in place'. One of the accomplishments he identifies in his first year is that of 'continuing the really good work that I inherited' and he notes that 'it's a question of tweaking, focusing... asking about standards and outcomes'. He has done this through the processes and procedures he has put in place in the first two terms in post, for example by introducing pupil progress meetings and by adding milestones to the school development plan.

A further leadership challenge has been to redefine a shared vision for the school. Matthew began to work on a plan for refreshing the vision in the summer term before appointment and has had several sessions with both staff and governors to work on this in the course of his first two terms. In May and June, further meetings with parents, staff and governors are planned to complete this.

Management challenges

In the term before appointment, Matthew was able to build a good knowledge of the systems that had been put in place by the previous head and to identify areas for improving procedures and processes.

He feels that by the end of his first year he will have accomplished what he had hoped to achieve with regard to school policies, processes and procedures. He identified the need for improvements to processes for assessment and the development of new assessment and teaching and learning policies. The work on these is nearly complete, with the policies due to go to the governing body this half-term.

As a deputy head and having worked with three different headteachers, Matthew had experienced very positive and close working relationships with the head. He has found it to be his biggest challenge that this has been harder to achieve with his own deputy. She had acted as head for part of the year preceding his taking up post and although she had not applied for the post, he does not yet feel that this 'crucial' relationship and 'team vision for the school' have been achieved. He is using the performance management process to achieve clarity about his expectations and, for financial reasons as well as his own belief that she needs to teach, the deputy has been assigned a class for the coming year. He is not sure how successful this will be.

Preparation and support for heads

Experience as a deputy in two different schools, in different local authorities and working under three different heads, together with a Master's degree and NPQH and going through different inspections have ensured Matthew has good knowledge and skills across the range required for headship. The headteachers Matthew had worked under had all, in different ways, been influential and his experience in his most recent post as non-teaching deputy was seen as particularly valuable. He recognised and valued the opportunities provided by his heads for his development. For example, a continuing development area for him is in public speaking, and 'you need to be given opportunities by your headteacher to do that'. Working on secondment for the local authority and having the opportunity to go into lots of schools as an AfL adviser had enabled him to see the 'public face of headship' and take note of the different things that headteachers did to influence practice in their schools and who took AfL seriously, as well as 'those who were approachable, and those who weren't'.

NPQH had been interesting and provided insight into teaching and learning, but the practical opportunities for apprenticeship and hands-on experience had contributed much more to his feeling of readiness to take on the headship role. Additionally, time in the summer term before taking up post for meeting staff and governors and for gaining a very good knowledge of school systems had been extremely useful preparation and had helped in identifying key areas for change during the first year.

To support his first year in headship, Matthew is able to draw on very good relationships with a number of colleagues. His relationship with his previous headteacher is extremely good and he regularly asks for his advice on practical matters, for example on admissions issues. He has a mentor and also an extremely good relationship and support from his local authority link inspector and his school improvement partner, whom he will continue to employ as an independent adviser. He is a member of several networks, in particular his extended schools cluster or 'quindrat'. This cluster is considered to be particularly effective at joint working and includes five new heads whom Matthew knew as deputies in the borough and an exceptionally

supportive, very experienced head. His school is planning to work even more closely in the future with two of the schools in the quindrat, for example on shared staff training. The local authority has provided an induction programme for new headteachers, as well as funding the mentor, and this has helped to form a supportive network of headteachers in a similar position. The programme itself is helpful and stimulating. For example, participants have been asked to read the National College's Learning texts (Conner et al, undated) and to make a group presentation on their individual readings. Overall he feels well supported: 'basically, I know a lot of heads I can ask'.

The practice of headship

A typical day in school begins at 7.30am with administration ('paperwork, emails') and ends at home, again with paperwork and email. The headteacher tries to leave school in time to help put his own children to bed, but will check his emails and do reading there during the evening. Much of a typical day is spent in meetings on various issues both related to the day-to-day management of the school or for meetings with staff, but also in connection with the strategic change, such as the meeting observed for an local authority SEN audit.

Despite his experience and preparation, and a good first day ('on day one I was OK, but there was an element of ignorance is bliss'), Matthew was very surprised by the feeling of isolation in the role and how lonely he felt, especially during his first term. He was surprised by his own surprise and not having thought of feeling like that and is also aware that this feeling is not moderated by a really close relationship with the deputy. In the second term, his surprise was at the sheer relentlessness of the role and of the tasks he needed to tackle. Overall he believes that 'the buck stops here – nothing can ultimately prepare you for that'.

Areas of uncertainty are on very practical matters, a current example being that of a parent seeking a place for her child at the school. As this would be the fourth change for the child in four years, he feels that this should be turned down and, as in other instances, will ask his previous head for advice on how best to tackle this. In a context of considerable change in national policy, he feels well informed by the local authority, with regular meetings and information led by the director and with good, current knowledge shared within the quindrat and by the chair of governors.

On a good day (and Matthew says there are lots of them) he will have achieved the key tasks he has set for the day and will not have experienced any significant problems such as challenging behaviour from a parent. A highlight of the job is in being able to acknowledge the successes of the staff and of the children and in seeing the impact of the changes he is making on the progress of pupils. He says:

> "It's kind of driving your vision through – they're the exciting things. For example, I've arranged for someone who used to work for National Strategies to come and work with us on really pushing children's learning."

Matthew, new headteacher

The observation day

This head has strongly held values and beliefs about the importance of making a difference for children's learning. He is driven by a conviction that systems and processes must enable the maximum progress in learning. He actively seeks support and feedback from others in making improvements according to his vision for his school. These beliefs and values were clearly seen to influence his leadership practice on the day when the headteacher was observed at work.

The observation day was characterised as a 'long, difficult day', but not untypical. The day included a lengthy SEN audit meeting with local authority officers, school staff and governors and an evening meeting of the governors' curriculum committee. The whole of the afternoon was filled by 11 one-to-one meetings with members of staff, each taking 15 minutes. There was also an accident at an after-school club which the headteacher attended and which interrupted his plans for working on a report. At the end of the school day, which concluded at 8.30pm, he noted that he would need to complete this at home later in the evening.

An overview of the diary for the day appears overleaf.

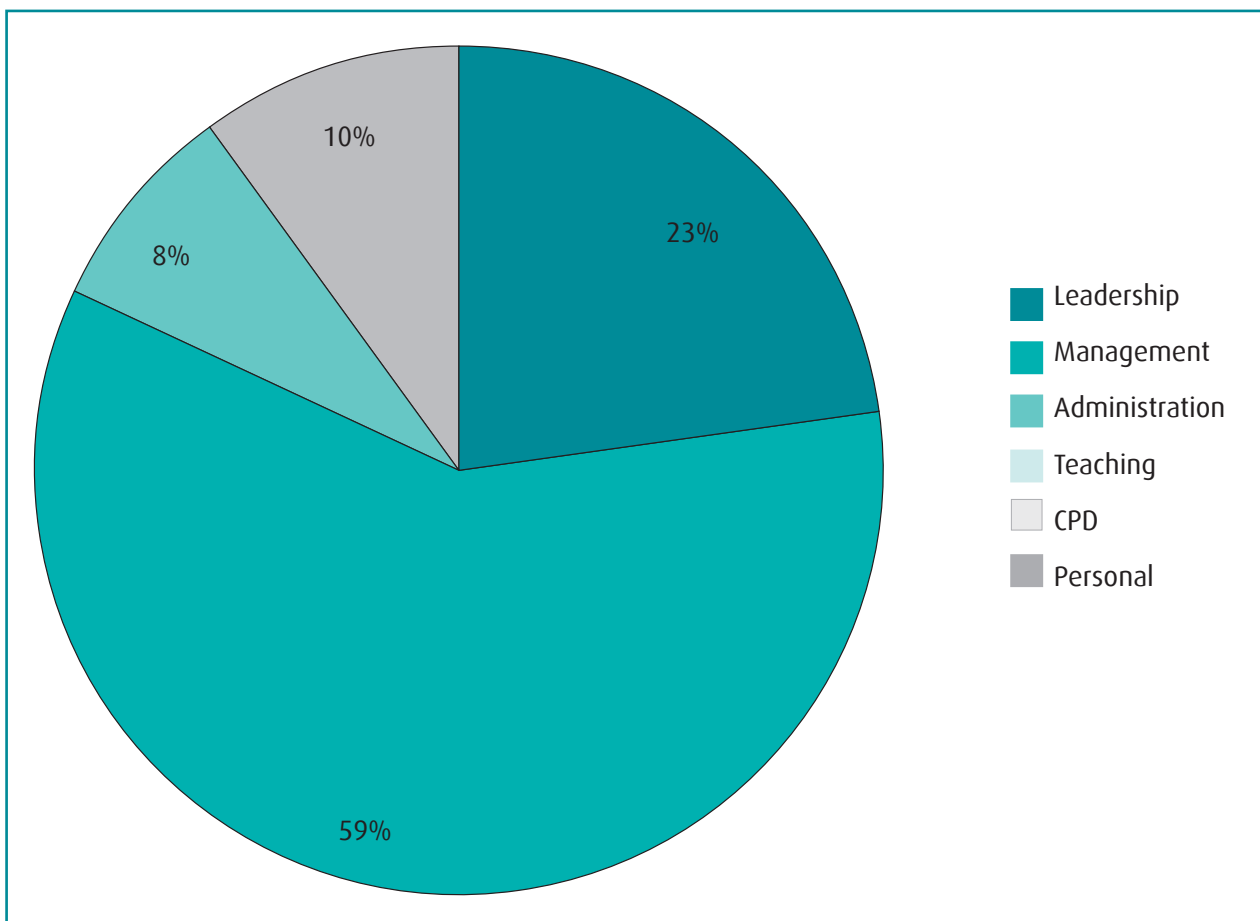|	
7.45am	Arrival in school, discussion with member of office staff, checking emails and making a phone call. This is to a colleague to seek advice on a pupil admittance issue. The office is next to the staffroom and the door is left open. A teacher pops in to update on a pupil issue and to ask for advice about the next step, and a supply teacher also comes in to feed back on her (good) experience with a class on the previous day.
8.30am	Headteacher walks round school, where teachers are preparing for the day. He has brief chats with teachers in their rooms, for example on the arrangements for a class trip that day, arrangements for Year 2 SATs and moderation.
9am	Playground duty, greeting children and parents and having brief conversations with them.
9.15am	Informal meeting with the deputy head in her office (his own is in use for another purpose) to discuss various pupil issues, adjustments to PPA and cover for that week and to share information and responses in relation to some recent emails.
9.45am	SEN audit self-evaluation meeting. The head, deputy and acting special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) are there to present the school side and the chair of governors (CoG) and the local authority SEN inspector are present as evaluators. Another school governor and the local authority link inspector join the meeting at 10.45am. The headteacher outlines what the school will present in this session. The deputy leads on the presentation of data using prepared slides. The headteacher supplements what she says on these. He also contributes strong belief statements: 'Personally, I think…', for example, when talking about involving children in reviews of their progress, and speaks about having examples in place of good practice but needing to spread this across the school. Also he several times summarises discussion and seeks confirmation of his understanding of what the local authority SEN inspector is saying in relation to improvements that could be made: 'Let's just go back to what you said', 'Let's be clear about this'. He models an open attitude to feedback, for example, by asking for advice about how best to select parents for meeting external evaluators (such as Ofsted inspectors) based on comments made by the local authority link inspector about 'extremes'. The headteacher talks about how they will take the next steps as a school: 'It's about the three of us – we'll sit down together'. He asks about the role of governors in continued monitoring, and checks with the CoG that they are in agreement about shared understanding of this. He concludes the meeting by summarising and clarifying the outcomes and noting down the action points for the school. He formally thanks the local authority officer, and openly values the opportunity to get feedback, and to learn and improve on the good things that are already in place.
12.45pm	One-to-one meetings, scheduled back to back with individual members of staff, both teachers and teaching assistants (the observer was not present in these meetings). Each meeting is scheduled for 15 minutes, and the head sees 11 different members of staff in this period. The purpose of the meetings was to get feedback about how things were going and gather any issues and views about what needed to be done in the school to improve. The headteacher comments afterwards that they were good meetings without any surprises, and that they had needed to happen but there hadn't been time until now. He also comments that he has not had a chance to eat any lunch.
3.30pm	Meeting with admin officer to discuss diary for the following week.
3.45pm	Meeting with deputy and a class teacher (the same one who had popped in before the start of school). The deputy gives an update on what has happened and the headteacher gives advice on the next steps.
4pm	Meeting with school business manager to discuss her input at a forthcoming staff meeting. A staff issue is also discussed.
4.15pm	The headteacher goes for a run before the evening governors' meeting.
5.30pm	Head called to an accident in the school playground which happened 'literally as I was walking out of the shower'. A pupil has been injured during an activity at an after-school club and had become unconscious for a few minutes.

6pm	Meeting of the curriculum committee, also attended by staff governor and the deputy. The head places himself at the side of the table, quite distant from the committee chair and the CoG. The meeting is strongly chaired by the lead governor, with other governors all inputting and the CoG taking a leading role. The deputy answers several questions and the staff governor also makes several contributions to the meeting. The head makes relatively few contributions to the meeting. On one or two occasions, the CoG gives a strong personal opinion and the head responds with a moderating comment such as, 'let's put it on the agenda for discussion'. He seeks clarity on issues and the decisions that have been made on some occasions and offers supportive comments. There is a discussion about the level at which pupil data needs to be presented to governors. Although the head contributes by seeking clarity, he also leaves it to the deputy to take this forward as an action point. He speaks most strongly when the discussion is about pupil learning, saying 'it's the progress we want to see'. As the meeting concludes, the head remains behind with the committee chair and CoG to affirm what had been achieved at the meeting. Very good relationships are demonstrated with governors by open discussion.
8.30pm	The headteacher leaves for the day, with emails to be checked and a governors' report to be completed later in the evening.

Reflect:

Could any of these activities have been led by other staff members?

Figure 2.1: How Matthew's day was spent

- Leadership — 23%
- Management — 59%
- Administration — 8%
- Teaching
- CPD — 10%
- Personal

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The field note for the day is given below.

> Although there were relatively few changes of activity, these required high levels of concentration. The head's leadership behaviour and what he said was controlled. At the two long meetings for which the observer was present, his contributions were carefully made to allow other members of staff, and governors, to take the lead as much as possible, but were also gauged to a) facilitate the progress of the meeting, by seeking clarity and summarising points made, and b) to give strong statements which demonstrated his personal beliefs about the importance of a focus on pupil outcomes. Although the observer was not present, the 11 one-to-one interviews in the afternoon would also have required a high level of concentration and awareness.
>
> The beliefs that the head expressed at the earlier research interview were clearly demonstrated during the day. He modelled behaviours and beliefs about the importance of a clear vision, of a focus on pupil progress and outcomes and of a consultative and enabling approach. His beliefs about the importance of distributed leadership were demonstrated in the mindful way in which he facilitated their contribution at key meetings. Although he did not spend much time interacting with children or parents on the observation day, he demonstrated the strength of his relationships with them through his visible and warm approach to parents, to staff and to pupils in his walks around the school and playground.

Head's role and others' expectations

Matthew takes his responsibility for developing the staff team very seriously: 'the team you have around you is crucial; CPD is really important'. He is keen to embed coaching and mentoring within the school and has allocated funds for this in the school development plan. He is currently discussing how coaching and mentoring will be implemented, as well as extending work on peer observation and enabling staff to visit other schools to look at good practice and to attend courses. However, managing the individual CPD needs of staff within the limited flexibility available to a small school can be difficult.

Staff expect to be listened to. In the term before taking up post, he met with each staff member individually and in the week of the research was repeating this process to get feedback from them about how things have been going and to get their input into further change that is needed. He has acted on what he heard from staff, ensuring that meetings are efficiently run, procedures tightened up and a clear vision created for the future of the school. He considers himself open to feedback and is intending to use material on strategic planning that the school business manager is obtaining through her work on an advanced diploma to make further improvements. Governors asked him for honest self-evaluation about the school and what is needed and they are continuing to build their skills as critical friends. In relation to the local authority, he is aware of a significant shift in its role as it actively markets services that were previously provided as a matter of routine.

Matthew considers that one of the most valuable elements of his first term in post was to improve his accessibility to parents by holding open meetings to seek their views on the strengths and weaknesses of the school. He has had very good feedback on these. He knows that parents want him to be accessible and responsive and that he will build on the successes of his predecessor. He will continue to actively consult with parents. For example a session is planned for consultation on the refreshed vision for the school.

Reflect:

What strategies would you use to help build positive relationships with parents?

Wellbeing and welfare

Consciously maintaining health and fitness, by taking care to eat well and not to drink too much and also by maintaining training at least once or twice a week helps to maintain Matthew's wellbeing. Before the evening governors' meeting on the day of the observation, he went for a run and has managed to stick to this as a routine.

Matthew is keen to reinstate a regular slot for dedicated headship time, termed by the previous head 'head's day'. Up to now, he has felt that he has wanted to be in school, but feels it will be really valuable to have reflective time away from the school environment.

In difficult times, he is sustained by his family and by 'pictures of the children'. He knows that he needs to be resilient and that 'on a difficult day, you've just got to get yourself up and get on with it… keep your head down and keep on going'.

For Matthew, being a headteacher in London is 'a bullfight – hard work, but exciting and exhilarating'.

Looking ahead

Matthew is excited about new proposals for headteacher development and support through a national network of teaching schools. One of the schools in his quindrat is likely apply to become a teaching school, so he feels he has reasonable knowledge of the initiative and would like to be involved. He is also aware of the risks, especially for a small school, of expanding its training role and getting the right balance between the needs of children and those of trainees. In a context where schools are judged by SATs results and by Ofsted, this is very important. He values the role of the National College 'I'm a big fan', he says and feels you need an overarching, national structure, as was provided through the National Strategies for the curriculum. He also feels that there should be ready access to evidence-based research on good practice, citing the Learning texts (Conner et al, undated) as a good example of this.

Matthew enjoys being a head and sees his current post as a stage in his career. He would like to move to a bigger school and gain experience in another local authority but would probably stay in London. He is passionate about social equity and justice and wants to work somewhere where he can make a difference in relation to significant need. He really enjoyed his time in the local authority and the opportunity to work with other schools. He hopes that in the future there will be opportunities to do outreach work in other schools.

To change headship, Matthew would increase the focus on the leadership of teaching and learning by raising the profile of the school business manager and their responsibility for finance and premises. As good practice in preparing to take on a new headship role, he would advise very good opportunities for building knowledge and relationships in the school in the term before taking up post. He would also recommend holding open meetings with parents to show them you are accessible and interested in their views.

> ### Reflect:
>
> What has this case study made you think about your own leadership and school?
>
> How will you change your leadership practice as a result of reading this case study?

Postscript: Matthew's reflections on the experience

The research process was good – having the interview questions sent through and being interviewed and then being observed. It was interesting and helpful to get an external perspective on how you do the job day to day.

The experience of participating in the research has helped me to reflect on my practice. The researcher had credibility acquired through her experience and knowledge of how schools work and this helped to make the comments on the observation relevant to me. Overall it was a good opportunity and a positive experience.

Case study 3: A primary school head from an inner London borough

Introduction

Jo is the headteacher of a small primary school in an inner London borough. There are approximately 200 children at the school, which has a children's centre for children up to three years old and a Foundation Stage for those between three and five. At the last Ofsted inspection in 2009 it was judged to be 'good' and described as having a very high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and with an ethnically diverse intake. Almost half the pupils spoke English as an additional language (EAL): 24 languages are spoken at the school and many began with little English. The number of pupils joining or leaving the school midway through their primary education was also high. Ofsted noted that the school had had some turbulence in its leadership.

Jo began her teaching career at the age of 28. Initially, when her own children were young, she worked part time and then held two part-time jobs at different schools for a number of years. Her first full-time post was as class teacher in Year 6 and, after a short time, also literacy co-ordinator. After four years she was promoted to an assistant head post and two years later to acting deputy. It was during the middle of her second term as one of two acting deputies that the substantive headteacher was suspended over a safeguarding issue. Jo and her fellow acting deputy then acted up to headship for the rest of the term until an executive head was appointed by the local authority. Jo worked with this executive head through the following academic year as acting deputy, during which time she completed NPQH (2009). The executive head retired at the end of the year and the school recruited a new substantive head from Easter 2010.

Jo applied, unsuccessfully, for the substantive headship post. In hindsight she felt it was right that someone else came in after such a turbulent period. She visited three other schools and chose not to apply. This included her current school, which she had visited but had felt that it had a number of complex challenges and so 'looked a pickle'. The school did not appoint and readvertised the post. Jo then decided to apply and to use the recruitment process to collect further information. She found that there were a number of challenges. After the long-term substantive head left, an executive head had stepped in until the appointment of a new head, who left after only four terms, to be replaced by another executive head. During this time pupil attainment had fallen and by 2010 was 'a concern'. The school had a budget deficit. So, although Jo felt the task was 'a big bag', she took the position when it was offered to her, taking up her post in June 2010.

Reflect:

What advice would you give to help prepare for the challenges of this role?

When Jo started teaching it was not her aim to become a headteacher and she feels that, in many ways, circumstances have led her there. She says that she enjoyed the leadership aspect of earlier roles such as co-ordinating literacy and designing systems and whole-school projects, and seeing the success of her work. As acting head she had led the school through a difficult time and giving security to both pupils and parents had been a major reward. Once she had had the experience of acting headship, she felt 'it was difficult to go back'.

Key leadership and management challenges

The newly appointed head of her previous school allowed Jo to leave several months early and this enabled her to work alongside the executive head until the end of the summer term 2010. She feels that this was invaluable in enabling her to focus on a whole-school audit and the recruitment of several key staff. The purpose of the audit was to find out what was occurring in practice as quickly as possible, but not so fast that the key issues were identified incorrectly. She found a range of management challenges including a lack of systems and routines and few clear lines of responsibility and accountability. There was a need to show teams how they interrelated and the potential negative impact on children if they failed to do so successfully.

Reflect:

If you were in Jo's situation, what questions would you ask the executive headteacher and chair of governors?

Leadership challenges

For Jo a key challenge has been changing the practice of teachers. She reflected that on arrival as headteacher with staff already in post you have a vision of where you need their practice to be but achieving the vision is very difficult because of the need to shift individual and group perceptions. Changing perceptions was not helped by the Ofsted judgement in 2009 that the school was 'good', because Jo's judgement was very different. A number of staff complained that her approach to reviewing pedagogy and curriculum incurred too much work. For many staff, the preceding period had been a turbulent time with a lot of different leaders saying different things but with little being embedded. So, in reaction, there was 'some rolling of the eyes and "here we go again"'. There was also resistance, which Jo found difficult mainly because 'you want to go at a pace, but if you go too fast you can end up going backwards'.

The existing deputy decided to move on when Jo arrived and this provided an opportunity to make a key appointment. In her first term Jo advertised the position, and, as part of the appointment process, observed all the candidates teach. She also observed candidates giving feedback to teachers on lessons they had observed as she believes that a crucial part of the deputy's role is to help coach teachers and build an improvement ethic. The person she appointed had been the deputy head at her previous school (with whom she had jointly acted up to headship). Jo saw this as 'very fortunate and important' because she knew this deputy was an excellent teacher, that they shared similar values and that Jo would receive her '100 per cent' support. They have since worked very closely together to establish systems for monitoring and for professional development to improve the quality of teaching.

Confronted with resistance, Jo decided to be as transparent as possible. She focused on demonstrating that specific changes would have a positive impact on children and, as such, were necessary. Jo felt that if many of the change conversations were held at SLT level, staff would not understand the purpose and direction of change. In order to address this the school improvement partner's feedback was shared with all staff, weekly staff meetings and a communication board were established and Jo, together with the deputy, met with individual staff to discuss specific issues. A regular half-termly cycle of lesson observation and book reviews was introduced, led by Jo and the deputy, and supported by the school improvement partner. Although Jo was keen to involve middle leaders in this process, she did not yet feel they were ready and she did not want to distribute responsibility for teaching quality too early.

Recently a class teacher who had been particularly resistant to change had resigned. For Jo this was a positive outcome and had made a difference to the ethos among staff.

Reflect:

What are some other ways that Jo could build trust with the staff?

Management challenges

Jo's initial audit of the school led to two staff restructurings. The first focused on support staff. There was a large number of support staff and hence a large budget for them, but their impact for children was limited as they were not managed well. Many had different contracts and timetables, they were not in school for planning or feedback and there were no specified skill sets or team co-ordination. From the audit it appeared that contracts were fitted around the needs of individual members of staff rather than those of the school or the children. As a result of this restructure, some support staff left and some were made redundant in a process that followed the local authority's model policy. Jo felt that the process had been fair and transparent. She sought to communicate to all staff that although this was a difficult period, the restructure was in the best interests of the school and would result in better quality teaching for pupils and more effective support for teachers.

The second restructuring was focused on the school's extended provision. Jo found that the school was subsidising the extended school provision, which ran for seven days a week and kept the school open until 9pm. Rolls for the children's centre had fallen by 50 per cent without subsequent action. The rents of community groups using school space had not been reviewed, premises management was very expensive with little accountability for value for money, the after-school club was losing money and physical access to an adult learning room presented potential safeguarding issues. Jo restructured the school office, after-school and premises teams with the result that several staff left or were made redundant. More money was released for the curriculum, and the school has been able to appoint a school business manager (from September 2011) to oversee the extended and children's centre provision as well as support Jo in wider financial decision-making.

Preparation and support for heads

In leading this broad spectrum of change, Jo felt she had received sound support from the HR and extended school teams at the local authority. The school improvement partner (SIP) had been very useful particularly as she had been the school's SIP since 2003 and had a longstanding and detailed knowledge of the school. The part-time executive head had returned to his own school at the end of the summer term but his part-time support, which had been brokered by the local authority, had been invaluable for the first few months.

Jo also found good support from a local network of primary heads. Local school heads, less so her direct neighbours, had offered support and she had taken that up on a number of occasions. One example was enabling her to discuss, in confidence, personnel, approaches to improving the quality of teaching and ideas on redeployment and the best use of human resources. More broadly, she was able to discuss, 'how to get to where you want to be'. Even if there were no clear answers, she felt that it was very useful to be able to talk issues through with other heads who had had similar experiences.

Jo felt that she was reasonably well prepared for headship but that also you 'can't learn to swim until you are swimming'. Through her earlier teaching and management experience she had a clear understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. NPQH had helped her think through approaches to having 'difficult conversations'. She had found budgets and finance relatively straightforward but reflected that she could have had more experience on HR and its rules and regulations.

Dealing with governors had presented a significant challenge. She found the new governing body very different from those in her previous schools. Two different chairs of governors had already resigned, the second very recently. She had struggled to appoint parent governors who had not previously played a big role in the school and were relatively undemanding. Jo was trying to build their involvement.

> ## Reflect:
>
> How might Jo encourage parents to become governors and develop strong relationships with the governing body?

The practice of headship

Jo felt vulnerable to external pressures in her role: 'we've got to get over [the] floor targets otherwise the sky will fall'. She said she was trying not to lose confidence but felt uneasy and very aware of the great accountability for achieving targets. She estimated that on a good day 70 per cent of her Year 6 class would achieve at the required level, whereas on a bad day the figure would be 58 per cent (and thus below the floor target). The implications of that margin of error were significant to her and the school but, as Year 6 was a small class, it only equated to two children (with each child contributing six per cent).

She had worked hard to try to build good relations with the local authority but felt it was not taking enough responsibility for the three years of attainment decline and instability when the school had entered local priority support. Jo felt that she had to keep reminding the local authority that she had been in post for less than a year. She was trying to identify strong evidence that her leadership was placing the school on the right path, as pupil attainment data in Years 6 and 5 was not strong. However she felt that it was hard to evidence a change in culture and atmosphere in a school, even though most staff were now on board. She anticipated that a poor SATs result for 2011 would trigger her school on 'the radar' and then 'a whole different journey would result'.

In the face of this acute personal pressure, Jo was attempting to balance the need for urgency without losing her staff or resorting to superficial quick fixes. Her days were best when she got out into classes, interacted with pupils and saw the positive results of restructuring including the benefits to the children. She recognised though that designing a range of systems (for quality and accountability) and updating the school improvement plan, as well as general administration, meant that she needed to spend time in front of the computer or in meetings in her room.

The observation day

Balancing these pressures was apparent during the observation day and kept Jo on the move and on task constantly. However she managed to keep a positive outlook throughout and sought to disseminate support.

An overview of the diary for the day appears below.

| 7.55am	Administration in the headteacher's office, dealing with emails. These included emails to several staff, asking them to undertake specific actions.
8.20am	Walk round to say 'morning' and bump into staff with whom she wanted specific conversations – for instance, asking a teacher to lead a new whole-school display on literacy work, asking the caretaker for an update on premises work, visiting the breakfast club, asking a member of the SLT to undertake a book review (as part of increasing his role in school accountability). This was one of a number of walkabouts that were distributed throughout the day.
8.40am	Administration in headteacher's office checking a job advert that was going out for a lunchtime deadline. She commented that there should be a job specification on file, but such systems were still lacking.
8.55am	Playground duty to oversee the pupil start-of-day line up and to greet parents for five minutes before walking around to check on the reception, which that day was down a member of staff, and to see an external building contractor.
9.15am	The headteacher reviewed the assessment report on a newly qualified teacher and sent it off to the local authority.
9.25am	Supporting staff in the classroom. Jo joined the deputy head in the Year 6 class to support the teacher who was guiding the pupils through a maths practice test for SATs. When the pupils were peer-marking their papers, Jo focused on supporting two different pupils, including one EAL pupil in particular who was strong on numeracy but weak on literacy and who would often not finish questions in time.

9.50am	In headteacher's office to ring the borough HR team to update on an interview the day before for the school business manager (SBM) post which had resulted in an internal candidate being turned down and subsequently calling in sick.
10am	Meeting with the new chair of governors (CoG) who had been voted in a couple of days previously. Jo showed the CoG a range of improvement documents and pupil tracking data files. The CoG had a local policy view on education but had less detailed knowledge of the data and needed Jo's support to interpret it and to be given reassurance about subsequent interventions. This was relatively time-consuming.
11am	Visit to the staffroom to meet staff informally, followed by a return to the headteacher's office to write a narrative on the budget and school development plan for an forthcoming governors' meeting.
12pm	Visit to the dining room. During the visit, Jo spoke to individual younger children whom she had either seen crying when arriving at school or whom she knew had had a problem at school the previous day. Several older pupils were asked about what they had learnt during the morning and the head stopped a boy who had replied 'nothing' and asked him to detail more specifically what he had learnt, which he then did.
12.30pm	Jo reviewed the school's finance plans in preparation for the governors' meeting.
1pm	Walk to a local shop to buy a sandwich and some cakes for an SLT meeting in the afternoon.
1.15pm	Meeting with the deputy head to pull together a staff monitoring and professional development plan for the summer term which includes plans to deploy external trainers and support. During this time she ate a sandwich while writing on a whiteboard.
2pm	Telephone conversation with the local authority HR manager to confirm the job advert and ongoing SBM recruitment process. This led into time at her desk to strategically plan staffing redeployment.
2.30pm	Administration, typing up the summer term planning.
2.50pm	Walk round at the end of the school day, speaking with a range of different parents. This was followed by a walk round the school to speak to different staff about specific actions and pupil progress.
3.15pm	Summer term planning and general administration in the headteacher's office.
4pm	SLT meeting at which Jo and the deputy head presented the summer term plan to three other senior members of staff. Two of these were broadly supportive (but without providing detailed comments) while a third offered a range of comments, but not always in a particularly supportive manner. Jo listened to inputs, made alterations and sought to gain buy-in.
5.15pm	Meeting with one SLT colleague on nursery admissions that needed the head's intervention to ensure that parents were contacted to secure their enrolment. At the same time, the deputy worked with another SLT member on staff timetabling.
5.40pm	Administration in headteacher's office and meeting with the manager of the adult learning centre who knocked at the door to clarify a decision.
6.15pm	Headteacher leaves for the day.

Jo commented that this had been a relatively typical day. It contained a balance between school improvement work and time to walk around the school. A better day would have enabled her to keep a closer eye on pupils, including supporting them in lessons.

> ## Reflect:
>
> How well do you think Jo prioritised her day and used her time?

Figure 3.1: How Jo's day was spent
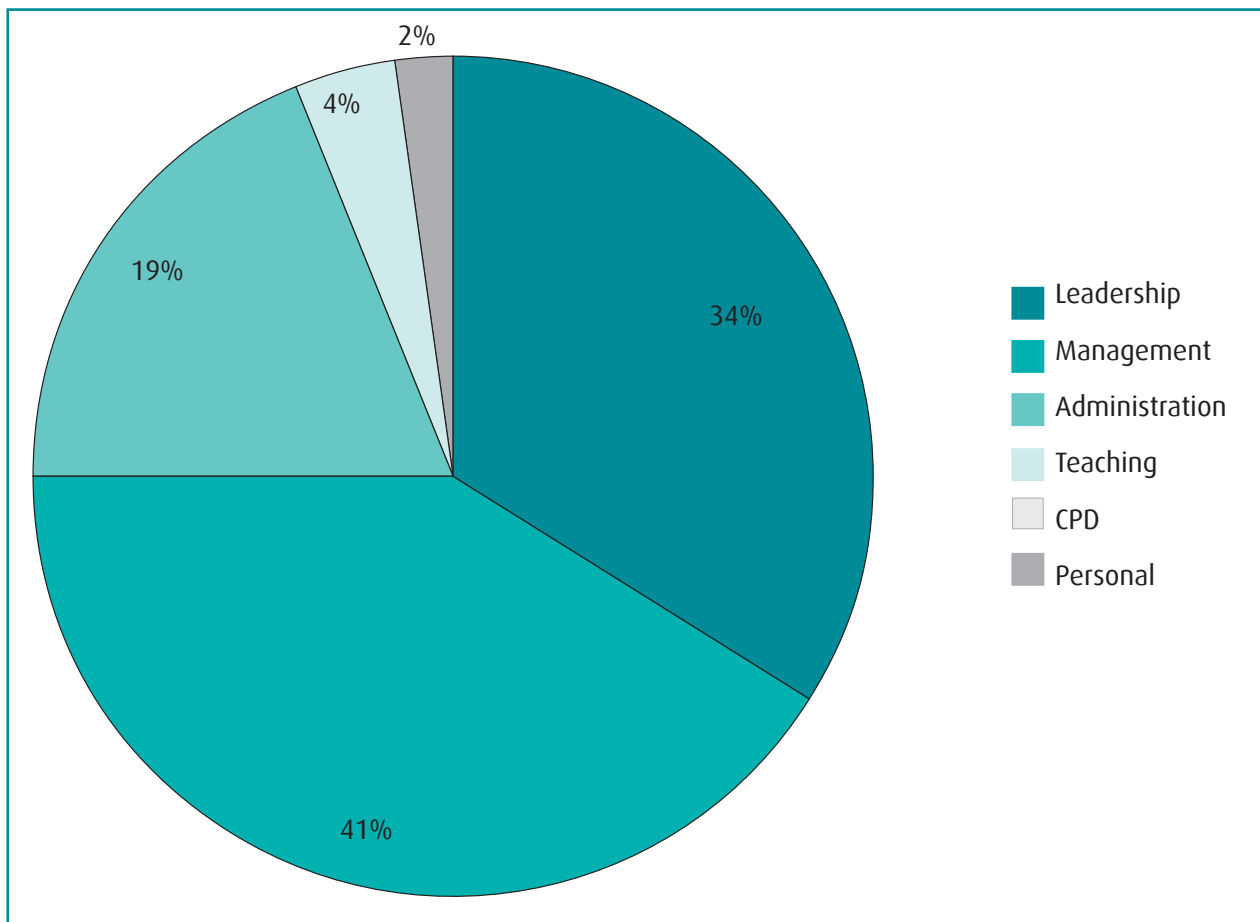
Head's role and others' expectations

Jo understood that generally her school expected clarity from her. Staff were keen for someone to come in and give direction as it had previously been an unsettling time without a person in charge. Parents expected her to be available to them and to give feedback. Jo had undertaken a consultation with parents and, for example, they were clear that they wanted to keep a weekly newsletter rather than moving to a more professional half-termly publication. Pupils wanted to see their headteacher regularly, to share their good work and to have clear expectations set. The governing body and local authority wanted a Year 6 attainment rate of at least 60 per cent in KS2 SATs, good communication and for her to be open to their advice and challenge. They also expected her to stay and to provide stability.

> ## Reflect:
>
> What strategies could Jo use to address and lead these multiple expectations? Which should be her main priority?

In seeking to fulfil these expectations, Jo felt she had already built a positive ethos, despite the changes for improvement that she had introduced. She had established higher expectations and aspiration among children and made safeguarding and the school's finances more secure. She was working to build capacity among her middle leaders but this had taken time, especially in a small one-form entry primary school. Her aim for the first year was for 60 per cent of lessons to be 'good or better', but this had not yet been achieved.

Wellbeing and welfare

Jo is sustained in difficult times by having 'some numbers on my phone to call if needs be; [headteacher] colleagues [for when] no one else is interested in some difficult issues'. The local representative of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) had been very helpful in thinking through what was fair.

The school deputy had also sustained Jo. She could not imagine trying to deal with a raft of difficult issues without a deputy who was completely on board: 'it would be impossible'. The deputy had helped influence people in informal ways, 'swapped good-cop/bad-cop roles', supported the strategic direction for the school, modelled good practice and led on improving teaching.

Headship was for Jo 'personally very demanding, but professionally very rewarding'. She admitted that self-doubt was a negative factor in that when confronted simultaneously with internal resistance and external challenge she could start to doubt herself. Stepping back and clarifying the context would usually help to overcome this but she found that more difficult when she was tired. There was also a sense of headship being lonely, of always being the leader and rarely the team member. However she knew that this was necessary and that being part of the school's external social life was not possible, at least at this stage.

> ### Reflect:
>
> How would you help Jo combat her feelings of self-doubt?

Looking ahead

For Jo there was a lack of clear external support for her role. She felt that changes and conversations around the role of school improvement partners (SIPs), local improvement teams and a range of accountability roles dissolved, from her point of view, into semantics. What she needed was consistency of approach and support rather than lots of external cross-checking.

She had found the SIP and the most recent executive head supportive. She had heard about the national leader of education programme and had asked to be a supported school. However, the school did not quite meet the qualifying criteria as it was making just too much progress in standalone English, even though it met the mathematics and combined mathematics and English criteria.

She regretted that she had taken up a headship just as the London Challenge had come to an end. She was wary about setting collaborative support 'too much in stone' because of the risk that the school might be absorbed into a federation. Overall Jo had no difficulty asking for help 'to get us back on track' and felt 'the best people to do that are those schools who had similar experiences', or an SLT that has had to deal with similar issues. Support needed to be school centred and helpful in overcoming key challenges in the classroom. Such support had not been easy to access and had not been forthcoming from national agencies.

Finally Jo reflected: 'I would like to spend a couple of years here to finish the reforms, then move to a bigger primary school in London', before taking on an advisory role to share practice and support others.

> ### Reflect:
>
> What has this case study made you think about your own leadership and school?
>
> How will you change your leadership practice as a result of reading this case study?

Postscript: Jo's reflections on the experience

The process of the research was well managed — communication, explanation of the scope of work, etc. The researcher was very personable and so, although the prospect of having someone shadow you for a day is a bit weird, in practice it was reasonably unobtrusive. We discussed at the beginning of the day that there would be periods when I would just work on my own at the computer and that might feel rather odd with another person in the room, but it was fine and I would just try to briefly contextualise the work for information.

I found it interesting to look at the outline of the day and how that broke across leadership, management and administration activities etc. With that in mind I am pleased that I am close to finalising the recruitment of a school business manager, as I think this will make a huge difference to where I can focus my energies. The case study report captures a period of time that was particularly challenging literally the week before SATs, and immediately after significant turbulence in the governing body and I think that is reflected in a lot of my comments. The research has supported me to reflect on the first year and in particular that period. In addition I think the other element that comes across is that it is a first headship in a climate of massive change. Announcements are coming fairly regularly from the Department for Education and all of them are loaded with a sense of huge systemic change. It will be an interesting period of educational reform to look back on in time.

Case study 4: A primary school head from Midlands inner-city

Introduction

Ann is the headteacher of a small primary school of approximately 170 pupils with an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provided through a nursery and the reception class. When inspected by Ofsted in 2009 the school was judged to be 'good' and was described as having a high proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and speaking English as an additional language. It was also judged to have a high level of pupil turnover. Ann has been the headteacher for just over a year, having started in April 2010.

Ann began her teaching career in 1988. She spent eight years in her first school and towards the end took on the KS1 co-ordinator role as cover for maternity. She found this very enjoyable and began looking for opportunities to take up the post permanently. At this time the then headteacher was retiring and Ann felt it was 'a natural time' to move schools. She secured the KS1 co-ordinator post in another local, large primary school where she spent eight years, during which time she was promoted internally to assistant head (after having begun to apply elsewhere). Soon after this promotion, a new headteacher was appointed who subsequently had a big influence on Ann's professional development. She remembered three main reasons for this.

First, the school's three existing assistant headteachers, 'made a pitch' to the new head to retain their three posts and not create a new deputy head position, a proposal with which he agreed. This immediately created opportunities for Ann to take on aspects of the deputy head role.

Second, the new head actively encouraged Ann to take on stretching assignments with support but with more freedom than she had previously experienced. This included being tasked with leading the EYFS from 'good' to 'outstanding' as this was the only part of the school that was not already judged to be outstanding. In hindsight, this provided invaluable experience in managing resistance to change within an environment in which she felt comfortable. It also gave her the opportunity of directly managing 15 staff.

Third, over time Ann had taken on responsibilities that essentially made her a de-facto deputy. This occurred as the head took on wider roles for the SSAT and internationally and requested that Ann lead and manage the day-to-day running of the school.

When her existing headteacher announced he would be moving on to another school Ann decided that she did not want to work under anyone else and instead wanted to take what she had learnt into headship. Crucially, she also felt confident that she had the skills to manage and lead a school.

This transition occurred quickly as Ann achieved promotion at the first attempt. She had looked at other schools, including reading their Ofsted reports and speaking to local colleagues. When she visited her current school she had a strong positive feeling about it, having observed the pupils and some staff.

The school had received 15 applications for the post which it had advertised interestingly as being suitable for someone seeking a first headship. This, Ann suggested, was because it was a small school and she had only moved up one point on the payscale on appointment, from assistant head in a large primary.

Key leadership and management challenges

Ann's first day as a headteacher was in April 2010. She quickly realised that issues in the school were more complex than had been portrayed externally and also in how they were understood internally. The school had been under the leadership of an interim head over most of the academic year. This interim solution had been organised by the local authority after the previous headteacher had retired. The existing deputy head had also left soon afterwards to another deputy's post elsewhere.

Ann diagnosed that the Ofsted judgement in 2009 that the school was 'good' overall, was inaccurate, based on the low attainment recorded by RAISEonline and also due to the quality of the curriculum and

teaching and learning that she observed. Her task and focus had changed quickly from believing she was leading a school from 'good' to 'outstanding' to actually needing to lead a school away from being only just 'satisfactory'.

Ann felt the new challenges this presented included the following.

— Low attainment: As a small school with a high proportion of children new to English, it was particularly vulnerable to missing floor targets. Classes of older children had only 10—15 pupils and hence a large percentage contribution from each child.

— Baggage brought by staff from previous years: This included a sense that the school might not have been a particularly calm place and that it might not have enjoyed appropriate support and challenge for high expectations.

— Local reputation: Few families actively chose the school and a greater than average hard-to-place children had been admitted following a threat to close the school when the roll fell to only 95 children.

— Budgetary deficit: This was not the £10,000 that had been suggested to Ann, but was actually over £40,000.

> ## Reflect:
>
> What do you think could be the key leadership strategies needed to address these challenges?

To address these challenges Ann led a range of responses. Recruiting a new deputy was a priority. An advert was put out in Ann's first month for a September 2010 start. Between an internal and an external candidate, the latter was chosen despite governor concern that this might upset other staff. This concern later proved to be largely unfounded. The external candidate was already known to Ann as a KS1 co-ordinator from her previous school and as an excellent teacher who shared her values and whom Ann could completely trust.

With the new deputy in post, Ann focused on improving the curriculum and teaching and learning.

Leadership challenges

Ann had observed that the children were disengaged and were often doing worksheets with little creativity in learning. Perceiving that she had neither the time nor resources to create a totally new curriculum, Ann introduced the international primary curriculum (IPC) in September 2010. Her choice was based on her belief that this curriculum provided good entry points for learning, enjoyable thematic focuses and clear points for assessment. Some staff proved resistant to this change, with several becoming openly negative in meetings. Ann and the new deputy worked hard to get key staff on board including using regular informal meetings to share the need for, and purpose of, the changes. They benefited from having one particularly resistant member of staff change her mind to become an advocate of the IPC's potential for creativity.

To enable improvements in teaching and learning, Ann introduced, across the whole school, Kagan co-operative learning structures which had been used successfully in her previous school. Ann and the deputy had originally planned to introduce Kagan at Christmas 2010, but later felt that this would be too early for staff and so waited a further term. They wanted to balance their own sense of urgency with the risk that staff would not keep pace with the changes and would resist them.

To provide a further focus on the quality of teaching, lesson study was introduced. This consisted of teachers forming cross-phase pairs in order to identify specific pupils requiring additional focus, to co-plan lessons and then to observe the pupils' responses to the colleague's teaching. This work was initially targeted on improving reading and writing.

Ann sought to create greater whole-school awareness of pupil attainment data and higher expectations of pupil progress. A new pupil tracking system was introduced in September 2010. Pupil progress meetings were held half-termly with teaching staff and were expected to identify pupils who were underachieving and discuss subsequent interventions. The wider goal is to make the whole school's staff, not just the head and deputy, feel accountable for pupil outcomes and for everyone, from subject leaders to teaching assistants, to know and understand the school development plan.

Management challenges

A closer inspection of pupil progress data had led in some areas to a redeployment of staff. This has been supported by the replacement of a senior teacher and the recruitment of several newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Capacity has been released for a new approach to cover and planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time, including moving one of the class teachers to other roles. This has avoided complex personnel procedures as well as meeting school and pupil needs.

Ann has worked hard to rebrand the school through new signage and seeking to work in the community. She has actively engaged with those parents whose children had been offered a place at the school despite not choosing it, talking to them and showing them around the school. As a result, several decided not to appeal against the allocation. Ann had argued successfully at local professional meetings that while the school aspired to be inclusive it should no longer be considered a dumping ground for hard-to-place pupils. Despite the budget deficit, improvements were made to the school buildings, with roof leaks, mould and peeling paint being addressed.

Reflect:

How would you develop positive relationships with the local community?

Preparation and support for heads

Ann completed her NPQH in 2007. She enjoyed it, but did not find all of it equally useful. A residential event at which she had to design a school from scratch with people she did not know had been challenging and very insightful.

She felt that the best preparation had been working closely with her previous headteacher. Learning through stretch assignments, the opportunity to lead the day-to-day management of the school, and managing change in the face of resistance had all proved invaluable. Ann compared the encouragement and freedom to learn and develop under that headteacher to working with her other headteachers, who had been more directive and with whom she had learnt less. However, she also noted that the freedom and accountability through which she had developed had not been beneficial to all her colleagues. Ann drew on this experience to lead her own school, from leading whole-school curriculum change to still using a system of daily folders in which longer non-urgent tasks could be stored in the knowledge that they would be revisited.

Ann has benefited from a range of ongoing support. The most important included the following:

— Ann felt she could completely trust her deputy head, who has provided a range of professional and emotional support.

— The previous interim headteacher offered to continue as her National College mentor head. Ann considered the pros and cons of this and decided that this colleague's knowledge of the context would prove useful. They currently meet half-termly and the support Ann receives ranges from practical discussion, for example on how the mentee is responding to changes in nursery funding, to emotional support for difficult decisions.

— The local primary/special school consortium has provided both an informal network of colleagues who can offer advice on a regular basis as well as a formal partnership that provides resources for specific projects (eg on behaviour) and a forum to raise local issues (eg fairly managing hard-to-place pupils).

— The extended school cluster co-ordinator has supported before- and after-school provision and also networked Ann into schemes and initiatives that have enabled her to improve the school's estate.

— The local authority has provided invaluable support on policy and legal issues, including matters of child protection and family separation.

The practice of headship

Perhaps the most common feature of headship for Ann was 'never knowing what's going to come in through the door'. She operates an open-door policy and has sited her office next to the school's front entrance, in part to be available, in part as a new headteacher wanting to be aware of the school's daily flows and events. This inevitably increased the number of knocks at the door.

Ann had worked purposively to organise herself to be flexible and able to respond to staff, parents and pupils. She noted that the actual running of school was not as challenging as it had been initially. She still needed, once she had clarified routines and structures, to go round making sure these were being followed, sometimes finding that they were not. She also noted that she still needed to develop strategies to stop her day from being hijacked by a knock or lots of knocks at the door.

This was a difficult balance to strike, as an important part of her leadership approach was to have quick informal chats, hear problems and suggest solutions or provide direct decisions. This was possible in a small primary school, although she noted that among the 10 per cent of staff she felt she had not yet won over, most were people she did not interact with often and who would not regularly knock at her door.

Ann reflected that in some ways this informal and open approach was a simple extension of her own 'chatty self'. It was also part of her response to the attitude she had encountered towards change, which had surprised her. At her previous school, change had come to be expected but in her current post, some staff had felt very challenged by change, with some seeing it as a threat or indicator they were not effective teachers. Ann had become used to talking things through with individual staff and striving to find out the underlying reasons for resistance. This had proved a successful approach in winning staff trust.

Reflect:

How could Ann successfully balance the need to be easily accessible whilst still making time for herself?

The observation day

An overview of the diary for the day appears below.

| 7.30am	General administration in headteacher's office and responding to emails on a wide variety of topics
8.45am	Gate duty. Ann stood outside the school to greet pupils and say hello to parents. To try to improve punctuality the school has instigated a 15-minute period during which pupils can enter the school and be greeted by their teacher. Pupils have to be in before 9am and, if they are late, the parents are asked to sign a late register. While greeting pupils, Ann exchanged friendly words with a number of parents, stopping to look at a child's artwork or to ask a parent about a younger child. Towards the 9am deadline, children and parents began to run towards the school when they saw Ann outside. The children generally seemed happy and well-behaved, although a couple of groups of children from the same families arrived without their parents and looking more dejected. Ann purposefully greeted them directly, with 'good morning' and 'well done for being on time'.
9am	Meetings with parents. As is common, Ann is available to meet with parents more formally after 9am without an appointment. One parent used this to discuss a private matter regarding information on their children. Ann offers these open-access meetings as she has learnt that issues 'can brew during the day' if not dealt with early on. When an issue requires detailed discussion, a follow-up appointment is made, but the open access to Ann for parents is an attempt to make the school feel welcoming and to demonstrate that any issue raised will be dealt with swiftly, whether it is over attendance, bullying, child protection or family issues.

9.15am	Ann visited each classroom to ensure children were settled and that teachers and assistants felt supported. This was generally well received with teachers telling Ann what the lesson was about without prompting or a sense of annoyance. Ann has also used her presence to try to model certain behaviours and curtail others. For instance later during the day she quickly visited the reception when she heard voices being raised and was also present at the first phase of lunch duty as she had been concerned about staff shouting at pupils as noise levels rose.
9.45am	Meeting with the caretaker about ongoing building refurbishments followed by a meeting with the school secretary about nursery applications. The meetings were interrupted several times by staff bringing boys in who had misbehaved. Ann was caring but firm with these pupils. She sought other staff perspectives, for instance, that of a staff member who had held a detention with one of the pupils the day before. Ann wanted to ensure that links were made, that consistency was assured and that pupils knew that this was so.
10.30am	Administration in headteacher's office, checking progress of SEN pupils within the school tracking system and writing a reference. There were several interruptions from staff, including one asking for direction on a safeguarding referral. All the knocks at the door, including misbehaving pupils, were treated with warmth.
12pm	Lunch duty.
12.15pm	Meeting with pupils. Ann reviewed the work of the two boys she had seen in the morning.
12.30pm	Meeting with the deputy about the school development plan, followed by a phone call about a meeting the following day. Ann ate her lunch during her meeting with the deputy.
12.45pm	School improvement planning. The task was to prepare for several days of support from an Ofsted inspector whom Ann has engaged to observe the current quality of teaching and learning and to support the school's self-evaluation. This is part of an ongoing process to prepare the school for an Ofsted inspection, which could be triggered early by pupil attainment data or not take place until 2012. Ann said that her purpose was to protect staff from 'manic' last-minute preparation, and also she wanted to reinforce regular staff accountability for pupil progress.
2pm	Scheduled meeting with the external extended schools cluster co-ordinator, who brought news of potential funding for creative and art projects with students. The meeting was interrupted by the special educational needs co-ordinator who reported on a child protection issue.
3pm	Scheduled meeting with a member of staff who had used her PPA time that day to review the EYFS RAISEonline data. The member of staff was not able to answers all Ann's questions. These were asked in a coaching and supportive way, but that served to clarify the staff member's lack of knowledge on target-setting and moderation. This was thus a developmental conversation and it ended with a follow-up meeting being planned. Ann confessed that a year before she had also felt concerned about not knowing what she did not know, especially around data, but had spent time learning and exploring and now felt confident in her knowledge.
3.30pm	Staff meeting in the staffroom. Ann broke off from the moderation conversation to lead the farewell to a long-serving member of supply staff. There was a sense of collegiality and good humour during the presentation of flowers. Staff responded well to Ann's jokes and talk, but she soon left to get back to the interrupted meeting. She reflected on how important it was to be open and ready to talk to everyone but also important that staff realised she had a fair but strong will, and that she would not get too friendly with anyone. This included her not attending trips to the pub or other social activities. The exception was the deputy head with whom she had developed a close friendship.
3.45pm	Ann returned to the EYFS data meeting.
4.15pm	Planned telephone call to support a colleague at her previous school who was going for an interview and for whom she had been writing a reference.
4.30pm	Emails and general administration.
5pm	Ann leaves for the day. She did not plan to work that evening. Often she leaves at 6pm and can take work home in the evening and over the weekend. She is trying to encourage other staff to achieve a better work life balance by going home at 5pm and suggesting that others leave, but she realises that she is not a very good role model in this respect.

Figure 4.1: How Ann's day was spent
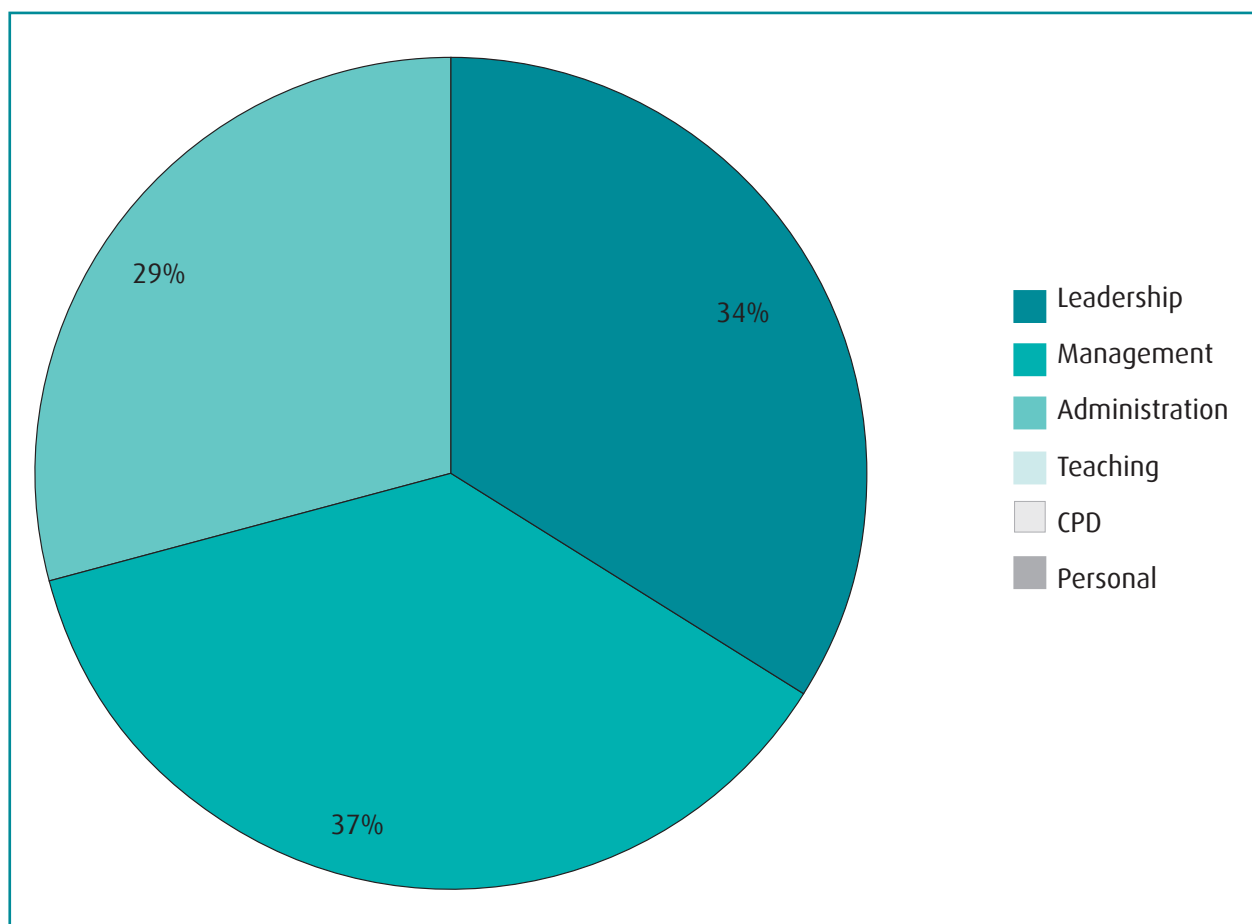
Ann felt that the observation day had been a 'relatively average' day. A good day would have involved more achievement towards her improvement objectives. These included the school development plan and also the improvement proposals that she had asked her key internal stakeholders to suggest when she had arrived. For instance, pupils had asked for a better outside play area as the original outdoor space was simply concrete. One very good day was when the school celebrated the opening of its new all-weather sports area along with a new garden.

Head's role and others' expectations

While experiencing resistance to specific curriculum and pedagogic changes, Ann agreed that she had had a honeymoon period and that this may not yet have come to an end. Many of the staff had only worked at this school and so Ann felt they had become used to the poor accommodation in an old school building that had not been maintained well. Renovating the school had lifted the morale of staff and pupils.

Ann believed that her staff had initially expected her to be inconsistent, given their recent experience of leadership and change. They had now come to expect her to be consistent, to support them and, gradually, for her to challenge them.

Ann had worked hard to help the governors realise that the Ofsted judgement and previous school self-evaluation were not as accurate as it had seemed. This included training them in school data analysis. They now expected her to be open and honest and to communicate regularly with them and in return had offered her support for her leadership of change within the school.

Ann had taken a similar approach to the development of staff and especially middle leaders. She did not currently feel that she was able to delegate significant pieces of work to senior staff and was in the process of mentoring them and sending them on external training to help them understand the whole-school aspects of their roles. This lack of delegation meant that the school still had a relatively hierarchical form of leadership. However, Ann felt that the ethos of the school and especially staff willingness to take on new approaches and evaluate their own progress was one of her more significant accomplishments to date. A number of staff had also been told by members of the community that there was a perception that the school was improving, which bolstered a widening belief that progress was being made.

Wellbeing and welfare

Working to manage change and work closely with staff to see it through, coupled with a steady flow of child protection issues, had had their impact on Ann. She described herself as a supportive person and thought that she could go home and 'switch off'. However, she admitted that she often worried about specific pupils, particular decisions or the school more generally. This often manifested itself in disturbed sleep and Ann would wake at 3am with issues circulating in her mind and be unable to go back to sleep.

Ann felt she was getting better at protecting her time. But the most important contribution to her wellbeing was her relationship with her deputy. They shared values, and could laugh often at themselves or positively in the face of pressure and this was highly therapeutic.

Reflect:

How do you manage your work life balance?

Looking ahead

Ann was not familiar with recent changes to NPQH ('why would you when you've already done it?') and knew little about teaching schools. She had used her previous school as a reference point for demonstrating good practice and many of her staff have visited the school to observe specific practice, for example early reading research.

In terms of her own future, Ann has set herself the medium-term goal of staying at the school for another four to five years to embed the changes she has begun. Overall she is enjoying the role and, although she finds it challenging, it is also very 'exhilarating'. It has confirmed to her that she is capable of being a good headteacher. In the future, she would like to move to a bigger primary school that would afford the opportunity and challenge of leading a school from 'good' to 'outstanding'.

Reflect:

What has this case study made you think about your own leadership and school?

How will you change your leadership practice as a result of reading this case study?

Postscript: Ann's reflections on the experience

As a new head, it is very easy to focus continually on what is left to do, what areas need to be developed, and what new government targets we have to reach. It is all too easy to forget to celebrate the journey so far and reflect on what we have already achieved. This research project made me stop and reflect on our journey. I was able to clearly see all the positive impact we have had on the children's enjoyment of school, their engagement, progress and attainment. I am really pleased I took part in the research and found it almost therapeutic to have someone sharing my day. It can be a very lonely job!

Case study 5: A primary school head from an inner London borough

Introduction

Rose is headteacher of a very challenging 3-11 primary voluntary-aided school with 275 pupils. Situated in an inner-city area of considerable deprivation, the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is very high and significantly above average. Nearly half the pupils are from black Caribbean backgrounds with the next largest group being of black African heritage. There are 30 people on the staff including 14 teachers, of whom 3 are newly qualified. By the time Rose took over the headship in April 2010, the school had been through a period of considerable turbulence and was deemed by the local authority to be in 'category 3b', ie at risk of failing. Although graded 'good' when inspected by Ofsted early in 2008, this was considered a generous outcome and the headteacher left soon after. The school had four headteachers over the next three years and standards declined. In March 2011, after Rose had been there just under a year, the school was inspected and given a notice to improve as it was judged to be failing.

Rose had been teaching for over 20 years by the time she gained a headship. She trained as a teacher in West Africa, working there for about 10 years before coming to London to study during which time she worked as a supply teacher. She secured a position in an inner-city primary school in 2001, gaining qualified teacher status (QTS) and exemption from induction as an overseas-trained teacher the following year and stayed in the same school until 2006. During the five years that she taught there the school improved greatly: judged satisfactory in 2001, it was graded 'outstanding' when inspected in 2006 and again in 2008.

In recognition of her classroom excellence she was awarded advanced skills teacher (AST) status in 2003 and spent three years helping teachers in other schools improve teaching and learning, especially within ICT, as part of a 0.2 outreach role. Rose has a degree in law and business, which she considers has been valuable as a headteacher.

She moved to become deputy head of a church school in 2006 and stayed at the school for 4 years, during which time she completed NPQH over 18 months, in 2006-08. She was acting head at the school for a year, an experience which made her realise that she was 'definitely ready for headship'. She applied for the headship when it was advertised for the third time but was unsuccessful. When a new but inexperienced head was appointed, she applied for the headship of another church school ('working in a church school is important to me') in the same local authority, and was appointed head in April 2010.

Key leadership and management challenges

Leadership challenges

In meeting the challenges of this new headship, Rose said she was determined to demonstrate a clear vision and tried to operate strategically whenever possible. The problems that she faced included the following.

— Low standards: The proportion of pupils who reached the expected standards of attainment in both English and mathematics in 2010 was low and falling: 59 per cent in English (72 per cent in 2009) and 63 per cent in mathematics (78 per cent in 2009).

— Leadership and staffing instability: Rose was the fourth headteacher in three years and several classes were covered by temporary teachers.

— Falling roll: The school moved from having a one-and-a-half-form entry to a one-form entry roll, which had financial as well as organisational and staffing implications.

— Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision: This was considered poor.

— Parental engagement: This was low, with few parents being engaged in the school's activities.

Rose was very clear that her priorities were to raise standards, particularly through achieving better KS2 SATs results, and to improve provision for pupils in the EYFS and those with special needs.

Reflect:

What do you think are the key leadership strategies and behaviours needed to tackle such challenges?

Staff responded well to her. Rose said 'they were desperate for leadership, having had such a long period of headteacher instability'. She tried to be open and collegial throughout: bringing people on board, for instance through the joint analysis of data from pupil, parent and staff questionnaires. She said, 'I took my time. I carried them along and we made changes together'.

She made four key appointments including a new deputy head, who was the acting deputy at her previous school. This helped her leadership because they knew each other well and 'he is really excellent at teaching and learning'. Passionate about distributed leadership, she put individuals in charge of each of the seven teams working on the school development plan:

1. Teaching and learning

2. Community cohesion, extended services and parental involvement

3. Inclusion/SEN

4. Environment

5. Communication

6. Foundation stage

7. Developing leadership and management

Governors, the local authority and Rose herself had been pleased with progress until the school was inspected in March 2011 and deemed to be failing. It was given a notice to improve (NTI) because 'actions taken by senior leaders are beginning to raise standards but have not yet impacted sufficiently on the overall attainment and progress of pupils across the school'. This was a huge blow to Rose but there was consolation in knowing that the recognition of her leadership stopped the school being placed in special measures. After the initial shock, she saw the Ofsted judgement in a positive light because it gave even more impetus to progress and a stronger mandate to make changes: two teachers that Rose had been worried about were deemed inadequate and so this outcome from Ofsted would 'speed up capability procedures'. A section 48 inspection (for church schools) a month later deemed the school 'good' but after a week this decision was downgraded to 'satisfactory' because Ofsted had put the school on an NTI. Although this too was a blow, she held on to the positive messages from the lead inspector and remained optimistic about the future.

Reflect:

What will Rose's key leadership priorities be to move out of the NTI?

Management challenges

Accommodation was an early challenge that Rose addressed. The school is in a Victorian building on a very small site. Improvements to the old school building had an early visible impact, with a better reception area and renovation to the EYFS block. Rose described this as 'a quick win' particularly as it had an uplifting effect on staff, parents and visitors to the school.

The behaviour of pupils was poor so Rose set up systems for children to become part of the decision-making process, especially about the behaviour policy. A school council was formed and all pupils were

surveyed, finding that, for instance, only two-thirds of children were pleased with behaviour. Pupils and staff investigated further. They analysed all the accidents in the two playgrounds and found that in one the children needed more to occupy them and, as a result, play leaders were appointed to structure playtimes.

Staffing was an issue with a succession of temporary teachers that had had a detrimental effect especially on some classes. Deploying teachers strategically meant that Year 6 pupils were much happier after having three consecutive years of supply teachers. Over a third of them had special needs which were being better met: as Rose said, 'they are all hungry for learning'.

Preparation and support for heads

Rose felt very well prepared for headship due to her experience as an acting head in another local church school, teaching in a challenging school that moved from 'satisfactory' to 'outstanding' and through her previous role as an AST. The latter was very useful preparation as the outreach role required her to manage change in many different schools and work with a variety of people.

She found NPQH useful:

> "It helped me derive and articulate my vision and strengthened me in how to work towards that vision. It helped me with dealing with unenthusiastic staff – that has been my strength."

Rose, new headteacher

However, she felt that NPQH would have benefited from more detail on setting a budget and going through redundancy and capability procedures. She also found that she needed more knowledge that was specific to church schools, such as about building regulations, the ownership of the premises officer's house, etc, and considered that there would be value in having an optional unit on these matters within NPQH. Shadowing headteachers would also have been useful.

She has felt very well supported and considers that she could want for nothing more. This support comes from:

— a Head Start coach, who is head of another local church school, chosen from the NPQH website

— a longstanding mentor appointed by the local authority when Rose was an acting head, who is a retired church school head

— a new mentor who is an experienced primary head in the local authority

— a school improvement partner from the local authority

— informal contacts with many people such as the head of her first school

The year's consultant leader programme and diocesan headteachers' induction programme were valuable although she did not attend all the sessions because she had felt she needed to be in school. A course run by Ofsted for schools with an NTI was also useful.

In the half-term before she took up the post, she spent a day a week (her PPA time) at the school getting to know people, discovering what needed doing and planning a strategy. She found this very valuable. She also considered that taking on a headship in the summer term was beneficial because she could use the last term of the year to bring about quick wins and get people on board before making bigger changes in the new school year.

The practice of headship

For Rose, the most satisfying and rewarding parts of the job relate to the happiness of the children. She has identified vulnerable children and each one now has a key worker on the staff, including Rose, so that issues can be tracked and addressed such as raising issues of punctuality with parents. Parents and pupils know the targets and how to achieve them. Rose believes that 'parents trust me because I send my child here'.

The headteacher has a structured timetable for each week with regular meeting slots such as one with the chair and vice-chair of governors every fortnight. Every day is also timetabled with regular events such as being outside by the school gate talking to parents at the start of school and at hometime.

> ## Reflect:
> How would you structure roles and the head's timetable to enable the best possible response to the unexpected crises that regularly interrupt the day in schools in challenging circumstances?
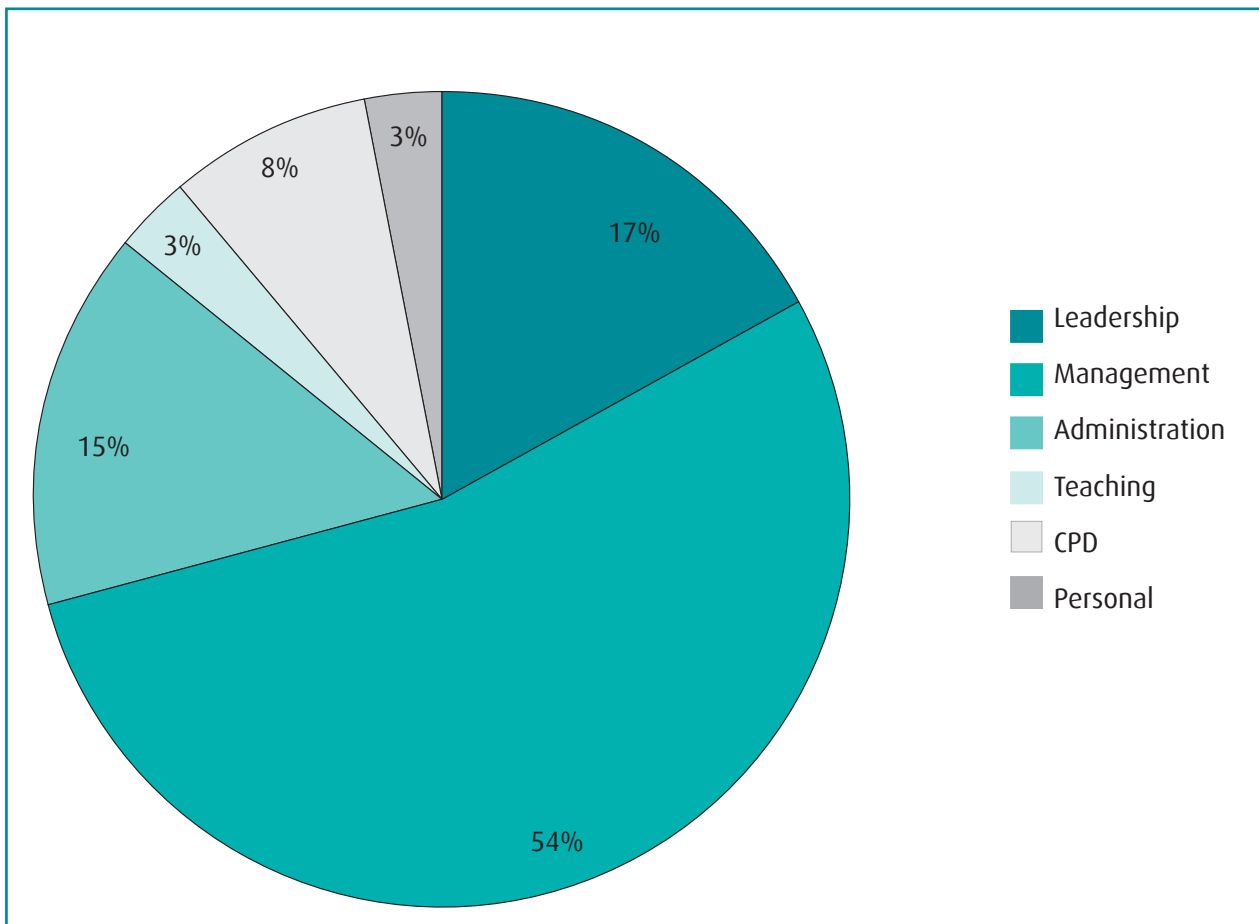
The observation day

This was a Friday, the last day of SATs week. There is a tightly timetabled schedule of events and meetings but it is less busy than usual because Rose and the staff have worked very hard on preparing pupils for the tests, including coming in on the bank holiday. Three out of nine classes are not being taught by their regular teacher on the observation day: two teachers are on long-term sick leave and one has been poorly for two days. Two teaching assistants (TAs) are also away.

An overview of the diary for the day appears below.

8am	Administration. Most staff arrive just before the headteacher. Rose chats to office staff and the deputy head in a relaxed but businesslike manner. Three out of nine classes are not being taught by their regular teacher today as they are on sick leave. Two teaching assistants are also away. Rose deals with email in her office.
8.30am	Classrooms. Pops into classrooms to chat to teachers as they prepare for the day. Rose is very friendly and shows an interest in the work.
8.45am	Playground. Talks to the premises officer who stands by the gate for security as the school is on a busy street. Rose greets parents with a big smile, saying 'Morning Miss X, how are you?' and children are welcomed sometimes with a hug. She tries to greet parents in their home languages, saying 'this is an aim for me – it brings a smile to their faces'. There is gentle admonishment about a boy eating crisps, whose mum says he has had his breakfast.
8.55am	Rose blows the whistle and says good morning to the whole school, they chant good morning back and then walk into class in lines with their teacher.
9am	Premises management. The school business manager (SBM) and premises officer come to the headteacher's office to do a health and safety walk around the school. They discuss the CCTV footage of a theft and focus on the reception area, discussing where to position the plasma screen and clock to maximise impact. They also discuss improvements to the EYFS outdoor area.
9.30am	Observation of nursery teacher. Rose watches and makes notes, smiling. She deals with two brief but urgent interruptions from the admin officer about a social services matter.
9.55am	Administration. Rose changes from high heels to flat shoes.
10.10am	Meeting with the deputy headteacher who feeds back on the student teacher's lesson he has just observed. Rose shares her views on her nursery observation. This is a very reflective and analytical discussion.
10.30am	Assembly. The vicar takes singing assembly with all staff present. Rose sits at back in the centre and joins in. She moves to the front at the end to thank the vicar and children, and then dismisses classes but keeps Year 5 and 6 behind for a telling-off for not having excellent behaviour. This seems part of a strategy of not loosening the reins on children who might be feeling demob happy after their SATs. She talks with the vicar about taking pupils to a service in the cathedral.
11am	Meeting for a new disabled child. The meeting is performed through a translator with a Polish mother and her son who has Down's syndrome and who will be starting school on Monday. Rose takes them to his reception class to meet the staff and children, where everyone is pleased to see him and some children give him welcome cards.

11.15am	Finance management. Rose reads the post, which has been opened and sorted already by admin staff, for 10 minutes and then has a scheduled meeting with the SBM and admin officer about buying into a service level agreement with the educational psychology service. They discuss school-dinner money collecting problems regarding asking parents to pay off arrears. This raises the need for the admin officer to keep more detailed records, tracking persistent offenders and speaking to them in the playground. Rose has set a target to get the arrears down by £500, which the admin officer hasn't met. Rose says she needs to see letters and evidence of a staged approach to debt collection. She makes clear what she needs in an assertive way and stays sitting behind her desk while others sit on lower chairs. The admin officer was clearly feeling stressed. Next, Rose goes through the attendance figures and records. It is all good news and Rose says 'well done'. She tells the SBM to monitor the admin officer's record-keeping more closely. A maths consultant pops in for four minutes to keep Rose updated about progress with the maths co-ordinator.
12 noon	The special needs assistant of the new Down's syndrome boy feeds back on progress and they discuss changing and feeding arrangements with his mother via a translator.
12.15pm	Lunch duty and playground. Rose calms children down and gets them lined up. She also deals with a play leader. She and the deputy walk around the dining room and playgrounds. Rose talks to a boy who is upset and has had a fight. She asks the class teacher to sort it out because 'I don't want to be seen to be the answer to everything'.
12.45pm	Eats lunch in staffroom. Rose does this a couple of times a week to build relationships 'even though we may be at loggerheads'.
1.05pm	Administration. Rose rings the SBM ('do you have one minute before you go?'), and even though the SBM is in the office next door, she knocks on the door. Admin tasks are dealt with very professionally.
1.30pm	Scheduled meeting about vulnerable children and safeguarding issues with the inclusion manager and learning mentor. It's very businesslike, and focused and no time is wasted. There is a firm message about expecting all staff to ensure that every pupil's needs are being met. They plan case conferences and meetings about statutory assessments. It is clear that Rose is delegating tasks and for example does not attend every meeting. They share information about individuals and processes with external agencies such as discussing a new child who is moving from a special school who will have dual registration. They review the TA's timetable for children with EAL to prioritise support for the most needy children. Rose keeps a brief note of key things that need to be done in her notebook and diary, ending positively by saying 'well done everybody we're clear what needs to be done'.
2.15pm	Classrooms. Rose has a walkabout for golden time, nags those in detention and shows an interest in the activities of all the children and speaks to the teachers.
2.45pm	CPD. Rose phones a mentor head for about 10 minutes. She shares news and gets advice about wanting her NQT to visit a strong Year 1 teacher.
3pm	A boy who is leaving the school comes in to give Rose a big hug. It is a very emotional moment as his mother has died so he's going to live with his grandmother. Later Rose speaks in private to a new TA about dress code as she was wearing jeans and no denim is allowed. This is done very professionally, and Rose invites the TA to the before-school Monday prayer meeting, which she seems thrilled about.
3.15pm	Playground. Rose speaks with parents and sorts out problems eg, a mum who feels faint.
3.35pm	Rose speaks to a teacher about rearranging her assembly date. This is followed by lesson feedback with a nursery teacher.
4pm	Reflection on day with deputy.
4.30pm	Rose leaves for the weekend. She has no plans to do more work over the weekend.

Figure 5.1: How Rose's day was spent

Pie chart legend:
- Leadership — 17%
- Management — 54%
- Administration — 15%
- Teaching — 3%
- CPD — 8%
- Personal — 3%

Reflect:

What do you think of the way this headteacher spent the day (see also Figure 5.1)?

The field note for the day is given below.

> Rose was pleased with the day because she achieved everything that she intended to. The schedule was kept to. She has a powerful presence. She conveys a self-assured professionalism that has a very reassuring impact on parents and staff, and this is excellent in terms of public relations as well as in communicating her vision and high expectations. Thus, although some of the tasks done during the observation day might appear to have been simply administrative, they were done with strategic leadership. For instance, the time spent in the playground and walking around the building was used for numerous small but powerful interactions with children, parents and staff, and conveyed a passion for learning and the wellbeing of the school community. Brief conversations with pupils demonstrated a real warmth and interest in them and their learning. It was not possible to speak to this head without being made aware of her very strong belief in the entitlement of every pupil to the very best experience and learning and of her commitment to ensuring this. Through all that she did Rose did not lose sight of the importance of learning; in that sense she was a good example of a learning-centred leader.

Although polite and friendly at all times, Rose maintains professional boundaries and has a businesslike manner. Her office has a door to the corridor and another to the administrative office and reception area. Both doors are kept closed. She tends to ring the office next door to ask to speak to the SBM.

> **Reflect:**
>
> What can we learn from the leadership strategies adopted by Rose to maintain a focus on teaching and learning?

Head's role and others' expectations

Rose has placed great emphasis on training and development for staff at all levels. People have more responsibility and their roles have been clarified, but they have not always been ready for these higher expectations. With a falling roll and some patchy performance, Rose has restructured the staffing of the school. Teaching assistants, for instance, had previously been used to having a simple child-minding role but now much more was expected of them and six posts were reduced to four. The admin officer's job has been upgraded and applications sought, meaning that the present incumbent might not get it. All this resulted in some friction. However, Rose's motto, which was on a poster in her office, was to 'Be friendly to everyone but nobody's friend'. She holds her vision clearly, saying 'I do support staff but it's the child that's at the centre of it all'. It is this that sustains her in difficult conversations and she has had to have many of them, particularly in the drive to improve teaching and learning; for example she has had to start capability procedures with two teachers.

Parents are now much more actively involved. Rose has worked hard to achieve this, being highly visible and sending her own child to the school. She listens to parents' concerns. For instance, some were concerned about school meals (too bland because not enough salt) so a forum was set up to identify problems and explain the healthy eating guidelines under which the kitchen has to work. An outreach worker now comes to the school to help unemployed parents and has helped six parents get work. Rose said, 'I'm seeing smiles on our vulnerable children's faces now'. A parent teacher association has been set up for the first time in the school's history and the three key members have proved to be very valuable and proactive, organising events such as a quiz night. She briefed them about the Ofsted judgement just before the report was published and they have been very helpful in allaying fears about the situation among the parent body. Caribbean mothers are well represented so Rose has inspired them to work hard to get other groups involved. For example, 14 men attended a fathers' breakfast morning.

Wellbeing and welfare

Rose is very strict with her hours, limiting her working day to 8am to 5pm and not working at weekends in order to give time to her three children. As she says, 'headteachers must look after themselves, their health'. She organises her time strategically, keeping the mornings free to drop into classes and having meetings in the afternoon. She hopes to be able to take half a day a term as leadership time offsite, but has not yet felt able to do so.

The hardest aspect of headship for Rose was being given an NTI by Ofsted just when everyone felt that the school was moving forward. She said:

> "It was a shocking experience for me. This was a new learning curve – how to manage failure... I had to put on a smiley face because I didn't want to discourage the children and the staff."

> Rose, new headteacher

Some teachers underperformed, which really surprised and disappointed her:

"They taught only satisfactory lessons when they had been teaching good ones. I observed three lessons with inspectors and I was ashamed to see little new learning going on, just consolidation."

<div align="right">Rose, new headteacher</div>

She doesn't find headship a lonely job because she gets great support from the governors and local authority and this has sustained her in difficult times with staff. Her faith and her family are also very important to her.

Reflect:

What key leadership behaviours and skills are needed to get through such disappointments?

Looking ahead

Rose would like to be head of a bigger school in the future (in about three years' time) but only when this school is stable and the senior leaders are strong enough to sustain improvement and drive the vision forward.

If there were things she could change about headship they would be:

— have every team led by someone who can be autonomous so that the headteacher can delegate and distribute leadership

— improve office management so that administration ran more smoothly and without so much of the head's attention

— remove the stress of having to meet English and mathematics targets because she believes that it is vital to develop the whole child

— revise the inspection process because although it is helpful in terms of checking the accuracy of school self-evaluation she has witnessed how it can damage the progress made by schools in challenging circumstances. Her school is at a very vulnerable stage and she hopes that Ofsted's judgement of failure does not damage relationships and the progress made so far

— have more knowledge of employment law and finance to get greater value for money

She is very keen on the idea of teaching schools:

"With all due respect to people working in local authorities, some of them haven't seen the four walls of the classroom for so long. It'll be good to have the first-hand experience of teaching schools."

<div align="right">Rose, new headteacher</div>

After a strenuous first year in headship, Rose's advice to new headteachers would be the following:

— You must prioritise. It's the child that's at the centre of it all.

— Make every child feel listened to.

— Don't change things too quickly. See what's working and what's not working.

— Be strategic in everything you do but you've got to be organised to be strategic thinker.

— Give yourself time to reflect.

— Be friendly with staff, but that doesn't mean being friends with them.

— Use the most appropriate leadership style for the situation – sometimes democratic but at other times more assertive.

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For Rose, being a headteacher in London is 'a very challenging role but if you're very committed, dedicated and a great role model (all eyes are on you) it's very rewarding'.

Reflect:

What has this case study made you think about your own leadership and school?

How will you change your leadership practice as a result of reading this case study?

Postscript: Rose's reflections on the experience

I have been highly privileged to have been chosen for this research. The first session [interview] indeed helped me to rationalise my practice as a new headteacher so that I could articulate what I am doing and justify my methods. Being able to tell myself why I do things as a head in particular ways (and not in others) is critical. I experienced some success from the research and it has further motivated me and the methods I use. Much of the time I was doing the research project I felt confused and unsure about the process of doing this type of research. In the end I now realise that the research is valid and that my practice has improved. However, and more importantly, my style of leadership has improved because of the research.

It's a brilliant tool to use for a new head who is moving towards distributive leadership, having more time for leadership work and moving away from management. It does take a while before feeling secure enough to let go, particularly when you inherit people with poor management practice. Like any new concept or theory it can be difficult to grasp initially. The end result for me has proven to be worthwhile, from wading through the fog in the beginning, reflecting along the way, constantly questioning my methods, and spending time and energy in the process.

Case study 6: A secondary school head from an outer London borough

Introduction

Nina is the headteacher of a voluntary-aided secondary faith school in a London borough in the north of the region. The school is a larger-than-average secondary school with 1,105 pupils on roll. Students are drawn from a wide area and from a range of primary schools. Nearly two-thirds of the students are from minority ethnic groups and a much higher percentage than average speaks English as an additional language (EAL). The percentage of students eligible for, and claiming, free school meals is nearly 15 per cent, which is similar to that seen in most schools. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is also similar to the national average. The most commonly identified needs relates to emotional and behavioural difficulties and speech, language and communication difficulties. The school became a specialist science and sports college in September 2004. It was graded 'satisfactory' for both overall effectiveness and capacity to improve in January 2010.

Nina took up the post of headteacher in September 2010 and this was her first application for a headship. Prior to that she had been a learning network inspector (cross-phase) for the local authority and had been the school improvement partner (SIP) for the school to which she was appointed headteacher. She held the inspector role for six years and therefore had a good knowledge of the authority as well as strong links with many schools and headteachers across the local authority. Nina gained NPQH in 2008 whilst working in this local authority role. She began teaching in 1987 and so had worked for 23 years before reaching headship. She taught for four years in her first school in a central London borough, five years in a school in her current authority, then eight years as a deputy head in another central London authority.

Throughout her career Nina had always been ambitious and sought responsibility whenever possible and had always aspired to be a headteacher:

"The dream had always been headship."

Nina, new headteacher

Whilst engaging with NPQH, the National College data about women and headship struck a chord with her and she realised she shared some of the self-doubt highlighted in such data. When she had held the deputy post, the school had gone into special measures and the circumstances of that had also made her question whether she wanted to be a head, resulting in her subsequent application to a local authority role. Whilst in this role she was inspired by other heads who saw her as headship material and encouraged her to do NPQH. During her time as an inspector, she undertook a secondment in a school to support a new head: she 'adored being back in school' and realised she could be successful. This opportunity to see herself again in a successful leadership role in a school removed some of the self-doubt about her ability to be an effective head.

The motivation to apply for her current position was because, having previously been the SIP for the school, she was very aware of what needed to be achieved. She was clear that she had the experience, ability and motivation to bring about the change needed. Other new heads had advised her to research the school's context to be sure the school's priorities matched what she wanted to achieve and she would recommend this principle and strategy to all potential new heads. A key motivating factor was also her family's belief in her ability to be a headteacher, and specific family circumstances which highlighted an appropriate time to apply for a post.

Reflect:

What do you need to know about a school before applying for its headship?

Key leadership and management challenges

Leadership challenges

Nina faced two main leadership challenges. Whilst Ofsted had reported on some outstanding features, there was a clear and urgent need to raise standards of teaching and learning and attainment. She also wanted to review the curriculum offer to provide appropriate opportunities and raise standards.

To achieve these two overarching challenges, Nina needed to shift the culture of the school towards a focus on raising attainment and expectations and improving teaching and learning whilst working within the Catholic ethos. This meant an open approach to holding people to account and highlighting the importance of accountability.

A major aspect of this was to show that there were different ways to do things especially in terms of teaching and learning. In essence, the school's leaders needed to think and act strategically.

The head responded to these challenges through:

— communicating

— modelling

— focusing on teaching and learning strategies

— reviewing staffing structures

On her first day in post, Nina addressed the staff and set out her expectations which were 'raising attainment through a renewed focus on teaching and learning' and 'becoming a professional learning community'. She also wrote to parents to emphasise her availability to talk and meet with them. In the first two terms, Nina has worked to clarify the relationship between members of the senior leadership team (SLT) and heads of department (HoDs). Previously these structures lacked accountability and a clear focus on improving teaching and learning. In the first term, she observed every teacher, producing a clear audit of the quality of teaching and learning and gaining the overview required to support a dialogue between SLT members and HoDs. In this first year, Nina met with individual members of the SLT and the HoDs they line manage so she could model strategic approaches as well as the 'courageous conversations' needed to address long-standing areas of underperformance. The latter included the quality of teaching and subject leadership as well as student attainment. SLT members now agree formal agendas for their link meetings with HoDs so all managers and leaders have a clear picture of what needs to be addressed and by when. These agendas can be used in future years to support planning.

Such accountability procedures highlighted some pockets of underperformance among staff and a key leadership challenge was to support the members of the SLT in understanding the importance of tackling underperformance: previously this was avoided. Nina achieved this through an analogy with student behaviour. A student had been arrested in school: Nina paralleled the need for there to be consequences for students as a result of serious misbehaviour with the need for action and consequences if staff were not willing to fulfil their role. Many staff are supportive of this new emphasis on the learning needs of the students whilst others have struggled.

The second main leadership challenge had been to review the curriculum. In September 2012, the school is moving to a two-year KS3 and the following year, KS4 will be extended to three years. Underpinning both of these challenges has been the need to address leadership capacity starting with the SLT. New appointments to the team have been made or advertised and September 2011 will see three new assistant heads joining the school. This increased capacity is to enable the SLT to focus on strategic rather than managerial issues and so move away from fire-fighting.

Reflect:

How would you structure an SLT and why?

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Management challenges

Many of the main management challenges were related to the key leadership issues above. Staff were not used to change or being asked to change and many staff had worked at the school for a long time. During discussions in the interview for the post, a member of the SLT had stated: 'There are 164 years of experience around this table'. Previous heads had been in post for long periods and several staff had worked at the school for exceptionally long periods of time. On the day of the interview for this case study, one member of staff was retiring after 39 years at the school. Governors were long standing also.

To address the need for change, Nina invited external speakers into professional development sessions in the school: this was a new experience for staff and one that was welcomed. The head also supported some colleagues to visit other schools in the local authority to expose them to new ways of working. Drawing on Nina's strong local knowledge, several partnerships with other schools have been developed and a joint professional development day with another school is planned for October 2011. Short secondments across these two schools have also taken place.

Some staff were underperforming, including a key head of department (HoD). Before Nina joined the school, weak colleagues were discussed among the SLT but with no agreed strategies to support improved performance. The head addressed these long-standing problems with individual staff immediately. She chose to line manage a department that was causing concern and also began capability procedures with one member of staff.

Another significant staffing challenge is to restructure the roles of support staff to match the kind of roles that need to be covered by appropriate staff. The first main action achieved here was the appointment of a new school business manager (SBM) to address this change.

Other managerial challenges included the constant need for fire-fighting as staff and student issues emerged due to the lack of consistency in the school's response. Nina felt as if she had:

> "A baptism of fire in terms of staff and student issues that occurred in the first two terms. Many staff and the chair of governors were saying, 'nothing like this has ever happened before."

Nina, new headteacher

Incidents included the arrest of a student, the suicide of a student's mother, students discovered to be having sex in the grounds of the school, the school closed due to a heating problem and a permanent exclusion which was a first for Nina and an unusual occurrence for the school. Yet Nina felt that the chair of governors and other staff were finding out about the level and volume of such incidents for the first time due to her policy of open and transparent communication between herself and other stakeholders.

Reflect:

What other leadership strategies could support the level of change Nina needed to bring about?

Preparation and support for heads

Nina felt well prepared for headship mainly through her previous experience as a deputy and a local authority inspector and school improvement partner (SIP). These roles had prepared her well to focus on teaching and learning, raising attainment, strategic approaches and modelling. Her experience in the local authority and her previous contact with the school as a SIP meant she also felt well prepared to take on the role of head in this particular school.

In particular, Nina felt the secondment she undertook to support a new head whilst she was in the local authority role was excellent preparation for headship after being in a local authority role for six years. This secondment enabled her to gain confidence in her ability as a school leader, confirmed her desire to return to a school role and enabled her to receive positive feedback from an existing headteacher.

She also felt well prepared as she knew many of the heads and other local authority officers in the borough; indeed one head in the borough in particular had inspired her to consider applying for a headship and given her positive feedback about her ability. Nina had started the first term as a head feeling able to call on her local colleagues for advice if needed. However, her strong relationships with such colleagues also raised one unexpected issue for her in that her colleagues all expressed their confidence in her ability to do very well in her first year. This did raise doubts in her mind when she wanted to contact colleagues for advice or help during the year and inhibited her from asking for as much advice as she had thought she would.

Nina would have felt better prepared for arriving on day one if the handover between her and the previous head had been significantly more effective. She was invited to the new Year 7 intake evening but was not able to have a visible role or talk publicly with the parents and students with whom she would be working in the future. The chair of governors was also retiring from post with the vice chair becoming chair in September 2010. These circumstances meant Nina felt less well prepared for taking up the actual role of headteacher in the specific school than she would have wished. She recommends that there should be more formal expectations during a handover period and that this could be achieved by the National College issuing guidance on this aspect. She would also see a key role for local authorities and governing bodies to consider how best to support the handover period and to consider any risks in terms of the school context.

Post-appointment and prior to taking up post, and with hindsight, Nina now feels the following would have helped her to be better prepared:

— master classes in budgeting and financial issues, HR and how to work most effectively with a PA

— formal clarification by the National College of the handover expectations to be discussed with the outgoing head, chair of governors or local authority link

— clarity and suggestions about how best to work with governors, how often to meet, what to establish with the chairs of governors from the outset and how to communicate with governors

> ## Reflect:
>
> What would you try to do between your appointment and starting headship?

During her first two terms, Nina availed herself of a range of support. She went to the National College's new heads conference which was 'super' and she has worked with the London headteacher contacts she made at this event since then. She also felt it was 'special to receive a card from Steve Munby'. Her union (association of school and college leaders) helped with legal issues, which was very effective. She also networked with other heads and their support has been invaluable.

As head of a faith school, she wanted her mentor to be a Catholic headteacher and from a different borough, given the presence of extensive existing relationships from her previous role. The local authority found such a mentor and his chair of governors supported her own new chair of governors, which Nina found helpful. It worked well in her first term: in the second term, this relationship was less effective, with telephone calls to her mentor going unreturned and agreed meetings cancelled. She felt a mentor would be an important source of support and so used her extensive contacts to find her own mentor and this new relationship is working more helpfully, with her mentor communicating with her when needed.

There was no follow-up by the local authority to see if the mentoring was working or being helpful or effective. She feels local authority support should include a formal conversation at a fixed point in the year as to whether the mentor relationship is working.

Her links to the local authority mean she can find the information she needs when required, for example when she wanted support to set the budget. She wonders if this would be as easy if she had been new to the local authority. She does think the local authority should be a key source of support for new heads.

As a Catholic headteacher, she feels the diocese should be another key support. She attended a new heads meeting after which she would have valued some follow-up support or a visit from a diocesan colleague.

Having been a headteacher for two terms, Nina feels that within NPQH or post-NPQH it would be useful to undertake scenario-based sessions to work out how to address the unexpected issues that arise (eg, heating breakdown, closing the school, serious student pastoral or behavioural issues) and the key learning from such situations. Nina has learned from such situations that it may not always be possible to sort everything out immediately. She has learned to sleep on situations or decisions and that she cannot always know the answer immediately. A significant learning point for her is that she realises that new heads have to start to address their challenges with the staff who are already working at the school. This means developing and supporting existing staff is as important as looking to recruit new staff when opportunities arise.

One of the main ways Nina supports herself is by talking with young people around the school, by seeing students learning and hearing her colleagues talking about teaching and learning strategies. She seeks out such support herself and this maintains her resolve to address the key challenges of her first year.

Reflect:

Many leaders look to recruit staff rather than work with existing staff as Nina has done. Do you think this is the best approach? If not, why not?

The practice of headship

The observation day

For Nina, a typical day begins at 7am and it would be unusual not to have several meetings with other staff before the timetabled day at school begins. She goes to assemblies every day if possible and meets her PA every day to ensure she is aware of all outstanding issues. She blocks out a lesson period every day to do a formal lesson observation or to walk around the school and go into lessons. She does both break and lunch duty every day as these are good opportunities to see and talk with students and staff. Each day there is usually a formal, minuted meeting with individual members of the SLT. The day usually ends around 6pm, making it a regular 11-hour day in school. There is a scheduled school event at least one evening a week; otherwise she deals with her own work and answers emails when she gets home.

The beginning of the observation day diverted from the usual pattern described above in that Ofsted had announced a subject visit just before the date of the observation so several meetings were scheduled to prepare for this.

An overview of the diary for the day appears below.

|	
7am	Reviewing the school's existing self-evaluation form (SEF) in preparation for constructing a department evaluation requested by the Ofsted inspector.
7.30am	Meeting with assistant headteacher to clarify the data needed to update the school SEF and the broad thrust of the departmental evaluation.
8.40am	Nina talked with the head of year and deputy head regarding the suicide of a student's mother and called the local authority educational psychologist for advice in terms of communications and actions with the student herself (who was back in school) and the student's friends.
9am	Nina met with the relevant HoD to begin to write the departmental evaluation for Ofsted and was joined 10 minutes later by an assistant and a deputy head. During this meeting, the data manager typed up the discussion so the SEF could be reviewed regularly. Much of the dialogue is of a coaching nature to support the HoD and there is pressure to complete the form in the time available.
10.20am	Meeting closed and Nina responded to her PA asking if a member of staff could see her regarding the parent of a Year 7 student who was insisting on talking with the headteacher. Nina asked PA to arrange for her to meet the parent later that day and tidied her desk after the meeting. Another member of staff popped in for a brief, student-related discussion.
10.30am	Nina met with five Year 7 students who had attended extra reading classes and improved greatly. One was not there as his cousin had died that week. The students were accompanied by the member of staff who ran the extra classes. In recognition of their improvement they met with the head for a drink and fruit or chocolate. Nina praised the students for their achievements and used the time to explore how well they felt the school had supported them before they arrived and throughout their first year. She also asked for their ideas to improve the transition experience for future students. When she asked them what they were looking forward to in Year 8, several answered, 'better levels'. Nina said she was proud of them as they had 'got the learning bug', so emphasising pedagogical leadership.
11am	Nina undertook break duty in the school hall and talked with students and staff whilst asking students to tidy up their uniform. In particular she talked with students who were friends of the two students who had experienced bereavements that week and with staff who were supporting the children. She also talked with a long-standing member of the catering staff who was about to retire. All conversations over the break were very warm and positive.
11.15am	Start of lessons. Nina is asked by her PA to respond to an urgent call from a head of department and so made her way to the relevant classroom to be told the examination board had asked for sample coursework pieces to be sent though. Nina said she would alert the relevant colleagues and walked back towards her office, communicating the coursework issue to support staff and a deputy head in doing so. She picked up litter throughout this walk.
11.30am	Nina ate a banana whilst meeting with a colleague to discuss the latter's ideas to improve the student council. The discussion was fast paced and Nina supported her colleague by connecting up ideas with other developments across the school and with innovations in other local authority schools.
11.45am	Nina walked around the school and dropped into many lessons. She talked with students out of lessons and those sent out as well as picking up litter. Whilst in lessons she looked at books, watched presentations and asked students what they were learning, thus demonstrating pedagogical leadership. She settled a class to support the member of staff, alerted the nearby HoD to the issue, talked with support staff setting up exams in the sports hall, talked to individual staff in offices on either student or personal issues and had a brief discussion with both deputy heads about current matters.
1pm	Back in her own office, Nina has a conversation with her PA regarding urgent issues in her in-tray as well as tidying her paperwork on the desk to project a professional learning environment.
1.15pm	Lunch duty in the hall. Nina ate her own lunch and conversed with the head of year about a student's behaviour, and talked with a student who had returned after a period of health-related absence as well as having other brief exchanges with staff and students.

1.45pm	Back to her office, Nina met the parish priest who had dropped in to thank Nina for her support for the head in whose school the mother who had committed suicide had worked. Nina then reviewed and edited a letter for her PA.
2pm	Meeting with deputy head and special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) to review staffing needs for the next academic year and clarify contractual positions of some existing staff. Budgeting and succession planning issues emerged and a fact-finding visit to other schools was agreed.
2.45pm	Nina asked to see a student from the inclusion room to ascertain information in preparation for her later conversation with the parent who had called earlier that day. She checked her in-tray.
3pm	Nina was on duty at the school gate as students left and she had brief exchanges with students. On returning to her office, she spoke with a foster parent waiting for a student and contacted another member of staff to help with foster parent's query. She thanked another teacher for supporting some of the children whose friend had lost her mother.
3.15pm	The SEF meeting from the morning was continued with the head, deputy, assistant head, head of department and data manager working on reviewing and refining the departmental evaluation form based on feedback from other colleagues during the day.
5pm	Nina met with the parent who had insisted on seeing the headteacher, with the deputy attending also.
5.30pm	Clearing paperwork and emails.
6pm	Nina left for home and whilst there, called the father of student whose mother had committed suicide.

Reflect:

What do you think of the way this headteacher spent the day?

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Figure 6.1: How Nina's day was spent
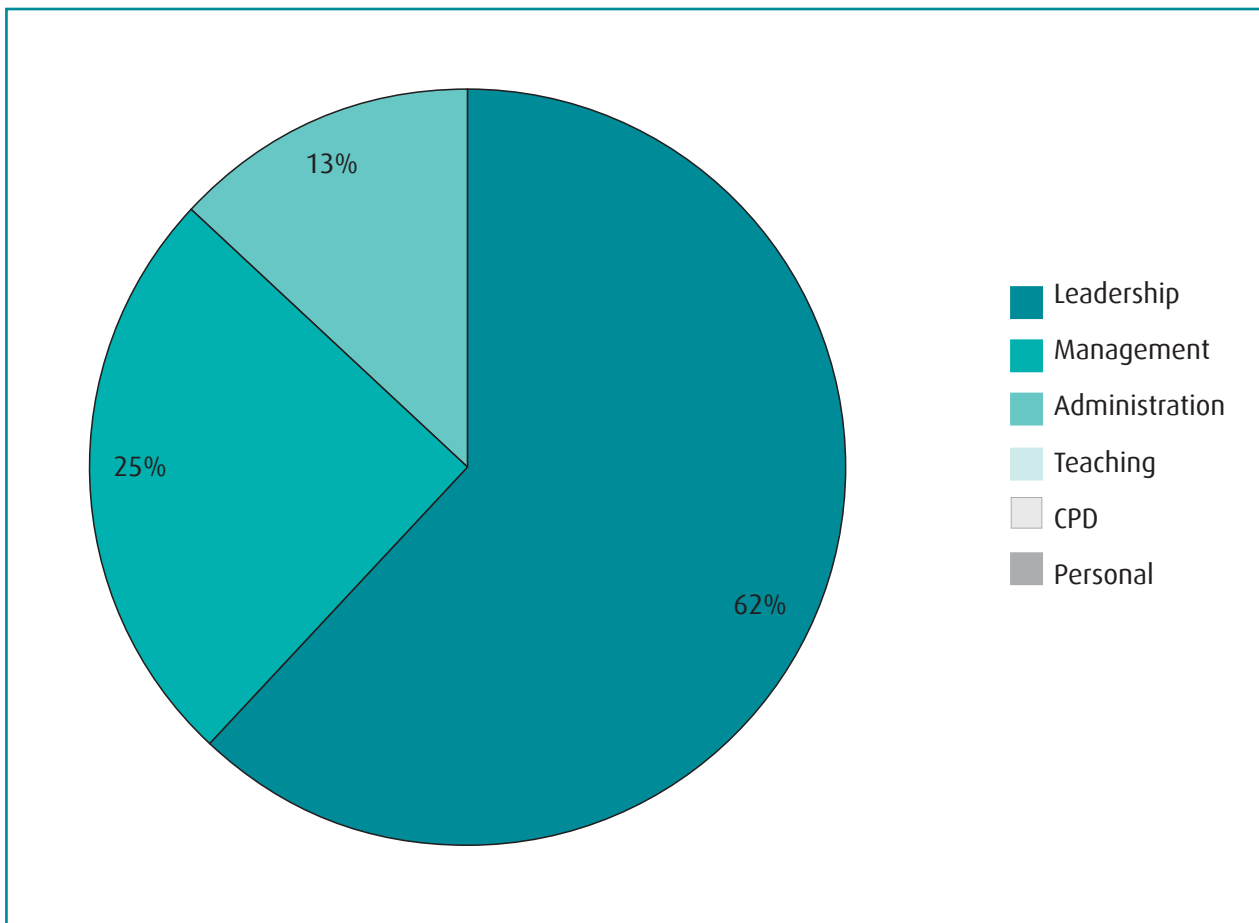
The field note for the day is given below.

> This was a very busy day with little time for the headteacher to attend to paperwork or emails as the forthcoming subject inspection dictated a series of strategic discussions with departmental and senior colleagues. In that sense the day was unusual and took Nina away from conventional activities such as assembly. Other meetings that had been scheduled continued and included internal stakeholders who wished for Nina's views on staffing or student matters, and external stakeholders such as parents or the parish priest. The difficult circumstances of two bereavements among families meant there were further short conversations throughout the day and a distressing conversation saved for the end of the day.
>
> There were many interactions with students and staff throughout the day as well as brief exchanges with Nina's PA to check on progress with some ongoing matters. Although categorised in Figure 6.1 as 'administration', the time spent on duty and walking around the school during the lessons was used for numerous brief interactions with children and with staff, most of which were focused on supporting the culture shift towards a learning agenda. Seeing a class late to settle with a member of staff prompted an immediate discussion with the relevant head of department who was asked to monitor the situation. A personal discussion with a member of staff about a forthcoming absence then moved into issues to do with coursework and grades for Year 11 students. Students and staff were left in no doubt that the head's interest was in learning and achievement as much as their own wellbeing and experience.

Management meetings followed this pattern with a discussion about improving the student council being linked to a forthcoming strategic appointment and opportunities to develop partnerships with other schools to learn from their innovative practice.

The head was clearly seen to lead from the front and to be supporting her colleagues in the shift towards a learning focus and greater accountability. Positive encounters with children sustained her ability to respond as the focus of the day swiftly changed. Whilst the challenge of working with some colleagues was evident, the support and collegiate approach of many others was demonstrated throughout the day.

Nina knows that working these hours is not sustainable and she feels she needs to get better at fitting paperwork and emails into the main day. She finds it hard to say no to people and needs to work with her PA to help her protect her time. To shift towards this, she knows she needs to plan her day better and block time out to do her own work, just as she does to walk around the school. Her priority next year is to make sure the SLT has the capacity to carry out its own strategic role through a distributed leadership approach, made more feasible through the new appointments planned. However, she wants to go through this first cycle of how things work and then will pass on and delegate to other colleagues from next year.

The most satisfying and rewarding aspect of Nina's job, and what particularly sustains her when working long hours or dealing with difficult matters, is seeing students succeed or good and exciting lessons: these are described as 'brilliant days'. One example is when she met a young member of staff following a lesson in which the teacher was excited at having tried something new that had worked. A teacher's joy and excitement when they and the students have had a good lesson makes her feel the day has been good, as does hearing staff talk about the new buzz around teaching and learning in the school.

This new buzz is further exemplified in the new approach to daily staff briefings. Nina has reduced the business focus and added a teaching and learning briefing with every department expected to share good practice. An example is of a young teacher learning to use a snowball strategy for English to support the recapping of character information. A student writes a character fact, screws up the paper and throws it to another student, who adds to the information and this snowballs around the room. This was demonstrated in the briefing with staff throwing paper to each other. At a later student council, when students talked to staff about their experiences of lessons, they highlighted that the snowball technique happened in lots of lessons all of a sudden. This buzz is welcomed by Nina and many staff.

Resolving issues before she goes home also makes her feel proud as well as managing to achieve something she set out to do.

In her first two terms, several things surprised her, for example:

— an underage student at the school having sex on the grounds, with the extra dimension this brings in a Catholic school

— the community police officer being told not to work with one of the school's students as he was too dangerous, yet staff were still teaching him

She was also unsure how to work though difficult budget decisions as she had not set a school budget before, even without the extra difficulties of exploring financial cuts. She was unsure of her own skills and knowledge in this area and made use of her knowledge of local authority colleagues and contacted the local authority for support, which she received.

Head's role and others' expectations

The head feels a significant personal responsibility for supporting the development of all her staff and particularly the capacity of her senior colleagues. She is also concerned that the formal leadership role for professional development is not yet fully addressed in her new leadership structure. She wants it to be seen as a role with responsibility for developing every member of staff and for this role to be within a portfolio held by one of the new SLT members. She sees her overall role in developing others as identifying whole-school priorities and supporting colleagues to translate these into individual performance management objectives.

She absolutely wants to be a head who knows the students, who is visible and approachable and she recognises there are costs to her and her family to achieve this at the moment. She has made it clear that she will be open and honest with colleagues and she wants to move to a distributed leadership approach.

Nina thinks her staff expect her to lead by example, to work hard, to give of her best, to deal with things and to make decisions. She thinks staff and other stakeholders expect her to be available. She wants this also and does see and meet many parents as well as attending the student council.

Governors expect her to meet her performance management and school targets. As she is still a little unknown to them and very different from the previous head, she thinks they are still unsure about how she will do things. She has asked them to take part in learning walks in the school, which they say they have learned from and want to continue.

One of the school's strengths is the relationship between staff and students and, whilst she has been treated courteously, she feels some responses have been variable. Many staff support what she is doing and respond positively to the focus on teaching and learning. Some colleagues still refer to her as new and not able to understand the ways things are done at the school. One incident which concerned her was that the previous head was invited to a member of staff's birthday celebration which was during the school day at breaktime without this invitation being discussed with her first.

The challenge she brings has affected some staff in that capability procedures for one have concluded and this member of staff was very distressed and others were uncomfortable about the situation. Others have not adapted to the new culture and resigned.

Nina did not feel there was a honeymoon period as change was brought in straight away and she has been open from the start about her expectations.

> ## Reflect:
>
> What leadership strategies can Nina use to develop positive relationships with those members of staff who still see her as new?

Wellbeing and welfare

To manage her own wellbeing, Nina knows her supporters on the staff and has conversations with them to promote positive feelings. She has a generally healthy perspective so does not get things out of proportion and thinks her sense of humour is the most important way she sustains her own welfare. In difficult times she talks to her husband as he was a deputy head and a couple of close friends in education who therefore appreciate the context of any difficulties. She thinks she should do that more and not be frightened to ask for help when she needs it.

Seeing success and achievement also sustains her, as does knowing others are experiencing similar difficulties and issues when she talks to other heads.

> ## Reflect:
>
> How do you maintain your own wellbeing?

Looking ahead

Nina is aware of new proposals to NPQH and to develop heads through teaching schools and thinks this will mean NPQH will be more practical, which she welcomes as long as there is a balance between theory and practice. A positive implication would be easy access to people currently doing the job for trainee and new heads. A concern for her is quality assurance as people interpret the role so differently and she would not prescribe one set way to do such a complex and challenging job.

In terms of support for new heads, Nina feels that local authority officers previously supported the induction of new heads effectively and she is concerned as to where this role will come from in the future as teaching schools will not cover all geographical areas.

Nina is not entirely sure how her career will unfold beyond knowing she would still wish variety in her future roles up to retirement. She is not sure of any other options to headship given the change in local authorities and the impact of the white paper. She adores her job now and has so much she wants to accomplish and achieve. However, she has seen heads fail previously: the tracking data suggests improvements for this year and she does worry in case this proves to be otherwise. Her focus now is being successful as she still doubts whether she can make the difference she wants to.

She sees being a headteacher in London as 'a rollercoaster with great highs and quite a few lows and not knowing what is around the next bend. It's exciting'.

She has valued the opportunity, afforded by participation in this research, to reflect and think:

> "The opportunity to step back and reflect on what has happened and been accomplished is very positive. Maybe all new heads would value this chance."

Nina, new headteacher

Reflect:

What has this case study made you think about your own leadership and school?

How will you change your leadership practice as a result of reading this case study?

Postscript: Nina's reflections on the experience

I found being shadowed and interviewed for the case study to be such a valuable experience. It forced me to stop and take stock a little and genuinely reflect on my experiences to date. In doing so, I realised that honest reflection is something that I keep meaning to make time for, and to be able to do so with a fellow professional was truly insightful. The questions asked prompted honest evaluations which gave me an opportunity to take that step back from the hectic pace of the role and think for a while about decisions I was making, actions I am taking and how I am developing in headship. Sharing a day, being observed, was a pleasure and a privilege and provided a chance to talk through how I was approaching this new challenge and I only hope other new heads are enabled to have a similar rich experience.

I will make sure that this experience is not limited to me as a newly appointed head, but will strive to arrange a similar experience as part of my ongoing professional development. Many thanks for allowing me to be part of this research.

Part F: Vignettes

95

This part of the report consists of four small vignettes of experienced headteachers, ie those who have served in post between two and four years. As with the case studies the names of the heads have been changed and the details of the schools slightly altered in an attempt to preserve anonymity.

Below are some questions to consider once all the vignettes have been read.

Having read the vignettes, spend some time reflecting on the following questions:

— What are the most common leadership challenges and how would you address them?

— How can headteachers ensure that they devote the necessary time to leading teaching and learning?

— What are three things headteachers can do to help prepare their aspiring heads for future headship?

— What forms of support and development seem to be most helpful to headteachers?

— How would you help headteachers find ways to address their sense of loneliness?

— What good strategies do you have or know about for helping headteachers focus on their own wellbeing?

Vignette 1: A secondary head from an outer London borough

Introduction

Will has been the headteacher of a mixed, 11—16 community secondary school in an outer London borough since September 2008. The school's specialism is languages. There are about 900 pupils, of whom 5 per cent are eligible for free school meals. About 1 in 12 of the pupils have special needs, with a relatively small number of these having statements. A total of three per cent of pupils have a first language other than English and the majority of pupils are from a white British background. It was last inspected in October 2010, two years after Will took up post.

Ofsted found the school to be 'satisfactory', with 'satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement'. The satisfactory progress of students was noted to be improving strongly at the time of the Ofsted inspection and standards at GCSE have continued to rise with over two-thirds of students achieving five GCSEs at grades A*C, including English and maths, in 2010.

The head began his teaching career as a teacher of social studies in a school in a county shire, where he remained for nine years, the last three of which were as head of humanities. He spent the next five years working overseas, in France and in Canada, where he completed an MA and taught on an initial teacher training programme. On his return to England he spent a short period at a school known for its innovation before returning to the same county local authority to take up a head of year post and, after a further two years, moved to a London borough as assistant head, before moving to his current post in September 2008. He completed his NPQH in November 2003.

For this headteacher the decision to work towards a headship was planned, becoming a strong ambition during his time in Canada.

Key leadership challenges

When Will took up post he considered that the school was overly bureaucratic or systems-led. There was a document which outlined the responsibilities of the senior leadership team (SLT), represented on an A3-sized grid, but this had little influence over how people actually operated.

Targets were a significant issue when he arrived. Data was generated and formed the basis of staff parent discussions on academic review days. Two review days were set at the midpoint of the school year and then near the end where each parent received a 10-minute slot. The problem was that the data was not used or referred to apart from on these days.

The school had last been judged by Ofsted as 'good'. Performance was around 50 per cent of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grades A*–C (excluding English and maths). This was perceived by the staff as validating their efforts. The head believed that the student potential indicated that much higher results could be achieved. A significant minority of staff resisted the idea but a number were 'up for it'. The problem crystallised when the head was told by staff, 'we do not understand the problem that you are trying to solve'. The head stood his ground, a number of resisters left and in-house continuing professional development (CPD) helped to get everybody on board.

The school is a specialist language college. Within weeks of Will's appointment, two delegations of Year 11 students came to him over compulsory language options; at KS4 there was a requirement for five-eighths of students to take two languages at GCSE. This approach was backed up by lobbying by parents. The compulsory element was seen by the head as self-evidently inappropriate and after discussions was changed. The compulsory requirement to undertake multiple languages was dropped but retained as an option.

His current challenge is still related to GCSE results, which have risen and now the key priority is to keep them at this level and to move the school to 'outstanding'.

Other challenges have been about management, and maintaining a course of action rather than making significant changes. To meet these challenges, Will stressed his deep personal commitment to 'seek to influence rather than to exercise power'. He says, 'I set out my stall and made it clear that just because I say it doesn't mean it has to happen'. There had been high staff turnover at the end of the second year. Staff turnover is currently in line with local averages.

Weekly SLT meetings were introduced and CPD on learning development has been a major element of the strategy for improvement. Meetings have been taking place with this focus every four or five weeks, with other meetings, such as faculty or staff meetings, happening on demand. Training has been in-house, mainly drawing on the head's own work from his time in Canada.

Lesson observations were introduced in the second term of the first year with the head exclusively carrying these out. All 65 teachers were observed and positive written feedback given as well as points for development.

Preparation and support for heads

Will felt very well prepared for his leadership role as head, and that the appointment had occurred at a point where planning for the role and its execution had coincided. The Master's degree he took in business administration during a vice principalship was seen as very useful through remedying deficiencies in his knowledge of managerial issues such as finance, HR and unions. NPQH was seen as 'not particularly' useful as it did not address the pragmatic issues to an adequate extent and there was a sense that the studies undertaken in Canada had already addressed this ground. NPQH and attendant support were thus seen at best as peripheral to the execution of the role. During his first year, the M2NH programme was seen as useful, particularly because of the accompanying mentor, who was described as 'better than good'. However, Will was not sure whether he found the programme helpful purely because of the strengths of his particular mentor.

He feels that his entry to the school was planned and could not think of any further preparation for the role that would have helped. However he also said:

There is nothing like doing the job not even the acting headship could prepare you for the job.

Will, experienced headteacher

Will is a member of the local headteacher network which has 18 members. This network is perceived as useful for both formal and informal connections.

The practice of headship

This head considers that there is no such thing as a typical day. Most of his time in school is spent in briefing meetings with staff and in interacting with staff and with students. This constant interaction is seen as key to his leadership role.

He has chosen not to teach because it was not fair on the students to have a teacher who could not guarantee continuity because of other commitments.

Days are good when he feels that people have been influenced to change their behaviours or commit to the direction that the school is moving in. He gains satisfaction from his leadership of raising the attainment overall of the large numbers of students at the school.

The main surprise for the headteacher has been the feeling that nothing, not even deputy headship, can prepare you for the reality of the role. This captured the sense of both isolation and accountability. These were recognised to be part of the role in advance but it was still a surprise when they were felt in actuality.

Another surprise was in his initial engagement with governors. At the end of the first year the chair and a minority group of governors were meeting with the previous acting deputy (who did not get the post confirmed) to discuss and even plot against the head. This activity was outed by other governors and the chair resigned and the staff member left. To a large extent the resolution was not strategic but rather happened as the story unfolded.

There are now few areas of work that cause uncertainty, and the head is confident about 'finding a way through' issues as they arise.

He believes that his main accomplishments since taking up headship are those of establishing a focus on learning and teaching, evidenced by improved student achievement, and the increase by 20 per cent in students achieving five A*—C grades at GCSE including English and maths. He achieved his aims of developing more functional systems and ways of working and leading a move from bureaucratic preoccupation towards a focus on learning and teaching. He purposefully achieved this by direct observation of teaching and learning and by initiating effective CPD.

Head's role and others' expectations

Will believes that developing others is very much part of the leadership role of the head. He has done this through the development of learning and teaching and by drawing upon his work undertaken with the University of British Columbia. He considers it very important to influence others positively rather than control them, and to work with staff by giving context-based positive feedback.

He feels that staff, parents and governors expect him to raise standards. He believes that the expectations of the route to this were less important. There was not, in his opinion, any honeymoon period. He has placed a great deal of emphasis on listening and responding to parents. When the initial issue with governors had been resolved, very good relationships developed, especially with the chair, and financial reward has followed.

Wellbeing and welfare

Will works to maintain a good work life balance and goes to the gym, sings in a choir and enjoys watching his (football) team play. He is sustained in difficult times particularly by the support from his mentor, who was allocated through the M2NH programme.

For Will, being a headteacher in London is 'the same as being a head in other urban schools'. Although he said that London was a place that he felt at home and loved, 'but that was it'.

Looking ahead

This headteacher is aware of forthcoming changes including the introduction of teaching schools but is not certain of the detail. He is uncertain of the implications but would be happy to be involved in mentoring. However, generally he did not feel he had enough information to comment.

He remains very much rooted in the present and feels that he has much more to do on targets. He has a five-year plan and has not explored life and possibilities beyond that.

Vignette 2: A primary head from an inner London borough

Introduction

Tim is the headteacher of a one-form-entry, 3—11, primary school in an inner London borough. The school has nearly 200 pupils of whom just under half are eligible for free school meals and 12 per cent have special needs, with 4 pupils having statements. Nearly half the pupils have a first language other than English and the largest group of pupils is from a black British or black African background, followed by those from black Caribbean and white British backgrounds. It was last inspected in October 2009 a year after Tim took up post, when Ofsted found the school to be 'satisfactory for overall effectiveness and good for capacity for sustained improvement'.

Tim's teacher training was in southern Europe, which meant that he was qualified to teach both primary and secondary when he first came to London. He worked as a supply teacher in several different primary and secondary schools whilst doing postgraduate work. He joined the staff at the school in 1998 as a Year 6 teacher, then ethnic minority achievement grant teacher and co-ordinator for literacy, and became the deputy head in 2004 before applying as an internal candidate and getting the headship of the school in September 2008. He was doing NPQH in his first year as a head and completed it in the summer term, 2009.

He has never had an ambitious career plan as such. He had a very good working relationship with the previous headteacher of the school, who encouraged him ('he was a good mentor') to apply, first for the deputy headship and then for the headship of the school. He was aware that when the previous headteacher retired, he needed to make a conscious choice between the three options: staying on as deputy and building a working relationship with a new head, applying for a post elsewhere, or applying for the headship. Because of the 'great relationship' with the previous head, he doubted that this could be replicated under a new head.

"Everything came really naturally – it just sort of grew. I've seen in London; it can be very fast if you're ambitious. There are opportunities. I was never like that, it just sort of grew."

Tim, experienced headteacher

Key leadership challenges

Moving to headship in the same school meant that there was a challenge for leadership in 'reinventing yourself as a head', establishing oneself in a new role with colleagues who had known you in a previous role. He had already done this when becoming deputy so he knew that he would have to go through it again and knew that it wouldn't happen overnight and so was less anxious about achieving the role change successfully.

Despite his experience as a deputy, holding the position of full accountability and coming to terms with that had been a challenge.

The school went through a particularly challenging time for recruitment after the Ofsted inspection, with a number of changes in staff. Other issues, such as getting to know the school, the community and the staff and understanding performance issues were not a challenge when he took up post because of his prior experience and familiarity with the school.

He considers his biggest current leadership challenge to be ensuring the high quality of staff at the school in a context of high turnover: 'I would say the biggest problem in London is staff recruitment – managing the changes'. In a small school, there are key people in key places, and the loss of a member of staff has a large impact. However there are currently no staff vacancies.

He worries about succession planning, again an issue for a small school and as an example, he mentioned an assistant head who was about to go on maternity leave, saying 'you can't plan people's lives for them'.

In response to this challenge, he is leading the expansion and development of the senior leadership team (SLT) and opening it up to more people, giving opportunities to up and coming teachers. It is very noticeable that in answering questions about his leadership, this head consistently demonstrates the sharing of leadership in the school by using 'we':

> "We are talking a lot about distributed leadership with the staff. It is about recognising that the headteacher cannot do it all and that other people need to be encouraged to share responsibility."

<div align="right">Tim, experienced headteacher</div>

To support the changes he has led he has found his school improvement partner (SIP) helpful in giving ideas. The lead Ofsted inspector provided the name of a recently inspected school in a neighbouring borough that has developed the leadership style and team the head was seeking. Following contact with the school over the course of a year, he and other leaders made visits to the school, the other school's SLT visited them, and leaders from both schools paired up for peer coaching. This was especially helpful, perhaps because it was a bigger school and, because in another borough, there were no politics to worry about. 'We looked at what they were doing, the systems they had in place and took a lot on board'.

Preparation and support for heads

Tim felt well prepared for taking on his headship. Knowing the school well and working closely with the previous headteacher was good preparation and this was followed by lots of learning walks in the first year to understand exactly what was going on in each class. As part of NPQH and another course he did at a local university, he spent a lot of time in other schools observing headteachers, for example as part of the course he was paired with and spent time at a school in another London borough which he found very useful.

He gets support through networking with others and by 'knowing that there is someone [in a similar situation] you can get on the phone'. The church schools locally form a particularly supportive network and there are two or three other heads in this network who offer each other mutual support. They also do things together such as teaching assistant (TA) training. Tim says, 'It's the people mostly – it's managing the responsibility and the only way you can do that is by discussing with someone else'.

Because of the high accountability associated with statutory responsibility, this head feels that NPQH should provide more opportunities to provide information and guidance for prospective headteachers about the statutory responsibilities of the role, for example in safeguarding. The training he experienced was too remote from practice and the assessment days in particular were felt to be 'too much', with irrelevant activities that could potentially deter very good prospective heads. He had never had enough time to take advantage of online courses.

As well as the local church schools' network, Tim belongs to a headteacher cluster network for extended schools.

The practice of headship

Although he considers that no day can be typical, Tim will get to work at 7am in order to prioritise what he needs to do for the day and to deal with paperwork because he knows that there will always be unplanned events that he will need to attend to, such as members of staff reporting sick. At 9am he is ready to 'expect the unexpected'. For example, on the day of the interview, he had spent much of the morning dealing with a family with a number of issues that had developed over the school holiday. He finds that it is very common to be involved with a family over issues involving the home and family of the child; sometimes social services or the police are involved. He always tries to prioritise spending time scheduled for working with children, for example in assemblies, and he always tries to stick to commitments he has made for work with children. The typical day ends with checking emails and dealing with paperwork and he tries to leave by 5pm if possible.

Tim has a good day (and he finds that there are plenty of them) when all the things in the diary get done and there are no disruptions or accidents. On good days, he sees evidence of children making progress in their learning, for example, a whole-school assembly enables him to see the appreciation and enthusiasm of the children and staff. Seeing the appreciation of the children extend outside the school, for example, he says, 'when a Year 6 pupil comes and says "hello" in the street, sometimes you feel like a superstar'.

The main surprise for this headteacher has been in relation to the challenge of managing adults and he has found working with difficult parents and staff to be the most challenging area of the work. He was surprised at how much more difficult this is than managing the children (who can be challenging too). He says, 'It can be a small number, but it takes up a lot of time'.

In relation to issues where he feels uncertain, his response relates to the current context for education rather than internal school issues. Tim feels that the speed and radical nature of national policy change has caused great uncertainty, for example, in the revision of the national curriculum. He is 'enraged' by the money and time wasted on 'stupid' training and preparation for something that has now been 'dumped'. He has recognised that the school needs to make its own decisions and choose its curriculum in the best interests of the learning of the children. Although he agrees that schools should set their own priorities in the best interests of the pupils and community, a context of radical change is a cause of uncertainty.

Head's role and others' expectations

This head believes that his most significant work in leading the development of his staff team is through his close involvement in working with teachers on a day-to-day basis, visiting classrooms and giving informal feedback and suggestions for improvement, looking at children's books and other work for evidence of progress, and following up advice by making it clear what he expects to see as a result. He believes that following up the 'so what?' has to happen on a daily basis. Performance management or appraisal meetings as part of the performance management cycle are also part of development work.

In terms of expectations of others, he has worked hard to implement consistent systems so, for example, there is a shared expectation among staff (teachers and TAs) and pupils of what a good lesson should be. He shares expectations with parents, the local authority and the governing body and believes that consistency is really important.

He has good relationships with both the governing body and with the local authority. The governing body is professional and committed and he has a lot of parent governors who ask lots of questions and are ready to challenge. They are involved and help out in school. They have been supportive and have praised his accomplishments, particularly in taking the school successfully through an Ofsted inspection only two months after taking up post.

The local authority is good and, in his view, has done a good job in supporting schools. He feels his previous experience of moving up to deputy was also good preparation for the change he experienced as head in the reactions of staff. The first few months could be seen as a honeymoon period, but then there were some difficult choices and conversations, for example about staffing issues. 'When things became hard, I was well supported by the senior teachers and that was key'.

During his time at the school his accomplishments are marked by tangible evidence in securing the teaching and learning from overall 'satisfactory' to overall 'good' across the school and improving SATs results. It is evidence of the progress in children's learning and literacy that he considers his main accomplishment, and he is able to find this on a daily basis through, for example, 'looking at the books, seeing progress over time, that they are full, rich'. Improving writing had been a key target so it was really satisfying to see the outcome of winning a competition with a publisher to publish a booklet of extracts of writing from all classes in the school.

It has taken longer to accomplish the things he had planned to do and he had found that reshaping the SLT, improving the progress of children and raising the quality of teaching and learning have taken much longer than originally expected. On coming into the post he had soon realised that 'it is a marathon not a sprint'... it doesn't happen like that, you can't move a school that quickly'. Some of the things he started to put in place in the first year are only beginning now to be complete.

Wellbeing and welfare

Living within 10 minutes of the school contributes to the health and wellbeing of this headteacher. He has managed to keep weekends free of work, although he had to be disciplined to reach this position as he had been used to popping in on Saturdays and checking emails.

To support him in difficult times he has one trusted colleague at the school to let off steam to and he is aware that he fulfilled this role as a deputy with the previous head. His good friends and family network, 'who won't always tolerate him talking about the job', are a source of strength.

For Tim, being a headteacher in London is like 'running a marathon'.

Looking ahead

This headteacher believes that the proposed teaching schools may be a positive development, but that it is uncertain what this will look like in practice. He would hope that such schools would work as training grounds and open themselves up to other schools to see their practice and would welcome a move for prospective headteachers to see more of other headteachers in action. He strongly believes that all prospective and new headteachers should have a named mentor. Furthermore, NPQH should enable the development of face-to-face networks – not virtual – where you can meet other people and discuss issues at a practical level on a regular basis. His worry about the proposed changes is that teaching schools may take resources and opportunities away from other schools, such as his own.

For himself, he enjoys being a headteacher and expects to stay in his current role for another two to three years and then to look to a bigger school, perhaps in a different local authority, for a different experience. However he emphasises that any decision would also take account of the needs of the school at the time as it would go against the grain of his values to leave the school in a precarious or difficult situation. He would see his responsibility as securing the future of his current school as part of his moral responsibility as a leader.

Vignette 3: A primary head from an inner London borough

Introduction

Pam is the headteacher of a two-form-entry, 3-11 primary school in an inner London borough. The school has over 400 pupils on roll, of whom nearly half are eligible for free school meals. A quarter of the pupils have special needs, with a relatively high proportion of these having statements. Nearly two-thirds of pupils have a first language other than English and pupils come from a diverse range of backgrounds.

It was last inspected in November 2007. Ofsted found the school to be 'good with some outstanding features'. The good progress of pupils noted at the time of the Ofsted inspection has been maintained, resulting in high standards of attainment.

Pam's teaching career began in 1995, when she worked as a tutor in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in Japan. After two years there and a further period in India where she worked for a charity, she returned to England and completed a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) in 2000. After four years in her first post, she gained a deputy headship in a primary school in west London. During the four years of a deputy headship, she started a higher degree in international development and started NPQH, which she completed in 2009. By this time she had already gained appointment to her current headship, where she took up post in September 2009. She continued to work on her Master's, completing in September 2010.

For this headteacher it was the stimulus provided by working on a Master's while a deputy that made her realise that she had the ability and drive to move to headship. She felt 'an obligation to give back' arising from a passionate commitment to children and to education.

Key leadership challenges

When this head took up post, the school was 'impeccably organised' but structures were felt to be hierarchical. The leadership challenge has been to establish a sense of collective responsibility and accountability at all levels by empowering all staff to act as leaders.

This was addressed through restructuring, and initially through expansion of the senior leadership team (SLT) and inclusion of the school business manager (SBM) in this. Subsequently new structures for middle leadership were created with other staff being involved for example through establishing working parties of teaching assistants (TAs) which included senior leaders, teachers and TAs, based on the skills needed for the task.

A lot of work has been done with staff on empowerment, a recent example being leadership training for teaching and non-teaching staff. Attention has been given to detail and to the overt signals that reflect the non-hierarchical nature of leadership in this school. For example the staff photographs on display in the entrance hall are not arranged in a hierarchical pyramid.

Initially the head needed to address issues about 'people's engagement and behaviour'. The behaviour policy was rewritten, and clear staff manuals were written covering processes, working hours and absence to ensure that there was 'absolute understanding of what was needed in terms of professional practice'. The timetable was also adjusted to allow for more time for core subjects. More recently there has been a review of processes for financial management, forecasting, risk management etc partly driven by the current economic climate.

Preparation and support for heads

Pam felt very well prepared for her leadership role as head, but 'not so much by the formal training route'. Her business background has been very valuable, including knowledge and experience of marketing and PR

as well as financial and HR management. The Master's degree showed how to bring theory into decision-making, and her study of change management and policy was very useful. She considers that NPQH did very little compared to these, and that it was more of a test to see if participants had the necessary skills. Academic rigour was considered to be lacking in NPQH at the time and it is seen as 'doing things to tick the list rather than engaging cognitive skills and learning'. The NPQH placement was very useful but this was partly because it was used to develop and write a reflective, academic piece about passionate leadership, fusing together the work for the Master's and the experience. As well as the placement, the assessment activities and final interview were useful to aid reflection on her skills and helped her prepare for the application and interview process.

To support her in headship, the head where she had a placement during NPQH has been her mentor and the schools have worked closely together. Other staff have been involved in visits and shared training, and the placement school has acted as a coaching school. She initially said: 'I think it was luck in a way'. However, Pam went on to emphasise that she had been proactive in seeking out a placement school with an ethos that reflected her own passions and where she thought that she would be able to learn. Because of this she has been able to build an extremely productive relationship: 'I was very proactive in making sure that I found the right school'.

Her local authority link adviser was 'a rock' especially in the first three months and it was a support 'to know that she was on the end of the phone'. The local authority also assigned her a link headteacher from another school in the authority. They met only once during the first year due to time constraints in a very busy year for both heads. The school's chair of governors used to be a headteacher and is 'also a rock' in terms of the support she has been able to provide. Overall Pam felt she has a good support network, but considers that it is one that she has created herself.

The large number of schools in the borough perhaps does not encourage the formation of a productive headteacher network because smaller groups would enable better networking. Pam would like to see 'more system leadership', a network of four or five schools which could work together, not necessarily led by a secondary school, with 'an equal voice for all'. She thinks that there should be more frequent opportunities for ongoing leadership training for heads in the local authority and she noted how valuable the borough's headteacher conferences were: 'it would be good to have more time to look at the big picture together' and to encourage ongoing learning.

The practice of headship

A typical day in school begins at 7.45am with a visit to the school office to check on any diary changes or staff absence, followed by 45 minutes on paperwork. After a short staff briefing at 8.45am, she goes out to the playground with other members of her SLT and spends time talking to children and parents. After that, she says that it would depend on the day. For example, once a week there is a session at this time when parents know that she will be available. On other days she could be doing an assembly, visiting classes or having meetings with staff.

She always spends a lot of time around the school being available to children, staff, parents:

> "The job is about people, so time should be spent on engaging with the people that make the school. I say that you should never turn a child away, if you do that then they will never come back, so if I am in my office children can come in, perhaps to be praised for a good piece of work."

Pam, experienced headteacher

Meetings are mainly on personnel matters, with a few sessions allocated to correspondence. There is a weekly SLT meeting after the school day is over, and staff training also takes place, which she always makes a point of attending.

The head tries to get away early once a week at 4.30pm or 5pm and will work late once a week until about 8pm. On the remaining days she will finish at about 6pm. Time outside school hours is used for in-depth thinking, for example on a Thursday evening, plus half a day at weekends. She believes that: 'if you are a head you have to do it with a passion'. It is necessary to accept that it is not a job where you watch the clock or resent using the time it needs.

Days are good when she feels that she has been able to see the excitement of engagement in learning, by both pupils and staff. The children provide the most rewarding and satisfying part of the job:

"When the parent comes in and sees the progress of their child and engages with their learning, that magic moment of seeing parents, staff, children all engaged in the excitement of their learning – it's amazing."

Pam, experienced headteacher

The main surprise for the headteacher has been in relation to her role in accessing support for children with high levels of special needs, in particular the amount of advocacy that is needed to access the appropriate placement and support.

Head's role and others' expectations

This head believes that developing others is best achieved through personal engagement and creating the right opportunities to learn. For example, with TAs, Pam says it is first necessary to show them what they can do and to give them encouragement to believe that they can achieve and then to provide imaginative opportunities.

Pam feels that staff, parents and governors expect her to make things happen and that sometimes this is when they don't understand the complexity of related issues such as legal or HR implications. They also expect that she will have a deep knowledge and understanding of learning, the curriculum and the community. They expect her to listen to them and to have the answers and to keep things running smoothly at the school. She says:

"Headship is who you are, not what you do – it's how you enact that being, making the space to engage with people."

Pam, experienced headteacher

In the first few weeks of taking up post she says that there was definitely not a honeymoon period. There were behaviour issues to deal with in the first weeks, including extreme parental situations so that these first weeks were very challenging. This was dealt with by having a strong support network in the SLT, governors and local authority advisers. Pam feels that the honeymoon period came later and this was because, as she knew she was coming into a good school, she made a conscious decision to hold back and spend the rest of the first year looking and learning and not changing too much, although this was hard at times. The changes included an increased focus on core subjects within the timetable, reviewing and increasing urgency of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Year 1, and a review of playground support. Most of the changes were implemented in the second year and were found difficult by some of the staff.

During her time at the school she feels that her accomplishments have been 'seeing more people buying into the direction that the school is taking'. She feels that she has empowered the TAs and led improvements, especially in KS1, with a tighter curriculum and simplified and better assessment and systems. Governors have recognised the successes the change in direction has brought and have endorsed this. She considers that she has a very good relationship with the governors, but that it has been a lot of work to achieve and maintain this.

Wellbeing and welfare

A strong and supportive SLT ('we are all on the same wavelength') helps to sustain her through difficult periods. She practises meditation and considers that self-awareness and self-reflection enable her to be resilient. She has a strong network of family and friends, who are able to remind her that 'it's a job, it's not me'.

For Pam, being a headteacher in London is 'a privilege' but she is aware that you need to keep a balance to avoid being burnt out: 'you can't do it for more than 10 years without burning out'.

Looking ahead

This headteacher believes that teaching schools are a good idea at one level, but she has concerns about moving too much to a school-based model of leadership development. She believes that what is needed is a model 'where leaders learn together not just where they do together' and she does have serious concerns about the application of a US model here and does not believe that there is sufficient evidence that this will work. She thinks that there is a place for the competency framework provided by NPQH and for assessment based on it, but believes strongly that there is also a need for rigour and a focus on learning. She gives the example of London Challenge which worked because leaders and schools came together to learn. She would also want universities to continue to be involved to include the academic dimension of learning.

For herself, she enjoys being a headteacher and thinks that she needs to continue to learn more by practising the role. She would like to think that in the future she might have skills to share in the developing world in India, perhaps working with schools initially followed by a secondment. She is eloquent in her continuing commitment to the right of every child to a good education:

"My passion for education and for helping children extends internationally – it's part of international development, helping children in the world, helping prepare children for a future we don't know about, enabling them to be flexible."

Pam, experienced headteacher

Vignette 4: A secondary head from an outer London borough

Introduction

Megan became the headteacher of a mixed community secondary school in an outer London borough in September 2008. The school has held the status of a Leading Edge school and training school. The school is large, with over 1,400 pupils, of whom nearly one-fifth are eligible for free school meals. One in eight pupils have special needs, with about a quarter of them having statements. Three-quarters of pupils have a first language other than English and pupils come from a diverse range of backgrounds. There is a large sixth form and the school holds specialist status.

It was last inspected in February 2007 when Ofsted found the school to be 'outstanding' with 'an outstanding capacity to make even further improvements'. The outstanding progress of students noted at the time of the Ofsted inspection has been maintained, resulting in very high standards of attainment.

Megan's teaching career spans 23 years and she has been at her present school for 16 years, having first been appointed as head of sixth form. After six years, she was offered the opportunity to join the senior leadership team (SLT) and after a further three years she gained promotion to deputy head. She held this role for seven years, gaining NPQH in 2005 before taking over the headship of the school in September 2008 on the retirement of her predecessor. Although she had 'thought about it' after gaining NPQH, she had not applied for any other headship positions, citing her great commitment to the school which diminished her motivation to seek such a post elsewhere. She describes a 'gradual metamorphosis' into leadership and a growing appreciation of the headship role in securing systemic change. When the opportunity to apply for the headship at her school arose, she was highly motivated to take the opportunity, reporting a sense of 'mission' to model to others what can be achieved by someone, such as herself, who comes from relatively humble origins.

Key leadership challenges

The appointment to headship was gained in competition with another, more senior, deputy. This was an issue, but one that had been openly and frankly discussed and resolved.

The expectations of staff changed as she assumed a new role within the same school and she was aware of her lack of preparation for the complexities of finance and HR. She cites an example of a member of staff approaching her between the date of her appointment and her taking up post to request a pay rise. There was a sense of being overwhelmed and of shock at the isolation of the role. Through a personal contact she appointed her own mentor to deal with her personal feelings around headship.

Critical incidents early in her headship were extremely challenging. These included:

— emergencies (bomb scare and fire)

— assault by a member of staff on a pupil

— deaths of two members of staff and a student

— union issues

A further current leadership challenge has been to redefine a vision for the school to reflect the commitment to the development of distributed leadership, including student leadership. A vision paper was shared with governors and staff a year ago and the challenge is now to ensure that the vision is realised. This will be done through continuous interaction with staff to shift day-to-day practice closer to the three key vision statements:

— education relevant to the lives of young people

— love of learning

— students at the core of everything

Support in responding to the challenges of headship has been provided by the previous head, who worked alongside Megan in the five months between appointment and her taking up the post: 'he took induction very seriously'. Mentoring support has been particularly important for Megan. She received good support from her local authority mentor, particularly on budget and management issues. Mentoring support through the M2NH programme has also been very helpful, with a particularly effective relationship developing with the second of the two mentors who worked with Megan on this programme.

Preparation and support for heads

As a deputy at the school, Megan had worked in a team with three other deputies, holding lead responsibility for KS3, timetable, learning and teaching and leadership training. There were many opportunities to experience aspects of the headteacher role when the serving head was out of school. Although there were gaps in the areas of finance, budgeting and HR, her preparation through this apprenticeship was 'at least at a satisfactory level'. The induction input from the previous head was a great help.

NPQH had been of limited value with M2NH slightly more useful because of the support of the second of her mentors who was described as 'excellent'. However, Megan felt unprepared psychologically for the isolation of headship. She feels that only experience of the role enables a proper understanding of the impact it has:

"There is nothing like doing the job, not even the acting headship could prepare you for the job and that sense of you don't know what you don't know."

Megan, experienced headteacher

To support her first year in headship, the mentoring support described above has been of most value and her main source of support. However, whether this is because of the training associated with the M2NH programme or because of the skills and qualities of the individuals providing the mentoring are uncertain.

She is a member of several headteacher networks, all of which are considered useful as a source of informal support, and for sharing general information about initiatives and changes. These networks included:

— SSAT (a member of the London headteachers' steering group, though this came later)

— local secondary heads group

— participation in M2NH programme

— informal networks; having moved into headship at the same school and having worked in the borough for a number of years there she enjoys a wide network within the borough

NPQH and attendant support were seen at best as 'peripheral' to actual execution of the role.

The practice of headship

A typical day in school begins between 7am or 7.30am. The head considers that there is certainly no such thing as a typical day unless it can be described as dealing with the unexpected. She spends a lot of time 'as a presence around the school and at the school gates' and this enables a considerable amount of interaction with staff and pupils. She provided recent examples of the kind of incidents that may require her intervention and take up a large proportion of her time such as 'the site manager and the bread delivery man having a fight', 'the school refuser clinging to a bollard in the school car park' or 'Year 10 involved in internet porn'.

Days are mostly good when people respond appreciatively. A specific example of this is going into a classroom recently to talk to a member of staff about an issue and the (female) member of staff gave her a kiss in front of the pupils. Megan has kept responsibility for doing the timetable because she enjoys 'solving the puzzle'.

There are many leadership issues that need to be dealt with and resolved on a daily basis at the school. However, there are no current issues which cause major concern or uncertainty. Despite her experience within the school and her preparation for the role, Megan was surprised by the sense of being overwhelmed, isolated and accountable all at the same time. The importance of the engagement with governors was also a surprise.

The head finds it very rewarding to be responsible for running a successful school and to see the maintenance of high standards and pupil achievement. It is satisfying to see these achieved by keeping a strong focus on learning, in alignment with the school vision she has been able to develop. Relationships among staff are very good and leadership of the development of the training school and its impact on taking CPD forward have been particularly satisfying.

She believes that her main accomplishments since taking up headship are establishing a focus on learning and teaching, maintaining student achievement at a high level, promoting good staff relationships and developing the training school. These, together with a clear statement of intended corporate values, are what she aimed to achieve in the first year of her post.

Head's role and others' expectations

This head believes that developing others is best achieved through personal engagement and she does this through 'being out there', around the school and available to interact continuously with staff and with students. Maintaining a focus on learning is extremely important in ensuring the development of others. Leadership of the training school has provided good opportunities to enable others' development.

Megan feels that staff have appreciated her input and that this shows that she has met their expectations, although she felt that in her first six months she experienced a honeymoon period. Staff have consistently responded well to her. The school operates a buddy system for new staff and through this the head was paired with a more junior member of staff. At a staff barbecue at the end of the first year her buddy praised her leadership and staff had given her a standing ovation.

Similarly she has good relationships with parents and governors. Governors had recognised her contribution to the development of the school through financial reward at the end of the first year. They recognised her success in managing a difficult transition and not creating unease following the departure of a long-serving predecessor. Within the local authority, she feels she is considered to be 'one of their own' and as a contributory head in the borough.

Wellbeing and welfare

Megan feels that she is able to talk issues out and then 'put them down'. She maintains an active social life and believes herself to be good with time, which supports an effective work life balance. In difficult times, she is sustained by a belief in her vocation for headship and her network of relationships. The mentoring/coaching input has also helped her in challenging times.

For Megan, being a headteacher in London is 'not different from being a head in other urban environments'.

Looking ahead

As head of a training school, she is aware of forthcoming changes but needs more detail. An application to be involved in the new developments of teaching schools has been made. Within the limitations of what is known, she is supportive and wants to be involved.

From her own perspective, Megan has not given much thought to her future as 'there is so much to do here'. She envisages her headship role continuing for another 15 to 20 years.

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