

East Renfrewshire Education Department

Leadership Strategy 2019-2022

Evaluation Report



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Executive Summary

This executive summary outlines the main findings from a review of East Renfrewshire Council's (ERC) Leadership Strategy 2019 – 2022 and the proposed next steps for our refreshed 5 year strategy for 2023 – 2028. The main findings are as follows-

- In 2019, the ERC Leadership Strategy recognised that a bold and ambitious approach to leadership was required, one that recognised that developing leadership capacity takes time and is a continual process involving constant reflection and re-evaluation from learned experience. The notion of the authentic leader was introduced together with a move towards a distributive rather than a distributed or delegated form of leadership. A number of key aims and actions were outlined to facilitate the development of these concepts.
- In keeping true to the principles of this strategy, a selection of teaching, Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) staff and leaders were tasked with evaluating the effective use of distributive leadership. Their findings reveal that, since 2019, there is much to be celebrated in the progress towards the key aims of our strategy in terms of leadership development in our establishments.
- The overall review findings conclude there is an enthusiasm and desire for continuing to move towards a distributive model of leadership which offers meaningful opportunities for practitioners to positively influence learner outcomes and which provide the impetus for career aspiration. But senior leaders must be receptive to ensuring that any form of distributed leadership is disciplined and meaningful with a focus on outcomes and impact on learners.
- Building on the conclusions from this research our renewed strategy seeks to clarify the type of leadership we desire as a Department and how that leadership should be nurtured and embedded in our culture. As such, the refreshed 2023 -2028 strategy aims to clarify our thinking around authentic leadership and offers an interpretation that suggests that authenticity manifests itself in a leader's local, professional and personal context and in our relationships with others. Our thinking on leadership development will move to an exploration of the term phrased by Munby (2019)¹ of '*imperfect leadership*' which displays authenticity in its truest sense.
- Our renewed strategy suggests that established leaders should also be evoking the type of 'systems leadership' in which leaders at any level, exert influence beyond their immediate context, and are intentionally deployed to drive change and invest in improving other schools in addition to their own. The strategy builds on the importance of distributive leadership in action as a strength of system leadership in enabling the collective processes through which individuals and teams work together to create the conditions for change and which impacts positively on educational improvement.
- The literature study which was undertaken to inform our next steps, found that high performing leaders and thus effective leadership development was underpinned by the following elements;
 - Learning on the job;
 - Exposure to outstanding practice in other contexts/ collaborative practices;
 - Access to high quality research;
 - Focused feedback from credible peers, mentors or coaches;
 - Time for reflection.

- The key aims have been refreshed within the context of the Department's leadership aspirations for all staff and have been considered within a new and evolving context of national and local policy when informing our action planning and target setting. Our next steps for leadership therefore focuses upon our delivery of the aforementioned key aims with the above elements for effective leadership development as the foundations for our actions.

REVISED KEY AIMS

1. Effectively develop resilient and reflective practitioners who consistently deliver high quality learning experiences within and beyond their own setting by engaging individually and collaboratively in contemporary, meaningful and inspiring professional learning.
 2. Cultivate an informed, inspiring and creative approach to improving learning and teaching across all settings by utilising disciplined collaboration which not only develops and enriches the leadership skills of practitioners but provides a positive impact on outcomes for all learners.
 3. Ensure that existing and aspirant middle leaders are supported and challenged to develop and continue to build the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding required of highly effective leaders, as well as the confidence to begin to explore their own authentic style of leadership.
 4. Empower and support all newly appointed Heads of Establishment and Senior Leaders to develop their own authentic leadership in order to lead a school community strategically and effectively.
 5. Utilise the expertise and depth of experience of established Senior Leaders to inform policy and practice beyond their own settings locally, regionally and nationally to unite in a single focus on collaborative approaches to systemic change aimed at improving the outcomes for all learners.
- A renewed emphasis on ensuring true distributive leadership is the golden thread and should provide leadership opportunities which make a positive measurable contribution to improved experiences and outcomes for our learners, and therefore facilitate the development of authentic leaders who lead with their values at the heart of everything they do.



Review of 2019 Key Aims 1 and 2

- Key Aim 1:** *Effectively build the foundations of confident, resilient and reflective practitioners who consistently deliver high quality learning experiences for all learners within and beyond their own classroom by engaging individually and collaboratively in the most relevant, meaningful and inspiring professional learning.*
- Key Aim 2:** *Cultivate a collaborative, inspiring and creative approach to improving learning and teaching across schools, centres and beyond by developing the leadership skills of teachers.*

Donaldson (2011, p2)² recognised that, *‘Leadership is based on fundamental values and habits of mind that must be acquired and fostered from entry into the teaching profession.’* This wisdom was echoed in our 2019 Leadership Strategy which presented the above Aims designed to ensure that in ERC, education professionals in the early stage of their career, experience a culture, along with a wide range of professional learning opportunities, which supports the development of values, knowledge, skills and abilities to lead learning effectively while making a difference to the lives of all learners.

In line with the expected outcome of Key Aim 1, the Department has refreshed its offering to probationers by developing an extensive Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) complemented by a new handbook which is shared with all probationer teachers in advance of their placement. The ERC TIS provides a comprehensive programme of compulsory and optional Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) opportunities linked to local and national priorities culminating in a professional inquiry element. We acknowledge that in terms of our probationers a *‘commitment to career-long professional learning is a critical part of developing [their] professionalism... enquiring and collaborative professionalism is a powerful force in developing teachers’ agency’* (GTCS 2021, p4)³. This approach underpins our professional learning offer during the probationary year. The professional inquiry element has also been strengthened in line with the Aims of our Leadership Strategy to ensure it is an impactful experience for all probationer teachers, developing their research skills and ability to relate these to improving learner experiences. A showcase event is held at the end of the year to share and celebrate learning with fellow peer colleagues and with senior staff from all establishments and the

wider Education Department. It is expected that within their first year as fully qualified teachers, their professional inquiries will be taken forward into their new classrooms thus contributing to a learning continuum and culture of research informed practice. It is encouraging to note that in May 2023 most inquiry reports submitted by our probationers included reference to sharing their learning with colleagues at establishment level learning and teaching events. Head Teacher feedback indicates that the professional inquiry element of the TIS positively contributes to achievement of the school improvement priorities.

For our Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) staff, a suite of online resources has also been developed by the Department to support practitioners who are new to this sector of education. This resource builds on the National Induction Resource for ELC, setting it within the local context of East Renfrewshire.

In addition to these programmes of support from the Department, each establishment provides pastoral support and professional learning for our probationer teachers and Child Development Officers (CDOs). This includes: high quality mentoring; school level professional learning programmes which complement and build on the Department CLPL programme; support to engage in impactful professional inquiry and to share learning with colleagues and opportunities to observe more experienced colleagues. In evaluations conducted at the end the last two years, almost all probationer teachers (99%) who responded to our end of year evaluation, agreed or strongly agreed that professional learning experiences provided by their establishment develop their professional skills and abilities.

Overall, the professional learning offer to probationer teachers and CDOs continues to evolve in line with the key features of effective learning as set out by the Scottish Government model of professional learning i.e. learning that deepens knowledge and understanding; learning by inquiring; learning as collaborative. This model also places teachers as, ‘the drivers and enactors of change for improvement through their commitment to their own ongoing professional learning and development within and beyond their classrooms’ (GTCS, 2019)⁴. It is encouraging that all probationer teachers (100%) who responded to the evaluative questionnaire agreed that professional learning experiences provided by the Department developed their professional skills and abilities, and almost all (91%) agreed that they developed as an inquiring professional through involvement in professional inquiry. In the evaluations conducted at the end of the last two years, almost all (97%) agreed or strongly agreed that they would encourage a future TIS probationer to choose ERC as a local authority. From the above evaluations, one probationer teacher stated:

“This year has been amazing and being in such a welcoming school and authority has been a privilege. The most positive aspect of this year was getting to work alongside such a welcoming department where nothing is an issue. I really cannot thank them enough or the local authority for supporting me through this year.”

In line with Aim 2 of our 2019 strategy, comprehensive support for the development of teacher professionalism continues beyond probationary training and into early career teaching. All employees are offered the opportunity for masters level learning, which until 2023 has been supported with a substantial financial contribution from the Scottish Government. Since 2017, the Department has facilitated 95 teachers and ELCC professionals to achieve Masters level learning and 290 staff are either presently engaged in or have achieved masters level modules through our partner universities. Engagement in academic study enhances the strategic outlook of our staff enabling them to recognise their place in the system and the contribution they make as well as consolidating knowledge and experience to ensure practitioners translate this into quality in the classroom and



playroom. One Senior Officer when reflecting on her experience with a masters level Early Years Pedagogue course stated:

“I loved it, it totally opened my eyes and gave me much of the knowledge I have today re Early Years pedagogy and play in primary school.”

In addition to an extensive CLPL offering within and across establishments and clusters, education professionals in ERC are increasingly being exposed to a culture of distributive leadership. The effect of distributive leadership in effecting the attainment of Aim 2 was investigated by a group of unpromoted teachers and ELCC staff across the Department and their summary findings are attached as Appendix 1.

This practitioner inquiry group identified from their academic research that adopting a distributive leadership model was a powerful strategy for long-term improvement both in terms of learner achievement and attainment. In addition, rooted in a clear model of collegiality, aspects of distributive leadership were found to lead to shared decision-making in schools, with an increased culture of trust and staff ownership and accountability. Furthermore, due to the range of practitioners involved in a distributive model, establishments



were found to develop a greater range of solutions and interventions in meeting the needs of both pupils and practitioners leading to wholesale improvement. To support their findings the academic literature reviewed by the practitioner inquiry group indicated that distributive leadership can lead to increased individual and collective capacity and a focus on “team over self” (Fullan & Kirtman, 2019, p.5)⁵.

Following their discussion of the core literature and with a view to evaluating the effective use of distributive leadership across the authority, the inquiry group established an agreed definition of distributive leadership, which was used to guide all aspects of their subsequent research:

‘Nurturing leadership at all levels of an organisation to build capacity for improvement and change.’

Through a questionnaire devised by the research inquiry group, followed by a set of structured interviews, most un-promoted practitioners who responded (78%) agreed they have opportunities to lead on aspects of improvement priorities, while a majority (70%) agreed that, in their setting, a culture of nurturing leadership at all levels was building capacity for improvement. Most (81%) collaborate regularly with colleagues to enhance the quality of learning experiences they provide and most (82%) have opportunities to access relevant and impactful professional learning. These results would suggest that many practitioners are engaging in activities that Harris (2014)⁶ would ascribe to distributive leadership in order to positively influence and improve outcomes for learners i.e. collaborating,

accessing professional learning and being empowered to direct change in their classroom. As corroboration one Primary Head Teacher confirmed the impact of distributive leadership initiatives in their school stating;

“Distributive Leadership across my setting is underpinned by trust and empowerment. Senior managers ensure staff do not feel micro-managed but instead are encouraged and supported to improve outcomes for learners. As a result practitioners understand their learner’s needs better and how best to meet their needs and consequently we have seen incremental gains in attainment.”

However, only a majority of respondents (64%) agreed that ‘I feel like a leader within my setting’, with the research group subsequently suggesting that those staff who responded in this way do not always connect the aforementioned activities with leadership. Through structured interviews, top-down allocation of leadership roles from promoted members of staff was identified as a practice that occurs in many establishments. A concern arose with a perception that some senior staff delegate aspects of their remit to un-promoted staff in the guise of leadership opportunities. This is in contrast to the expectations of Aim 2 of our leadership strategy where leadership opportunities should be nurturing, inspiring and meaningful. As a result, either a perceived or real lack of support and lack of transparency was reported, leading to staff feeling excluded from meaningful opportunities to develop or worse feelings of being ‘used’ were highlighted in the research results.

The results presented by the practitioner inquiry group, reveal that distributive leadership can just as easily be associated with negative qualities as it can with the positive. Some leaders may genuinely feel that they are authentically distributing leadership but the feedback from others may suggest that this is simply not the case (Department for Education and Skills, 2007)⁷. Rather than distributive leadership there is *'distributed pain'* where leadership opportunities equate with more work, which in turn undermines the creation of a culture of trust (Youngs, 2009)⁸. It takes a secure, strong leader to be able to facilitate distributive leadership whilst also retaining a firm hold on the direction of the school. It takes a leader who can empower but also intervene and who has the trust and respect of their team (Harris, 2014)⁶.

Without the support of each Head Teacher, Head of Establishment and other senior leaders, distributive leadership cannot take place in an authentic and trusting manner. As a Department we acknowledge that our leaders will ensure that every element of expertise is devoted to improving establishment performance and learner outcomes, however the very best leaders build collective capacity as a positive means of securing change which leads to sustained improvement (Hargreaves et al, 2010)⁹. As such, we must ensure the concept of distributive leadership is not only understood but is practiced in a fair and transparent manner building trust and confidence in the system and capacity for leadership in all practitioners.

It is encouraging that, across our settings, arrangements for Quality Conversations and Professional Review and Development (PRD) are increasingly *'set within a culture of professional trust and positive relationships'* (GTCS, 2019, p3)¹⁰ as well as being linked to the refreshed professional standards and empowering practitioners to be leaders of and for learning. Evaluation results over the last three years on CPD Manager reveal that, almost all practitioners (96%) agreed that a coaching approach was used by their PRD reviewer and all (100%) agreed that they reflected against the GTCS Standards in preparation for their PRD meeting. From the most recent local authority staff questionnaires, most respondents (83%) agreed they have regular leadership opportunities and almost all (97%) felt their professional learning enabled them to reflect on and improve practice.

Overall, it appears that education professionals are increasingly engaging in activities that we can ascribe to a distributive leadership stance in order to positively influence quality in the classroom and improve outcomes for learners. However as a Department, we need to ensure a consistency across all establishments to:

“Cultivate a collaborative, inspiring and creative approach to improving learning and teaching across schools, centres and beyond by developing the leadership skills of teachers.”



Our next steps need to embed a culture where professional learning through collaborative inquiry are essential elements in the improvement journey and should directly impact upon the quality learning experiences of both practitioner and learner. Such activities are leadership opportunities and collectively we need to develop a consistent vocabulary for leadership where this is clearly communicated and understood. The practitioner inquiry group has made an excellent start in their definition of distributive leadership. To make this definition even more effective the group were asked to consider this definition in line with proposed next steps and agreed that going forward ERC should consider distributive leadership as:

“Nurturing leadership and collegiality at all levels of an establishment to build capacity for improvement and change which positively impacts learner experiences.”

This definition will be part of our next steps to ensure the opportunities being provided for and taken by education professionals at early stages of their careers are helping to develop the culture of collaboration and improvement that as a Department we aspire to.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

How effectively are establishments creating a culture which delivers the ERC vision of distributive leadership as; ‘Nurturing leadership and collegiality at all levels of an establishment to build capacity for improvement and change which positively impacts learner experiences’?

How well do we create collaborative conditions for staff to critically engage with professional inquiry, academic research, policy sources and developments in pedagogy which positively impacts learner experiences?



Review of 2019 Key Aims 3 and 4

Key Aim 3: *Ensure that existing and aspirant middle leaders are supported and challenged to develop and continue to build the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding required of senior leaders.*

Key Aim 4: *Create a sustainable pool of highly skilled and motivated leaders who are equipped to take the next steps into middle and senior leadership.*

Over recent years the recruitment and retention of quality middle leaders has been problematic contributing to the crisis in Head Teacher recruitment both in Scotland and internationally. There is a growing recognition, particularly in research literature, that middle leadership plays a pivotal role in connecting leadership with learning and thus in sustaining improvement in learning. However, if middle leaders are to be effective and successful in achieving positive results with learners and in fulfilling their career aspirations, they need opportunities to engage in professional learning which will improve their capacity to enhance their own and their staff team's pedagogical leadership while developing their own authentic leadership style (Flückiger et al 2015)¹¹.

In 2019, our Leadership Strategy recognised the aforementioned concerns in middle leadership development. Key Aims 3 and 4 provide an ambition to build the capacity of leadership at all levels but particularly in the middle, with an expectation that in doing so we would 'grow our own' school leaders for the future. To help inform a review of Key Aims 3 and 4 a group of middle leaders from the Primary and Early Years (EY) sectors (Appendix 2) and a group from the Secondary sector (Appendix 3) undertook two separate professional inquiries into the research question posed.

Data collected from these research groups included questionnaires with regard to practitioners' perceptions of leadership, as well as results from focus groups representing a cross-section of practitioners and specialists, with the aim of exploring participants' personal experiences in the context of leadership practice. The evidence collated from the Primary and EY middle leadership inquiry group is limited, as only a small proportion of schools responded to the requested consultation

(e.g. staff from only 22 of the 48 establishments responded, i.e. 24 primary schools, 13 of which have nursery classes and were treated separately for this purpose, 10 family centres and 1 school for children with additional support for learning needs.), such a limited sample prohibited the ability to fully reflect the views of all establishments. Across the 22 establishments that were represented, 112 responses were gathered in total. It is important to note that, in view of the limited response rate, it could also be argued that the sample was skewed as respondents were representative of areas of known good practice. This being said, whilst limited, the evidence from these groups suggests that ERC has made significant progress in building a more distributive and collaborative model of leadership in our establishments. The Secondary inquiry group chose not to employ the use of questionnaires.

Similar to the practitioners professional inquiry research group, this middle leadership inquiry group first looked at how the concept of distributive leadership is understood in schools and subsequently evidenced in practice. Qualitative data gathered through questionnaires provided insight into the perceptions of individuals, particularly around the understanding of what distributive leadership looks like, and this subsequently afforded the groups the opportunity to identify themes from responses. The inquiry groups then utilised these broad themes to elicit discussion within subsequent focus groups.

Evidence collated by the Primary and EY group revealed that most respondents (78%) felt that collegiate working was well established in their establishment and most respondents (81%) indicated that this collegiate working had made a positive impact on outcomes for learners. Participants in focus groups spoke enthusiastically about taking opportunities to

engage in professional inquiry and share findings within their establishments. This indicates that in the establishments that responded, Head Teachers and senior leaders are consciously creating the time, space and opportunity for practitioners to meet, plan, share and reflect. It was also evident from focus group discussions that an increasing number of Head Teachers are actively creating cultures of collegiality and greater capacity for leadership by inviting the participation of staff in self-evaluation and decision making, and in providing time for meaningful dialogue and discussion in relation to school improvement priorities. Surprisingly however, the results from the Primary and EY inquiry group show that only a majority of respondents (74%) felt empowered to make their own decisions to influence learner improvement. This is important as it indicates that whilst our Head Teachers are positively looking to provide wider leadership opportunities throughout their establishment, practitioners are less confident that genuine opportunities are being created for them to influence the priorities in their own classroom.

Similar to the practitioner leadership inquiry group, the middle leadership group reported tension in arriving at a shared understanding of the difference between distributed and distributive models. Within the responses gathered from the Primary and EY inquiry group, most (88%) respondents provided a variety of definitions of distributive and distributed leadership, with 12% indicating that they do not understand the difference between

the two terms. The inquiry group suggested this may be due to the “*fine dynamic balance between too much direction and too little direction*” (Fullan M., 2019, p. 19)¹². However, it can be suggested that the number of practitioners not understanding the difference between the two terms may have been greater had evidence from a wider cross section of establishments and practitioners been available. The lack of understanding is ultimately down to the interpretation given by senior leaders in schools and perhaps the nature of leadership opportunities being provided. As highlighted by the practitioner inquiry groups this indicates the need for a common vocabulary and understanding moving forward.

The assertion that everyone is a leader and that middle-level leaders take a share of the leadership work in an establishment, is commonly accepted as an expression of evidence of distributive leadership in practice. However, as Gurr and Drysdale (2013)¹³ suggest, distributive leadership may be turning teachers away from leadership work as they can find themselves placed in roles and given responsibilities for whole school activities that have expectations beyond their expertise, skill, knowledge and comfort levels. The evidence from academic research and our own research inquiry group discussions with practitioners reveal it is often these practices coined as ‘*leadership opportunities*’, for which practitioners report being unprepared and insufficiently supported, leading to a lack of trust and reluctance to move into formal leadership roles.



Going forward, we need to focus on distributive leadership as a supportive action to develop individuals' practice as opposed to the distribution of an enhanced role or formal title - or worse still the redistribution of a senior remit in order to '*lighten the load*'. Where distributive leadership was most effective, practitioners spoke enthusiastically of the importance of ethos within the school and behaviours by senior leaders which demonstrated that staff were not only trusted but valued. This in turn enabled individuals to have the confidence to step forward for leadership opportunities. The focus groups provided examples of such behaviours, including involvement in learning sets and whole school sharing of individual practitioner inquiry which both informed and improved learner experiences. The challenge for our renewed strategy will therefore be to create establishment based and departmental cultures that are conducive to supporting and nurturing the interactions between individuals and teams, and which subsequently result in increased confidence for innovation and real improvement to flourish in the classroom for every learner.

Our 2019 Leadership strategy recognised that for an improvement journey to be meaningful and sustained over the long term, '*improvements have to be integrated into the very fabric of the system pedagogy and establishing collaborative practices is a central component of improvement in the long term*' (Mourshed, Chijioke & Braber 2010 p11)¹⁴.

The Department has developed a number of initiatives to enhance such development opportunities across establishments. We have made progress in setting up a number of Research Hubs with a view to embedding the idea that professional inquiry is a stance rather than an action, or a habit rather than a time limited project. A number of practitioners spoke positively to all research groups about the impact of inquiry on their own leadership journey however practitioners were less able to speak convincingly, and demonstrate with tangible evidence, that involvement in research in this manner was having a positive impact on learner outcomes and thus whether the investment made by the Department

was making a sustainable difference. If an initiative, such as the Research Hubs, is to be successful there needs to be commitment and consistency across all establishments and clusters to embed an inquiring stance into everyday CLPL activity. In addition, we need to ensure that impact in the classroom is the consistent goal. Collectively we therefore need to ensure that our process of inquiry consistently includes an evaluation of impact. Glowing but unsubstantiated accounts of impact such as '*the professional inquiry work had impact because practitioners reported positive changes in the classroom*', show very little evidence of the impact upon learner outcomes. Going forward an evidence based evaluation of impact of professional inquiry and distributive leadership initiatives will be undertaken in appropriate Departmental reviews.

This should ultimately lead to every cluster becoming a community of consistent and sustainable professional learning. Such an ambition will enable practitioners to engage in collaborative inquiry and improve learning experiences and outcomes, within and then beyond their own establishments (DuFour, 2009)¹⁵. Our renewed leadership strategy will support establishments to develop and sustain these traits of shared values and vision, a collaborative inquiring culture, a focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, supportive and shared leadership and shared personal practice (Chapman et al 2012)¹⁶.

Since 2019, an increasing number experiential professional learning opportunities have been provided for middle leaders. In the Secondary sector temporary Principal Teacher (PT) Development posts have been advertised across the local authority where previously these posts would have typically been advertised only in one school. Where expertise has been lacking within ERC establishments for advertised vacancies, the Department have widened the search to the Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC). This has led to increasing opportunities for practitioners to develop leadership capacity out with the '*comfort zone*' of their own setting while supporting the cross fertilisation of innovative practice and thinking.

In addition, there have been an increasing number of opportunities for practitioners showing leadership potential to take on secondments within the Education Department. These have included Education Development Officer in English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Diversity, Digital Schools; Learning, Teaching and Assessment and Literacy. More recently, Depute Head Teachers (DHTs) have been seconded on a part time basis to Quality Improvement (QI) Associate roles within the QI Team. Experience in the above posts have led to increased leadership capacity within the ERC system while in some cases supporting practitioners to be successfully recruited into permanent leadership roles.

Through the recently developed Primary and Cluster Collaborative Improvement Visit (CIV) models as well as the Maths and Numeracy Review conducted in partnership with ADES and Education Scotland, there are increasing opportunities for Head Teachers and DHTs to be involved in these self-evaluation opportunities. The role of identified senior leaders during these visits has developed to include greater responsibility for report writing and feedback, as well as involvement in lesson observations and focus groups.

Equally, PTs within the Secondary sector have been supported to take increasing ownership of Subject Groups which are chaired by PTs, rather than QI Officers. These groups now have an increased focus on sharing best practice and strategic development of learning and teaching and of the curriculum. Linked to these Subject Groups, PTs play a lead role in the programmes of Secondary CIVs. In evaluations conducted following the CIV programmes, it was pleasing to note that most PTs agreed that CIVs are developing a culture of collaboration within and across schools.

It was interesting to note that in the findings of our research inquiry groups, involvement in such activities were rarely recognised by staff as leadership opportunities and results from the Secondary research revealed, whilst most middle leaders agreed that CIVs build their professional knowledge and expertise, there is scope for a more coherent and structured approach to sharing practice via Subject Groups. This inquiry group also commented that following the Alternative

Certification Model, there have been increased opportunities for PTs and DHTs to lead moderation activity across the local authority. However, these opportunities have not always been taken and there is scope for middle and senior leaders to be more involved in driving this activity forward. Both middle leader research inquiry groups highlighted the West Partnership Improving Our Classroom (IOC) and Improving Our Department (IOD) programmes as providing excellent leadership opportunities for practitioners. These programmes provide DHTs and Faculty Heads with the opportunity to lead this whole school initiative while collaborating with colleagues from across the RIC, leading to tangible improvement in practice for staff. Evaluations on the impact on teachers of this CLPL revealed that of the 23 members of staff attending the IOC course 96% felt that their skills had improved and 96% felt they were more confident to change their classroom practice. In terms of impact on learners 95% of teachers saw an improved confidence in their learners and 96% could evidence an improvement in attainment.

As with the practitioner leadership inquiry group it was disappointing to see that this middle leadership inquiry group provided little evidence from respondents that the opportunities offered centrally by the Education Department were being viewed as leadership development opportunities.

Coupled with the opportunity for more formal and informal leadership experiences, our 2019 Strategy recognised the need to provide our middle leaders and aspiring middle leaders with relevant and meaningful professional learning as CLPL. There is still a predominant view amongst practitioners that professional learning is about the practitioner, rather than the learner (Harris, 2014)⁶. This is not to say that the practitioner isn't important (this is where the professional expertise resides), however our strategy recognised that the focus of professional learning for middle leaders is to *'develop and continue to build the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding required of senior leaders'* which first and foremost means pedagogy, leadership of people and of change. However, our strategy also recognised that our middle leaders need support in beginning their leadership journey and identifying their values and thus their own authentic style.



Our focus over the last few years has been on developing a programme for aspiring senior leaders i.e. those already in middle leadership aspiring to DHT and headship. The aims of our aspiring leaders programme include: increasing leadership capacity; supporting a career journey towards headship; promoting reflection of professional and personal practice; and creating a knowledge base founded on professional reading and inquiry. During and following completion of the programme, evaluations demonstrated that all members (100%) of the first cohort (15 DHTs and PTs) felt they had increased levels of knowledge, ability and confidence relating to leadership capacity. Comments from participants included:

“I felt that the programme was extremely useful. Not only did it help me to identify areas that I need to develop but it actually made me reflect on my strengths and gain confidence in my own ability as a leader.”

“A key learning point for me was understanding the importance of shared values within a school and how all staff need to understand and embrace the ‘why’ for change to be successful and sustained.”

“I really liked the reading and subsequent discussion on being an authentic leader, and this is something I am enjoying reflecting on about myself. It ties in well with reflecting on my ‘why?’ when I am making a decision, and the research makes me feel more confident in my decisions when I know they sit well with me.”

“My coach was often able to give independent insight into situations arising in my own context and often allowed me to reflect on critical incidents much more clearly.”

From the outset the programme had a focus on reflection and learning from experiences that challenge the practice and values of participants. A learning journal was provided with the expectation that this would aid reflective practice and inform coaching sessions. A particular strength of the programme is the involvement of established Head Teachers as coaches and in leading seminars. Feedback from participants, and those involved in both coaching and the delivery of sessions will inform improvements in order to enhance the experiences of future cohorts.

A desktop search by Flückiger, Lovett & Dempster (2014)¹⁷, revealed that there are markedly more programs available for Head Teachers and those aspiring to headship, and far fewer examples are available for middle leaders or those aspiring to middle leadership. Indeed, what has traditionally been offered to middle leaders has more often than not had a focus on ‘stepping stones to senior leadership positions rather than a concentration on the exercise of middle leadership’ and its influence over quality in the classroom (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014, p. 52)¹⁸. As a reflection of this and the comments from our aspiring leaders programme, we propose that our renewed Strategy considers the development of a middle leader induction programme. Such a middle leadership indication should provide opportunities to improve the capacity of middle leaders to enhance their own and thus their staff team’s pedagogical leadership, setting them up as leaders of learning in the first instance. Our induction will then focus on the skills required for middle leaders to inspire confidence and to be able to bring staff with them in their vision for improvement. These skills include engaging practitioners in collaborative practice and focused discussion about ways to innovate and improve; observing and modelling practice; providing timely feedback; encouraging deep reflection and critique of practice; coaching and mentoring to ensure professional learning is translated into meaningful practice; and understanding moderation, assessment and reporting procedures (Flückiger et al, 2015)¹¹.

Above all our professional learning needs to have impact. Whilst stand-alone programmes and even masters level learning are important in developing knowledge and understanding, they rarely change practice. Although most respondents (78%) to the EY and Primary surveys stated they felt supported to *'critically engage with research, policy sources and current developments in learning and teaching'*, there was little if no mention of this learning having a positive impact in the classroom. In fact, one of the main requests in terms of next steps from the focus groups was a request for more CLPL. There needs to be an understanding that professional learning must focus on learners and the quality of learning experiences. We need to further involve our experienced DHTs and Head Teachers to act as coaches, to reach out and support colleagues in leadership roles, as feedback from within or beyond the establishment facilitates the transfer of theory and knowledge into improved practice (MacBeath 2006¹⁹; Robertson 2008²⁰; Swaffield 2004²¹). This kind of support should not be seen as providing answers but rather as using a repertoire of tools to help those being coached to reach new understandings. In addition, we need to establish a reliable and robust format to evaluate the impact of our CLPL particularly masters level learning and professional inquiry in terms of quality teaching and learning.

The overall findings from each research inquiry group revealed that, whilst there are real improvements in line with the key aims of our leadership strategy across the Department, distributive leadership in itself doesn't guarantee better performance and it is not necessarily a panacea for success: much depends on the opportunities created, the nature of distributive practice, the support provided and the intentions of those creating the opportunities i.e. our Head Teachers and senior leaders. If distributive leadership is to make any real difference senior leaders in schools have a substantial and integral role to play in making it a positive and meaningful experience. We are still on a journey in the achievement of Key Aims 3 and 4 to keep us on track our initiatives and programmes need to have a strong focus on the importance of leaders taking knowledge gained in professional learning whether through formal leadership programmes, secondments, collaborative working groups etc, back into their establishments in ways that maximise the effects of increasing leadership capacity on practice (Bush, 2009²²; OECD, 2008)²³.

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

How well do leaders empower staff and take steps to develop leadership at all levels in order to improve overall capacity within the establishment?

How well do leadership teams within establishments create the conditions for staff to engage regularly in professional dialogue to develop collective understanding? For example, shared understanding of standards, pedagogy, assessment and strategies for raising attainment.

How well do middle leaders actively seek out and share good practice within and beyond their establishment and to what extent can they demonstrate improvement as a result?

Review of 2019 Key Aims 5 and 6

Key Aim 5: *Empower and support newly appointed Head Teachers to develop their own authentic leadership in order to lead a school community strategically and effectively.*

Key Aim 6: *Utilise the expertise and depth of experience of Head Teachers to inform policy and practice beyond their own schools/centres, throughout the local authority, regionally and nationally and ensure their expertise, knowledge and skills enable the stimulation and dissemination of best practice and innovation.*

The 2019 Leadership Strategy echoed Earley and Weindling's (2007)²⁴ research into the stages of headship in identifying how the first five years of headship are critical in forming leadership identity as newly appointed Head Teachers experience a number of common difficulties and pressures. Walker & Qian's (2006, p297)²⁵ image of newly appointed Head Teachers '*balancing atop a greasy pole*' where they observe that the '*rigors involved in the climb not only continue but actually accentuate during the first few years of [headship]*' exemplifies the difference between expectation and stark reality of the job.

During this early headship period, Stevenson (2006)²⁶ indicates how the values of the Head Teacher may face conflict as they seek to juggle the demands of their new post whilst remaining accountable for the performance of their school. Such potential conflict is an example of an early critical incident, the handling of which may subsequently impact on the development of a Head Teacher's professional and personal identity as a leader and how their future headship may subsequently unfold. In fact, such incidents are a crucial stage in the identification and further development of an authentic style of leadership for Head Teachers. Fidler and Atton (2004, p168)²⁷ refer to these incidents as;

"trigger points which ...test the ability of the head teacher to see beyond the presenting problem to potentially deeper issues and to respond appropriately. This response will shape future decisions and will have an important effect on other stakeholder's attitudes to the head".

In keeping with the notion of authentic leadership Aim 5 of our Strategy emphasised that newly appointed Head Teachers should be appropriately

supported in coming to understand that such experiences are an essential and an inevitable part of headship and not necessarily attributable to any failure on the part of their leadership. Linked to these possible feelings of '*imposter syndrome*' the emotional demands of the job are often cited as one of the greatest challenges facing new Head Teachers during their early period of professional and organisational socialisation, particularly for Head Teachers moving into a new education authority. Reeves et al. (1997)²⁸ refer to this as '*isolation and overload*.'

In recognising these concerns, Aim 5 of our Leadership Strategy sought to try to address some of these issues for early headship. As well as utilising evaluation reports and a small survey, a focus group of ERC Head Teachers (in post 5 years and under) were brought together to explore the success or otherwise of the Department's endeavours in achieving Aim 5. The group emphasised the pressures experienced in the early years of headship with one Head Teacher stating;

"The challenges that HTs face can be overwhelming and isolating."

In redesigning our new Head Teacher Induction programme it was important to incorporate an emphasis on understanding these early pressures to headship. Fully utilising the lived experience of our senior leaders throughout the programme was one means of doing this. Strategic leadership, in a rapidly changing policy context, is a key focus of the new programme. An underpinning concern in programme design was to ensure that the sessions provided would equip our newly appointed Head Teachers with the skills and confidence to respond to this context. The Head Teacher induction

programme incorporates a range of both operational and strategic sessions led by established Head Teachers, Quality Improvement Officers and senior education staff. Newly appointed Head Teachers are offered a personal coach for the duration of these formative years. The coaching sessions are designed to enable participants to translate the learning into practice while providing scope and space within the programme to reflect critically on and process formative, and often challenging, leadership learning experiences.

All participants in the focus group reviewing the induction programme expressed how, within the early years of headship, they experienced time when they felt ‘not ready’ or ‘not good enough’ for the job of Head Teacher. To address those natural feelings of ‘imposter syndrome’, it was important to ensure our induction programme incorporated sessions that would allow for robust discussion around preparation for a role in which there are high degrees of unpredictability. There is no textbook response to critical incidents faced by Head Teachers, invariably they must act from policy guidelines or their value base and their tacit knowledge. In such cases, the knowledge imparted by our senior leaders based on what they have learned from the handling of previous unpredictable situations was invaluable. An important message as a golden thread throughout the programme is that our new Head Teachers must recognise that they are operating in what Schön (1987, p6)²⁹ describes as ‘indeterminate zones of practice’ (IZP) which escape technical rationality or solution, but which are pertinent to professional practice. Thus, our programme aims to prepare our newly appointed Head Teachers for such indeterminate zones of practice. In Vygotskian (1978)³⁰ terms, we have given consideration as to what scaffolding can be put in place to prepare Head Teachers for, and support them through, these challenging times. In simple terms ‘openly discussing the perplexing aspects of headship helps demystify them by signalling they are a ‘normal’ part of growth and development in headship and not an indication of failure’ (Purdie, 2014, p149)³¹. This was recognised and appreciated by all Head Teachers with 100% responding that the programme supported them to become more authentic in their leadership.

“The East Renfrewshire Head Teacher Induction Programme created a focussed learning experience for me as a new Head Teacher. It helped to develop my skills in both strategic and operational leadership, in a safe and supportive environment. Its focus on leadership within East Renfrewshire Council specifically meant that my leadership was fostered in line with East Renfrewshire Council’s Vision, Values and Aims, and allowed us all to challenge ourselves and our leadership style.”

(Head Teacher, HT Survey.)

Research by the Hay Group (2008)³² notes the differences between established leaders who demonstrate leadership maturity in such matters as political awareness, indirect influencing, alliance-building skills and long-term thinking and planning, and emergent leaders who often do not yet possess such qualities and skills. In designing our induction programme we asked the question: ‘how can leadership maturity be accelerated as well as leadership and management skills developed?’ (Earley & Jones 2010, p87)³³. Collins (2008)³⁴ contends that people do not only learn from experience, but also their reflection on that experience. Providing opportunities for such reflection is a key issue in Head Teacher development and is fundamental to our induction programme. Headship ‘in the swamp’ is openly discussed throughout our programme, as, according to Wright (2009, p265)³⁵, ‘In the swamp, everyday experiences are rich sources of learning that may be provoked by tension, chaos, struggle, uncertainty, conflict and dilemma.’ Open discussion of such difficult issues serves the purpose of making new Head Teachers aware of the fact that they are not alone, an aspect of the programme openly appreciated by focus group participants;

“Having the protected time to work alongside colleagues at a similar stage in our Headship journeys was invaluable. Networking and working collaboratively in a ‘Safe Space’ environment is incredibly important and helps you realise you are not the only one feeling a certain way.”

“ERC should continue to offer the robust and tailored support that we have been lucky enough to experience. When speaking with colleagues across other LAs, it is clear we receive a huge amount of support.”

The programme also appreciates that at induction stage Head Teachers may not yet be aware of their individual leadership development needs. As such, in house coaches appointed have been experienced and practicing Head Teachers. Head Teachers reported particularly valuing the support provided by ERCs comprehensive coaching provision which has, on occasion, been complimented by external independent coaching support;

“Coaching provided Head Teachers with the opportunity to establish trusting relationships to effectively reflect on their leadership and management journey thus far.”

“The Coaching Programme provided the support for more informal conversations and questions, to develop my skills and abilities from experienced colleagues.”

Feedback would also indicate that further development of coaching strategies, specifically the appointment of Head Teacher coaches, would be highly beneficial to all Head Teachers and ERC senior leaders, as both participants (coach and coachee) develop from the experience. All (100%) of focus group participants and survey respondents, expressed a desire for further coaching and associated CLPL, with some giving a specific request to develop their ability to support staff wellbeing.

It is worth noting that the increasing number of newly appointed Head Teachers who have participated successfully in the *Into Headship* programme are, alongside our Aspiring Leaders and Head Teacher Induction programmes, making a significant contribution to the development of leadership capacity across the system.

It is clear from the results of our review of Aim 5 that new Head Teachers require particular types of support in order to establish themselves and function as effective leaders in their establishments. Coaching, and induction into the Department culture helps new Head Teachers to learn ‘*the way we do things in ERC*’. However our Head Teacher induction programme also provides opportunities for a deeper examination of aspects of what it

means to be a Head Teacher with coaching and safe space group discussions playing a vital role in this aspect of headship development. The evidence would suggest that in line with the Aim 5 of the leadership strategy the support provided for new Head Teachers ensures they do more than just survive this induction period but instead become skilled leaders through improved confidence and competence.

This leads into the consideration of Aim 6 with regard to our established Head Teachers. Focus group discussions were used to capture the thoughts of our experienced leaders in terms of the Departments progress in supporting them to expand their leadership experience beyond the confines of their own establishment, cluster and local authority. The expectations in Aim 6 are complex and could be seen as unattainable given the present competing demands on Head Teachers and the ever changing policy context within which they need to be seen to be both managing and achieving competing priorities. Various policy initiatives from the Scottish Government reflect a shift towards a desire for more localised (establishment level) decision making in the context of an ambitious national vision for improved outcomes for all children and young people. These expectations have coincided with unprecedented fiscal challenges for all in education. The challenge for the Department and for Head Teachers, is how to develop the leadership capacity of their staff teams enabling establishments to be successful in achieving their ambitions for every learner.



The ask of our senior leaders within our 2019 Leadership Strategy was for them to consider a move towards a system based stance both in their own leadership and in the leadership development of others. Fullan (2004, p9)³⁶ explains that for improvement to happen across the system for every learner:

“A new kind of leadership is necessary to break through the status quo ... it will take powerful proactive forces to change the existing system (to change context). This can be done directly and indirectly through systems thinking in action. These new theoreticians are leaders who work directly in their own schools ... and participate in the bigger picture. To change organisations and systems will require leaders to get experience in linking to other parts of the system. These leaders in turn must help other leaders with similar characteristics.”

As our leadership strategy review has revealed our Head Teachers have embraced this approach and are actively moving away from the paradigm of the ‘hero leader’ to a more selfless, altruistic system leadership. It is clear that many of our Head Teachers are developing staff at all levels of the system to understand and accept that they have a responsibility for change and can affect the life chances of learners and therefore are themselves ‘the system’. Staff are beginning to comprehend that individually they have a responsibility to ‘interact with, learn from, contribute to and be a living member of the system as it evolves’ (Fullan, 2021, p34)³⁷.

Senior leaders have been instrumental in the provision of coaching for our Head Teacher Induction programme and for our Aspiring Leaders programme. In addition, they have shared their experience and knowledge in the delivery of aspects of these programmes. Their contextual knowledge at local authority level was significant in shaping the content of specific sections of these programmes. Head Teachers have been able to accurately portray the current, real life experiences of Head Teachers in establishments within the context of rapidly occurring change.

In addition to the delivery of key sessions, Head Teachers have been involved in scaffolding and processing participants’ reflective experiences

and responses during reflective group discussion sessions. Feedback from participants on both the Head Teacher Induction programme and the Aspiring Leaders programme indicates that this is an important element in their leadership development. It has also been satisfying for the Head Teachers involved to follow the growth and development of participants, particularly as they move into senior leadership posts. The relationships built during the in-course learning have continued as an available source of support for recently appointed Head Teachers and aspiring leaders, providing a two way benefit. The feedback from both participants on each programme and the established Head Teachers involved in delivery is that the model appears to be effective in translating theory into practice.

Established Head Teachers and Heads of Establishment have taken opportunities to contribute to the wider work of the Education Department with activities such as leading the development of policy in conjunction with the LNCT e.g. curriculum, learning and teaching, unacceptable actions, recruitment and have acted as key contributors to the shaping of strategy such as the Review of the Leadership Strategy 2019. Head Teachers have taken over the leadership of forums such as the Primary & Early Years Head Teacher Forum and the CfE Secondary Head Teacher Forum, in order to shape the direction of these meetings to better meet their needs and to share best practice more effectively. Through the various CIV models, there are increasing opportunities for leaders to take on greater responsibility for shaping and influencing improvement across establishments in ERC. It is also notable that an increasing number of leaders are opening their doors to share their establishment’s professional learning opportunities with colleagues from across the Department such as Learning and Teaching conference events; active involvement in piloting initiatives through the Regional Improvement Collaborative e.g. *Improving our Classroom*, as well as senior leaders being asked to speak at national events to showcase the work undertaken in the local authority through Education Scotland.

We are also fortunate to be able to draw on the expertise and experience of an increasing number of Head Teachers (11) who, following their achievement

of the Standard for Headship, have gone on to participate in the *In Headship* and *Excellence in Headship* programmes. In terms of the wider system our Head Teachers have been encouraged to engage in activities through the West Partnership Regional Improvement Collaborative, including Learning sets and Hexagon Coaching with 18 of our Head Teachers having completed this invaluable CLPL. Head Teachers and members of our Quality Improvement Team (16 in total) have also participated in *Evolving Systems Thinking* and *Making Sense of Systems Leadership* programmes. ERC also have an increasing number of Head Teachers and members of the Quality Improvement Team who fulfil the role of Associate Assessor for Education Scotland and who are able to share their learning from these roles to further enhance the level of knowledge across the system. One participant in the *Making Sense of Systems Leadership* programme commented:

“Participation has helped to develop my understanding of what highly effective and impactful system leaders do and the key attributes they hold. I have been able to take this back into the workplace and implement many of the initiatives relevant to my leadership development.”

It is important to note that both the academic literature review and the results of the research inquiry groups highlighted the importance of our

established Head Teachers in setting the tone for change and embedding the right culture and ethos. Harris (2014, p66)⁶ describes Head Teachers as ‘*the gatekeepers of change and they can be a help or hindrance in securing new ways of working*’ and in supporting a practitioner’s career progression. The research evidence shows that the most effective leaders embrace opportunities for innovation and change, they balance pressure and support for their teams and they empower practitioners to perform whilst holding them accountable for performance (Sahlberg 2011)³⁸. Head Teachers therefore are key in creating the conditions for effective distributive leadership to occur. If Head Teachers create the opportunity for staff to lead by inviting their participation in decision making and by providing the time for dialogue and discussion, greater capacity for leadership will be created. Distributive leadership will therefore be more likely viewed by practitioners as genuine and will therefore be sustained. If distributive leadership is viewed as inauthentic or used as a subtle mechanism to push workload downwards, it will be destined to fail.

“Creating organisations where relationships matter and where everyone’s contribution is valued is what characterises effective leadership. The most effective leaders understand that people are not just their best assets. They are their only assets.”
(Harris, 2014, p69)⁶

CHALLENGE QUESTIONS

To what extent are our strategies for change impacting positively on staff and improving outcomes for all learners? How is this evidenced for impact?

How well do Head Teachers and Heads of Establishment create conditions to support creativity, innovation and inquiry where staff feel confident to initiate well-informed change and are committed to collective responsibility in the process of improvement?

Key Performance Indicators and Targets

| Indicator | Target (by 2020-21) | Achieved (2017-23) |
|--|------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Number of staff taking Masters level Learning | 150 | 290 |
| 2. Number of Staff with Masters Degrees | 30 | 95 |
| 3. Number of staff undertaking Professional Inquiry (Based on knowledge of whole school approaches, probationer programmes and feedback from Head Teachers) | 400 | 60% |
| 4. Number of Staff with Into Headship Qualification | 25 | 27 |
| 5. Number of staff engaged in the Aspiring Leaders Programme | 10 | 28 |
| 6. Number of Staff engaged in Excellence in Headship Programme | 10 | 11 |
| 7. Percentage of positive results on CLPL evaluations | 100% | 91% |
| 8. Percentage of positive results from evaluations of probationer induction programme. * Probationers surveyed who agreed that CLPL provided by the local authority has developed professional skills and abilities. ** Probationers surveyed who agreed they have developed as an enquiring professional through completion of a professional inquiry. | 100%* | 100%* 93%** |
| 9. Number of ERC schools achieving good or better in school inspections for: • Learning, teaching and assessment; • Raising attainment and achievement; • Leadership of change. | 100% 100% 100% | 8/8 100% 8/8 100% 5/5 100% |
| 10. Number of teachers who have had their Professional learning confirmed through Professional Update and subsequently recorded by the GTCS | 100% | 100% |
| 11. Number of staff engaged in leadership programmes through the West Partnership. | No data | 145 |
| 12. Number of staff engaged in systems level leadership programmes. | No data | 16 |

Next Steps and Revised Key Aims

The overall findings from each research inquiry group reveal that, whilst there are real improvements in line with the key aims of our 2019 strategy, distributive leadership in itself doesn't guarantee better performance and it is not necessarily a panacea for success: much depends on the opportunities created, the nature of distributive practice, the support provided and the intentions of those creating the opportunities i.e. our Head Teachers, Heads of Establishment and senior leaders. If distributive leadership is to make any real difference senior leaders in schools have a substantial and integral role to play in making it a positive and meaningful experience. The key aims as set out in our 2019 strategy remain relevant in a number of key areas, but where required, have been refreshed to ensure they are now appropriate to the context of the Departments leadership aspirations for all staff. These refreshed Key Aims will be considered within a new and evolving context of national and local policy when informing our action planning and target setting.

REVISED KEY AIMS

1. Effectively develop resilient and reflective practitioners who consistently deliver high quality learning experiences within and beyond their own setting by engaging individually and collaboratively in contemporary, meaningful and inspiring professional learning.
2. Cultivate an informed, inspiring and creative approach to improving learning and teaching across all settings by utilising disciplined collaboration which not only develops and enriches the leadership skills of practitioners but provides a positive impact on outcomes for all learners.
3. Ensure that existing and aspirant middle leaders are supported and challenged to develop and continue to build the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding required of highly effective leaders, as well as the confidence to begin to explore their own authentic style of leadership.
4. Empower and support all newly appointed Heads of Establishment and Senior Leaders to develop their own authentic leadership in order to lead a school community strategically and effectively.
5. Utilise the expertise and depth of experience of established Senior Leaders to inform policy and practice beyond their own settings locally, regionally and nationally to unite in a single focus on collaborative approaches to systemic change aimed at improving the outcomes for all learners.

To achieve the above we will engage in the actions as set out in the refreshed strategy.

Appendix 1

Teacher Leadership Inquiry

Question

Is distributive leadership being effectively utilised to develop capacity and collegiality in the system which positively influences quality in the classroom and helps deliver excellent experiences for all?

Rationale

A cross-sector working group of teachers were requested to design and conduct an inquiry to review East Renfrewshire Council Education Department's Leadership Strategy and use the project's findings to inform a new, refreshed edition of the policy. The group specifically engaged with research and reading on the concept of distributive leadership, and the potential advantages and challenges this approach can bring to education settings.

Understood as encouraging and mobilising leadership expertise at all levels of a school, from the classroom teacher to the senior leader, distributive leadership moves the focus of leadership from solely "top-down" governance to an approach where staff are more empowered, with responsibility and leadership being layered throughout all levels of a school (Fullan & Kirtman 2019, p.11). In the research, adopting a distributive leadership model was identified as being a powerful strategy for long-term improvement in terms of pupil attainment and achievement (Harris 2014, p.14). Additionally, rooted in a clear model of collegiality where collaboration is pervasive, a key tenant of coherent school leadership (Fullan & Kirtman, p.47), aspects of distributive leadership are found to lead to shared decision-making in schools, with an increased culture of trust and increased staff ownership. This was subsequently found to lead to increased individual and collective capacity and a focus on "team over self" (ibid., p.5). Furthermore, due to the range of colleagues involved in a distributive model, settings can develop a greater range of solutions and interventions which meet the needs of pupils and staff (Harris, p.38).

However, where the literature points to the sizable potential for distributive leadership, potential barriers to it being beneficial were also evident. Indeed, the implementation of a distributive model without an adequate implementation strategy can be debilitating towards the goals of distributive leadership (Harris, p.27). In addition, if distributive leadership is perceived as adding to teacher workload, resistance and failure is more likely (ibid., p.66). Furthermore, there is a risk that distributive leadership can incorrectly be translated in practice into "distributed" leadership, whereby true collaboration is replaced with cooperation and compliance (ibid., p.31).

Nevertheless, despite its potential difficulties, the distributive model, when correctly implemented, appeals as professionals at all levels face the increasingly complex landscape of education as, as posited by Fullan, 'the more complex the problem, the more that people with the problem must be part and parcel of the solution' (2019, p.1).

Following on from discussion of the core literature and with a view to evaluating the use of distributive leadership across the authority, the working group established an agreed definition of distributive leadership as "nurturing leadership at all levels of an organisation to build capacity for improvement and change", using this definition to guide all aspects of the ensuing intervention.

Methodology

Research Design: The inquiry utilised a mixed-methods research design to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the current use of distributive leadership within East Renfrewshire education establishments.

Participants: The participants in this study were unpromoted staff from various early years, primary, and secondary settings in East Renfrewshire. This diverse representation ensured a comprehensive perspective on distributive leadership across different educational contexts.

Data Collection: The data collection process involved two primary methods: an anonymous questionnaire and follow-up 1 to 1 telephone interviews.

Questionnaire: A Google Form questionnaire was created by the group to gather data and feedback from teaching and education staff. The questionnaire consisted of a series of Likert scale questions and open-ended questions designed to assess participants' perceptions and experiences related to distributive leadership. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to nurseries, primary schools, and secondary schools. Participants were asked to rate their responses on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 represented "Strongly Agree" and 4 represented "Strongly Disagree." 139 people responded to the survey. Of the 139, 21 were in permanent promoted posts and so their responses were discounted from the data analysis. This left 118 respondents.

Follow-Up Telephone Interviews: In addition to the questionnaire, the group conducted follow-up telephone interviews with a group of participants who had indicated in their questionnaire response that they were willing to be interviewed. These interviews were semi-structured and aimed to delve deeper into participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to distributive leadership. The interviews focused on topics such as practices reflecting distributive leadership, non-reflective practices, leadership capacity, and support needed for improvement. A total of 10 participants were selected for the telephone interviews based on their willingness to provide additional feedback during the questionnaire.

Data Analysis: Quantitative data from the questionnaire was analysed by calculating the average scores for each question and determining the percentage breakdown of responses for each Likert scale option. The averages were used to identify patterns and trends in the participants' perceptions of distributive leadership. Qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and the telephone interviews were thematically analysed to identify common themes, perspectives, and insights. Key themes from the written responses were coded and the frequency of each theme was determined.

An initial analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire was done with further areas for clarification identified in order to answer the initial research question. The initial areas identified were:

- Further information on what respondents understand by the term 'distributive leadership' and clarification of what practices reflect this and which do not.
- What do respondents think it means to show leadership capacity? What do they consider 'being a leader' to mean within their setting?
- What kind of support would respondents need to develop the skills and resources to lead improvement?

It was agreed that this information would be gathered through structured interviews which were then undertaken. Post interviews, the team met again to code the interview transcripts and notes for clear themes.

Ethical Considerations: Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Participation in the questionnaire and follow-up interviews was voluntary, and participants' anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and data were securely stored and used only for the purposes of the inquiry.

By employing a mixed-methods approach, combining questionnaire responses and follow-up interviews, the group aimed to gather a comprehensive understanding of the current use of distributive leadership within East Renfrewshire's education department. The methodology ensured inclusivity and allowed for both quantitative and qualitative insights to inform the findings and subsequent recommendations.

Evaluation and Impact

Analysis of initial survey data (See Appendix 1)

The initial survey was comprised of 10 statements with an agreement scale response and then an open written response to the question 'Do you feel there are any barriers to you taking on leadership roles? Please detail below'. The analysis was done on overall responses to the statements, a comparison of part time and full time members of staff and an analysis of barriers to participation.

Key themes across responses

Analysis of the survey data revealed that most (75% - 90%) respondents agreed with five of the ten statements, and a majority (51% - 74%) of respondents agreed with descriptions of distributive leadership practices being relevant to their setting. The statements that had most respondents agree included feeling empowered to make improvements within settings, self-initiated collaborative working and access to relevant data and impactful CLPL as methods to achieve this. The statements with a majority of respondents agreeing included statements that explicitly referenced 'leadership' and described more formal or organised collaboration within and across settings.

Most respondents (81%) collaborate regularly with colleagues to enhance the quality of learning experiences they provide, while only a majority (73%) of respondents feel like their setting has a culture of collegiality and uses collaborative planning effectively to promote excellent practice. This would suggest that collaboration for improvement is something that happens in a self-initiated way in some settings. This reflects the model of distributive leadership outlined by Fullan & Kirtman (2019) but the building of collaborative planning could also be an area for whole school improvement in future that could utilise practitioners existing skills sets.

These results would suggest that many respondents are engaging in activities that Harris (2014) would ascribe to distributive leadership in order to positively influence quality in the classroom and improve outcomes for learners: collaborating, accessing professional learning and being empowered to make changes. However, despite high agreement rates within these skills, 'I feel like a leader within my setting' had the lowest agreement rate of all the statements (64%), suggesting that not all respondents explicitly connect these activities with leadership.

The statement with the second lowest agreement rate (66%) was 'I have had the opportunity to work collaboratively across the authority to improve outcomes for learners'. This theme also came across in the responses to the structured interviews.

Part time and full time comparison

The average score for responses was very similar across part time and full time staff. There were many areas with similar data being gathered from both groups: collaboration, average scores of responses, time as a barrier. Overall, the proportion of full time respondents that answered with only 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' was 73%. However, the proportion of part time respondents that answered with only 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' was 50%, suggesting that part time staff experience more barriers in certain aspects of distributive leadership. Additionally, there was a difference in feeling like a leader between part time and full time staff, with the part time staff less likely to feel like a leader in their setting (an average of 2.19 for full time staff and 2.55 for part time staff). This was noted as an area for possible further research or improvement.

Barriers to leadership

The responses to the open question regarding barriers were coded and grouped into 10 themes. The number of instances of these themes arising were then counted across all responses. If a barrier was listed more than once in a single response, it was only counted as one instant of this barrier being identified.

The barrier most frequently cited was 'Time', with 'Lack of Support', 'Resources (including budgets and CLPL)' and 'Workload' as the three most frequent after that. Some of the responses mentioned that these barriers seem 'endemic to teaching' and it was discussed during our analysis that time, resources and workload are structural challenges that may be beyond the scope of a leadership strategy to address. 'Lack of Support' could be an area for development in the future strategy.

Analysis of structured interview responses (See Appendix 2)

The group met to feedback from individually conducted interviews. While transcripts and notes were read out, main themes were identified from each question using emergent coding.

Question 1 - A strong culture of collegiality and frequent opportunities to share and lead good practice were identified in most follow up interviews as features of distributive leadership observable in settings.

Question 2 - Top-down allocation of leadership roles from promoted members of staff (distributed rather than distributive models) was mentioned by interviewees as a practice that occurs in contrast to distributive leadership styles.

Question 3(a) - Managing learning within classrooms, supporting pupils and sharing practice with staff were the leadership capacity indicators that chimed with distributive leadership styles.

Question 3(b) - Many respondents also described formal or named roles (such as Maths Champion or STEM Ambassador) as a main way they had shown leadership capacity.

Question 4 - Interviewees identified 'Being a leader' to mean communicating clearly, being a role model, mentoring, improving outcomes and providing excellent experiences for learners.

Question 5 - The support required to develop the skills and resources to lead improvement were recognition for leadership roles, support and clear pathways for progress.

These themes would suggest that most interviewees recognise the features of distributive leadership both in their settings through identifying common practices and also in themselves in how they show leadership capacity. The responses to Q3b suggest that there is still some association with specific named roles - leadership being something you have not something you do - that may act as a barrier to others taking on responsibility for improvement.

Next Steps

- Increase opportunities to visit and collaborate with colleagues in other settings.
- Promote a more consistent culture across settings where all staff feel valued, empowered and recognised for their leadership contributions.
- Promote greater understanding of distributive leadership.
- Consider further surveys with greater reach.

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Appendix 2

Primary Middle Leadership Inquiry

| Question | Is distributive leadership being effectively utilised to develop capacity and collegiality in the system which positively influences quality in the classroom and helps deliver excellent experiences for all? |
|----------|--|
|----------|--|

In order to evaluate how distributive leadership is enacted in schools, it is important to establish how this concept is understood in theory and subsequently evidenced in practice.

The purpose of this inquiry is to determine existing leadership practice, with a particular focus on leadership at all levels. Findings from this project will inform the revision of the current ERC leadership strategy and help to identify appropriate amendments and next steps.

Within ERC there are 24 primary schools, 13 of which have nursery classes, 10 family centres and 1 school for children with additional support for learning needs.

Data collection included the following components:

- A.** An online questionnaire to obtain information regarding practitioners' perceptions of leadership theory and practice
- B.** Reflective analysis to identify key themes to further explore within practitioner focus groups
- C.** A series of three focus groups to represent a cross-section of teachers and specialists discussing participants' personal experiences in the context of leadership practice

To support the development of the inquiry, it was pertinent to engage with relevant research and literature. In line with the view that "the individual is [...] not the unit of analysis in the study of leadership, but rather practice or activity is viewed as being the appropriate unit of analysis (Spillane et al., 2001), we felt it important to gather views both individually and within small groups. In this instance leadership is concerned with inter-dependency rather than dependency and embraces a variety of leaders in diverse roles who share leadership responsibility (Harris, 2005b).

Whilst a shift away from traditional hierarchical models towards a more distributive, collaborative model seems favourable (Spillane, 2006; OECD, 2014; Fullan, 2016), it is reasonable to suggest there is still progress to be made in relation to widespread application and evidence of positive impact.

Rationale for Data Collection

The rationale for collecting data using both questionnaires and focus groups was to ensure balance between qualitative and quantitative information from practitioners in various roles within establishments from across the authority. The benefit of using an online questionnaire offered the respondents the flexibility to answer questions at their leisure. Respondents comprised of Head of Centres, Depute Head Teachers, Depute Head of Centres, Principal Teachers, Teachers, Senior Child Development Officers, Child development Officers, Pupil Support Assistants and Early Years Play workers. A separate questionnaire was sent to all Primary Head Teachers. There was a degree of anonymity within the questionnaire allowing for honest responses. Qualitative data gathered through questionnaires provided insights into the perceptions of individuals and afforded us the opportunity to identify themes from responses within the same establishment. We then used these broad themes to create further questions to explore within the subsequent focus groups.

Two of the focus groups were comprised of members of staff from the same establishment. This was due to high response rates from the identified establishments in comparison to the other establishments represented. Within the focus groups in the same establishments, various roles were represented from those consulted in the questionnaires (Table E). One focus group contained practitioners from four different establishments.

Limitations of Data Gathering

The requirement to stipulate role and establishment meant that respondents in a leadership position could be identified. This may have affected openness within responses. Three of the wider reaching (multi-establishment) focus groups were planned but unfortunately two of these groups were unable to go ahead due to planned industrial action. Other constraints included timing: the questionnaire corresponded with the consultation surrounding the National Discussion on Scotland's Education, this may have inhibited the uptake of responses to the initial questionnaire and attendance at focus groups. Another potential limitation to data gathering was the omission of other staff members views, such as; facilities management, admin staff and education partners. The questionnaire required an extension of the response timeline due to a limited uptake of 21 responses; we re-sent the questionnaire and the response rate increased to 112, across the authority.

*other staff

Questionnaires

A. An online questionnaire to obtain information regarding practitioners' perceptions of leadership theory and practice

22 out of 48 establishments were represented through questionnaire responses (roles listed below). Across the 22 establishments that were represented, 112 responses were gathered in total.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Depute Head Teachers | 5% |
| Principal Teachers | 10% |
| Class Teachers | 81% |
| Child Development Officers | 3% |
| Pupil Support Assistants | 1% |

Prior to the creation of questionnaire content, each member of the inquiry team read the following three texts (alongside other relevant materials):

1. Distributed Leadership Matters: Perspectives, Practicalities and Potential (Harris, A., 2014)
2. Coherent School Leadership: Forging Clarity from Complexity (Fullan, M. and Kirtman, L., 2019)
3. Nuance: Why Some Leaders Succeed and Others Fail (Fullan, M., 2019)

Table A

| | Key Theme | HGIOS4? |
|----------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Theme 1 | Leadership | 1.4 Leadership and Management of Staff |
| Theme 2 | Culture | 1.3 Leadership of Change |
| Theme 3 | Shared Purpose and Vision | 1.3 Leadership of Change |
| Theme 4 | Autonomy | 1.3 Leadership of Change |
| Theme 5 | Collegiality/Connected Autonomy | 1.1 Self-Evaluation for Self-Improvement |
| Theme 6 | Professional Development | 1.2 Leadership of Change |
| Theme 7 | Capacity Building/Impact | 1.1 Self-Evaluation for Self-Improvement |
| Theme 8 | Moving Forward/Next Steps | 1.2 Leadership of Learning |

The questionnaire contained eleven questions in total. Five of these were quantitative in nature with the remaining six allowing respondents the freedom to provide supporting detail.

Quantitative Questions

Questions 3-7 listed below involved respondents rating each statement from 1-6 (6 being the most positive response). As is shown in Table B, responses were very positive overall. Whilst Question 6 yielded the highest average response, there is not much of a differential between the total values. Question 5, however, resulted in the highest rating when combining values 5 and 6, suggesting there is evidence of collegiate working having a positive impact on outcomes for learners. It is interesting to note that Question 7, centred on a sense of empowerment and the opportunity to be involved in decision-making scored the lowest value. This suggests that this may be worthy of further focus within establishments in concordance with the views of Fullan, M. & Kirtman, L. (2019, p. 14) who state, “If we want people to engage and commit to the goals of a district, they need to be part of the decision-making process and have genuine opportunities to lead.” Given the closeness of scores, however, we did not place statistical value on these responses.

Table B – Breakdown of Questionnaire Responses (3-7)

| | Questions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Average |
|-----------|---|----|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-------------|
| Q3 | In my school or establishment, I have meaningful opportunities to develop relationships through working collegiately | 1% | 0% | 4% | 18% | 29% | 49% | 5.21 |
| Q4 | Collegiality is well-developed within my school or establishment to build capacity for improvement and change | 0% | 2% | 3% | 18% | 37% | 41% | 5.13 |
| Q5 | The collegiate opportunities I have engaged with have had a positive impact on outcomes for learners | 1% | 2% | 2% | 15% | 36% | 45% | 5.17 |
| Q6 | I feel supported to critically engage with research, policy sources and current developments in learning and teaching | 2% | 3% | 1% | 16% | 21% | 57% | 5.24 |
| Q7 | I feel empowered and supported to engage in the decision-making process to improve learner outcomes and provide excellent experiences for all | 3% | 3% | 4% | 18% | 21% | 53% | 5.09 |

Qualitative Questions

Prior to gathering views on leadership practice, we felt it appropriate to establish a baseline understanding of the concept of distributive leadership (particularly given the challenges in definition highlighted in literature). There appears to be a particular tension in arriving at a shared understanding of the difference between distributed and distributive models. For this reason, each respondent was asked to differentiate between these two concepts, the results of which led to the identification of key themes. Within the responses gathered, 88% of respondents provided a variety of definitions which are categorised in Table C below. 12% indicated that they do not understand the difference between the two terms. A breakdown of responses is provided in Appendix 1 (a shortened list removing duplicated phrases). Perhaps this is due to the “fine dynamic balance between too much direction and too little direction” (Fullan M., 2019, p. 19).

Table C – Breakdown of Themes (Q8)

| Key Themes | |
|---|---|
| Distributed | Distributive |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared • Delegated • Passed on • Given to you • Focus on the individual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared • Collaboration • Autonomy • Empowerment • All levels • Focus on collective/group |

From responses gathered it is clear that there is an understanding of distributed leadership engendering aspects of delegation and task distribution. Distributive on the other hand is described as collaborative, based on a culture of empowerment and autonomy. Interestingly, the word ‘shared’ appears in responses linked to both definitions, however, from subsequent responses it is clear that the *ways in which* leadership is shared in schools determines whether or not it is perceived as distributed or distributive.

Questions 9-12 afforded respondents opportunities to elaborate on leadership experience and practice within their own establishments. The open-ended nature of the questions resulted in a variety of responses with specific examples directly linked to individual contexts. We collated responses that are representative of the wider responses and have summarised recurrent themes in Table D.

Table D. Summary of Questionnaire Responses (9-12)

| Questions | | Examples | Limitations |
|------------|--|--|--|
| Q9 | How effective do you feel distributive leadership practice is within your school or establishment? | Decision-Making, Empowerment, Working Parties | Motivation |
| Q10 | Please describe some of your experiences of distributive leadership practice within your school or establishment. | School Improvement Planning, CLPL, Moderation, Practitioner Enquiry, Curriculum Leadership | N/A |
| Q11 | In what ways has distributive leadership practice in your school or establishment provided you with opportunities to develop leadership skills. | Empowerment, Ownership and Autonomy, Skills Development/Confidence, Leadership of Learning | Variable opportunities within establishments |
| Q12 | What, in your opinion, would further support or enhance distributive leadership opportunities at all levels within your school or establishment? | More CLPL , Protected Time, More Opportunities for Collegiate Working, Cross-Sector Working, Sharing Good Practice | |

Head Teacher Questionnaire

In addition to seeking practitioners' views, we created an adapted online questionnaire to obtain information regarding head of establishments' perceptions of leadership theory and practice.

From the 11% who responded, all were confident that there are meaningful opportunities to develop relationships through collaborative working across their establishments both within the local authority and beyond, for example, the West Partnership.

In examples of good practice, distributive leadership was illustrated as the mobilisation of leadership expertise based on the skill sets of individuals at all levels. Fundamentally, a sense of connected autonomy to plan and implement strategic improvement and outcomes for learners was considered necessary by the respondents.

In comparing both, in simple terms, distributed leadership was termed as delegation of tasks with clear specific direction, an outcome that could be achieved by anyone regardless of their skill set. Distributive leadership was viewed as providing the opportunity to lead with autonomy, using talents, skills and expertise in an environment underpinned by a safe culture of trust, collegiality and shared vision. It was felt that the environment fosters a sense that staff views are respected and listened to, where their opinions are truly valued, and their professionalism rightly recognised. In the best examples, collegiality extends beyond school staff and includes families, learners and partners. Consequently, all stakeholder groups become integral to the change process with all sharing their knowledge, experiences and ideas in order to improve outcomes for learners.

Where examples of good practice were shared, self-evaluation and related curriculum development work is keenly focused on learners. Establishment improvement plans inform the need and desired outcomes of change. Ensuring the appropriate climate and the promotion of true collaboration, permits practitioners to be agents of change.

When asked to consider how head teachers empower and support staff to engage in the decision-making process to improve outcomes for learners, the following was discussed.

Using the depth of knowledge we have about our learners and the context of our community allows us to target approaches. Data based decision making also ensures improved outcomes for learners across learning, teaching and assessment. It is however crucial that the data and the local context are considered equally to provide for context specific improvements to be constructed. The self-evaluation and PRD process are crucial components to this.

Focus Groups

C. A series of three focus groups to represent a cross-section of teachers and specialists discussing participants' personal experiences in the context of leadership practice

Table E. Summary of Focus Group Responses

| Focus Group 1 | No. | Focus Group 2 | No. | Focus Group 3 | No. |
|---------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|-------------------|-----|
| Role | | Role | | Role | |
| Classroom Teacher | 2 | Classroom Teacher | 2 | Classroom Teacher | 3 |
| Principal Teacher | 2 | Principal Teacher | 2 | Principal Teacher | 1 |
| Pupil Support Assistant | 1 | Pupil Support Assistant | 1 | | |
| Child Development Officer | 1 | | | | |

Question 1

What do you think the difference between distributed and distributive leadership is?

Similarly to the questionnaire responses, some of the focus group participants found it difficult to differentiate between distributed and distributive leadership. **Focus Group 1** described the difference as: “Distributed is when something is delegated or handed to someone. Coming from the top down and telling people what to do.” They described distributive as “Given something to do with support, advice and mentoring, drawing on people’s strengths and using them.” **Focus Group 2** described distributive leadership as “Something given to you and distributed as when you ask for an opportunity”. **Focus Group 3** described distributed as “Being told what to do or done to you and distributive as collegiate, common goal and having a voice.” Two of the three groups found it difficult to distinguish the difference between distributed and distributive leadership, confirming the challenges alluded to previously.

Question 2

What do you think the culture and ethos of the school needs to be like in order to ensure effective distributive leadership? Provide examples.

Focus Group 1 spoke of the importance of ethos within the school and a feeling that everyone is trusted and valued, making people feel that they can step forward for leadership opportunities. They spoke of the importance of knowing staff in the school and providing effective support and encouraging people not to be afraid to make mistakes. They described a culture of collaboration, empowerment and confidence building through the school culture. The group provided examples including involvement in learning sets, sharing individual practitioner inquiry. **Focus Group 2** spoke of the importance of good relationships with Senior Leadership Team and them knowing individual teacher’s strengths and open to ideas. They spoke positively of being challenged and supported. The group provided examples including involvement in University leadership course, leadership academy and being a language leader. **Focus Group 3** discussed the importance of respect for everyone’s voice and being valued. They spoke of everyone participating and staff feeling comfortable to lead in certain areas, playing on people’s strengths. They provided examples of leadership of curriculum areas, autonomy in the classroom and providing time for staff to share learning experiences.

Question 3

In what ways in your school do you ensure that there is shared purpose and vision for leadership at all levels?

Focus Group 1 provided examples of decisions being made through staff consultation. They spoke of School Improvement Plan and opportunities for staff to reflect. They also described how staff can share skills and autonomy and agency has been explored with staff. **Focus Group 2** spoke of the School Improvement Plan and how it is analysed by whole school team at staff meetings. This helped to create a shared vision for improving learning and teaching and staff discussed elements they would take forward. **Focus Group 3** described all staff being involved in School Improvement Planning and the fact that analysis of data is done at all levels.

Question 4

In what ways are you empowered to make decisions that lead to change and improvement in experiences for children?

Focus Group 1 spoke of the opportunities provided to engage in appropriate CLPL activities and time given to support development activities and to try out something new. They described opportunities and consultation on school improvement priorities. They provided examples including staff coffee and chat sessions to discuss reading materials, inquiry-based learning, creative learning rooms and development time once a week. **Focus Group 2** talked about the open-door policy at the school and feeling that they were able to approach members of the management team for support. Having the freedom to follow interests of the children or the teachers was welcomed. A practitioner spoke about being a keen fisherman and being allowed to do Clyde in the classroom. Professional inquiries are completed by all staff. P5 are focusing on play-based learning. Other stages are focusing on the influence of digital learning. The data gathered from these will be shared across the staff group in March or April. Lesson study was discussed where staff planned collegiately with stage colleagues. This term they are working together to plan a Numeracy and Maths lesson, then in the following terms there will be literacy and health and wellbeing focus. The PSA talked about the range of ways they use their own skills to lead on idea for movement breaks for pupils, arts and crafts, Lego and gardening and flag football. The group also provided examples of Primary 7 leadership opportunities including opportunity to lead a lunchtime club. **Focus Group 3** discussed having the freedom to try new things, gather feedback from children and having the autonomy to make decisions. They described examples of how they use analysis of data to inform practice, how staff use of tracking database, evaluation of the School Improvement Plan, Professional Dialogues, Professional Review and Development and Practitioner Inquiry to inform and improve.

Question 5

What opportunities have you had to engage professionally and work with others in a collegiate way? What do you think has been the most valuable experience for you?

Focus Group 1 provided examples which included Cluster Science Champion, Language Leader, Froebel group, hoping to create training opportunities for others, school working parties and cluster working groups. Early years staff provided examples including ERC Early Years Teaching and Learning group, nursery reciprocal visits and the Early Years Neighbourhood Group. The Pupil Support Assistant described Chatterbox - communal training they had participated in. **Focus Group 2** described a number of activities they had engaged in and they felt were valuable. Examples included cluster and authority opportunities to visit other schools and authority wide moderation allowing staff to work with colleagues from across the authority and from other stages as well as teachers visiting other schools and classrooms to see pedagogical approaches. They provided further examples of working collegiately including working with Quality Improvement Officer during data sessions to inform judgements, working with the link Educational Psychologist to discuss how staff can support children with additional support needs and specific approaches to support English as Additional Language (EAL) and nurture. **Focus Group 3** provided a number of examples including the new moderation model with staff working in pods and trios, cluster standing committees, working with ERC literacy development staff, working to further develop Science through ERC STEM ambassador and health and wellbeing support teachers working in partnership with teachers to support the wellbeing needs of learners. They described working with other schools to share resources and good practice.

Question 6**What personal and professional development have you engaged in to enhance your leadership skills?**

Focus Group 1 provided examples of professional development including participation in the Froebelian leadership certificate, coaching from members of SLT, the summer immersion course to Cannes, learning from others in the leadership team through leadership posts, leadership opportunities in nursery, CLPL for staff and mentoring NQTs. **Focus Group 2** shared some of their experiences including the Froebel course, Education Scotland's Leadership development resources/opportunities and a school working party to introduce Maths and Numeracy approaches. Staff also spoke of resources they had produced individually and with colleagues based on their own professional interests, for example, creating bereavement guidance and EAL resources. **Focus Group 3** examples included leading after school clubs enable us to lead in different areas. Professional Review and Development (PRDs) allow for professional discussion around targets and areas for improvement. They also mentioned Skills Academy where teachers have a pathway and children move round between each one. This has supported staff to lead within different areas (either taking a skill further or learning a new skill and learning from others) as well as the Education Scotland teacher leadership course and the West Partnership moderation course.

Question 7**What impact has any leadership activity you have been involved in had on the learners in your care?**

Focus Group 1 described the impact of the Froebelian course as: developing a sense of community – children taking risks and leading learning at home. Children are also the starting point in planning leadership activities. Through Family-Centred Gold accreditation parents have noted improvements in communication between school and home. Enquiry-based learning led to independence, children taking opportunities to develop creativity and communication skills. Post-covid support focused on nurture and mental health have also had a positive impact on learners. **Focus Group 2** described an identified CLPL opportunity where a class piloted a neurodiversity series of lessons. This led to the children having a wider understanding about specific supports that some children need. The inclusive classroom approach and opportunities for children to present at assemblies and in class also had a positive impact. They spoke of teaching backwards and a Pivotal Education input that had a positive impact on the learners and practice. They felt that staff professional reading activities where teachers read identified chapters and reflected on this through staff professional dialogue has had positive results and aided understanding of key concepts. **Focus Group 3** described examples including Daily Literacy Learning (DLL). Pre and post data showed great progress for learners and further success was achieved by rolling this out across the rest of the school. They spoke of how the progressive structure of DLL has been helpful across the school. Other examples included the North Lanarkshire Active Literacy Programme which was introduced after lockdown. Staff discussed the fact that the freedom to try this new approach led to improvements in results for children in P1-3. The new moderation model is likely to make teacher judgements more robust moving forward.

Question 8**What would you suggest would enhance/encourage/support your leadership development moving forward?**

Focus Group 1 suggestions included the need to continue with protected time for collegiate experiences. They felt more opportunities to visit other schools and collaborate with other professionals would be beneficial as well as more informal opportunities for collaboration. **Focus Group 2** felt that more cluster leadership opportunities for teachers would be helpful, particularly for class teachers. Leadership teams engaging in CLPL opportunities together has been beneficial. More opportunities to engage in CLPL with high school staff would be welcomed. They also mentioned opportunities to engage with further qualifications such as funded Post-Graduate Certificates or Masters-levels modules. Perhaps having a mentor who has been through the process would encourage and support this process further. **Focus Group 3** suggested continued opportunities to put forward thoughts and ideas to SLT and continued staff opportunities to attend appropriate CLPL. Sharing leadership opportunities at all levels would further build capacity. More opportunities for parents and partners to be involved in leadership initiatives might strengthen relationships and sense of community. Further access to research and literature by signposting to appropriate resources would support professional learning and dialogue.

Next Steps

- To widen data gathering to obtain a more extensive range of views from different staff roles
- To illustrate examples of distributive leadership which have led to high-quality practice within classrooms and subsequently improved outcomes for learners. This may be best achieved through a case study approach.

Appendix 1: Establishing a Definition of Distributive Leadership

| Distributed | Distributive |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributed leadership is when tasks, roles or responsibilities are delegated, often from management team, with a predetermined outcome. Shared. organised by a senior leader, for example. and set tasks are delegated. Distributed is when the MT give others leadership roles/responsibilities. Distributed leadership means to me that people that are chosen or placed in the role are the ones who establish change within the school. Distributed leadership would be more focused on the end goal of achieving something, not taking into consideration the likes of the understanding of the concept that staff truly have and believe. Distributed leadership is delegated to you Distributed leadership is where roles and responsibilities are given to you to do. Distributed leadership has been passed onto you with a specific focus in mind. Distributed as instructional and directed leadership set out through school improvement plan/SLT and school expectations. My understanding is that distributed leadership is when a member of staff is asked to undertake a specific task/responsibility in relation to school improvement. Distributed leadership is that staff are given roles and asked to lead an initiative, the outcome of which will be dictated by SLT. Distributed leadership is sharing leadership/managerial roles. Distributed - My understanding of this is work distributed by the leadership team to individuals. 'Distributed' leadership is when managerial roles and responsibilities are handed out to practitioners but without their consultation/ views being taken into consideration. Distributed - this concept is when one individual makes decisions and shares these decisions with other staff members to share management and staff members are being directed. Distributed - leadership opportunities that you undertake with little choice. Distributed - my understanding of distribute leadership is when one staff member makes a decision and shares it amongst the rest of the staff. This type of leadership is one in which staff members are being directed and management is shared. I would say that distributed leadership is about giving leaders in schools ownership by empowering them to lead their teams and drive forward. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributive Leadership: When a team of educators from all different levels/stages work collaboratively to create good/positive change in a school. I think distributive gives more ownership to practitioners than distributed. Leadership is undertaken at all levels. Distributive you have a say. Distributive leadership is when leaders within a school need to be given the autonomy to make key decisions in their areas of responsibility. Distributive leadership is where leaders are empowered to take things forward themselves and develop ideas rather than just being told what to do by a 'manager'. Distributive leadership is when management tasks are shared whilst distributed leadership is when there is a sharing of leadership in which people can make decisions and have influence. Distributive leadership empowers all colleagues, no matter their role within the establishment, some form of leadership opportunity, that they feel comfortable to take forward. Distributive leadership is asking for input from everyone, through learning, investigating and informing, to come to a collective decision. Distributive leadership is based more on the journey of the school towards school improvement and the learning of all those involved, such as teachers and parents as stakeholders. Distributive leadership involves shared, collective and extended leadership practice that builds the capacity for change and improvement. Distributive leadership is when staff take ownership of an area of school improvement (e.g. leadership group/committee) and decide on how to take it forward. Distributive leadership is giving staff at all levels the opportunity to lead within the school, for example pupil groups, sharing CPD and knowledge with colleagues. Distributive leadership - an opportunity/ autonomy to lead and implement change with others. Distributive leadership is for the empowerment and balance of engaged parties. Distributive empowers staff to take opportunities. Distributive leadership to be an opportunity for me to have a say and encouraged to take ownership of my work. 'Distributive' leadership is when practitioners at all levels are consulted, their views valued and opinions heard and all staff have a say in making changes and improvements across the school. |

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Distributed’ leadership is when managerial roles and responsibilities are handed out to practitioners but without their consultation/ views being taken into consideration. • Distributed leadership – delegation. • Distributed leadership- shared responsibilities with others. This leads to shared vision for the school. • Distributed learning is a shared form of learning. • Distributed = management team. • Distributed leadership is basically shared management. • This concept disperses decision making from one individual to a collective group. Distributed leadership is delegation and others completing responsibilities for SMT. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distributive leadership is essentially shared management amongst those with the relevant skills or expertise. Its purpose is to increase the leadership capability within people in a school or nursery so that they can work together to achieve the vision, values and goals. Decision making is by a collective group of people and not by an individual. Within education the head teacher is empowered to lead his team and deliver improvements in terms of the school improvement plan. Leadership is at all levels. She or he then delegates remits or roles and the individual has the autonomy to decide how this is best delivered. |
|--|--|

- Responses below suggest a lack of a clear understanding of the difference between Distributed and Distributive Leadership
- I don’t really understand the difference between the two. However, I am aware that this is a shared style of management where everyone contributes, is engaged in decision making and gives feedback.
- I’m afraid I can’t remember hearing either term before.
- No idea of either meaning.
- I am not clear of the difference between the two styles of leadership.
- Not 100% on the different jargon.
- Unsure.
- I do not fully understand the differences between these two leadership strategies.
- They are more or less the same.
- None.
- Unsure.
- I have never heard those terms used before.
- I have no concept of the difference between these terms other than perhaps that they are slightly different ways of sharing leadership responsibilities.
- My understanding is that the leadership styles are similar.

Appendix 3

Secondary Middle Leadership Inquiry

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Question | Is distributive leadership being effectively utilised to develop capacity and collegiality in the system which positively influences quality in the classroom and helps deliver excellent experiences for all? |
|-----------------|---|

Senior leaders from all seven secondary schools conducted a collaborative enquiry in relation to the research question. Focus groups were held with middle and senior leaders to explore the following aims of the Leadership Strategy:

- Ensure that existing and aspirant middle leaders are supported and challenged to develop and continue to build the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding required of senior leaders.
- Create a sustainable pool of highly skilled and motivated leaders who are equipped to take the next steps into middle and senior leadership.

Participants were invited to discuss the features of distributive leadership in relation to their own schools and experiences using the table below from, “Distributed Leadership Matters” Harris, 2014: Chpt.6, Pg.85.

| High Performance | Low Performance |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Relational Trust | Suspicion and Mistrust |
| Open Communication | Covert Communication |
| Transparency and Openness | Secrecy and Closed Attitudes |
| Distributed, Collaborative Leadership | Autocratic, Dictatorial Leadership |
| Collective Working | Individual Working |
| Independent Learning | Dependent Learning |
| Constant Reinvention | Conformity |
| Innovation | Repetition |
| New Ideas Generated | Existing Ideas Recycled |
| Future Oriented | Preoccupied With the Past |
| Collective Capacity Building | Complacency |

Discussions reflected the national challenges facing schools post-Covid whilst navigating the uncertainty surrounding forthcoming, large-scale, educational change in a fast-changing educational policy context. Senior leaders were mindful that a future-oriented approach would be required now, more than ever, to protect staff from instability whilst equipping them with the skills to embrace change. Both middle and senior leaders were mindful of the recent changes in leadership across the secondary school estate with five out of seven headteachers having been appointed in the past two years. Hargreaves and O’Connor recognise the potential challenges this could pose:

“It’s hard to collaborate effectively when personnel keep changing. When leaders keep changing, schools constantly lurch from one direction to another and either teachers leave as well, or they learn to wait until the tides of change wash in and out ... When there is a culture of high turnover, teachers behave as self-centred individuals who have to sink or swim by themselves.” (Hargreaves, A and O’Connor M, T, 2017: 97)

However, despite these changes, it is clear that there is evidence of an emerging culture of growth. School leaders are building trust through clear communication and transparency to create a shared vision and middle leaders are part of the change. There was a collective recognition that,

“...building and sustaining trust is a critical feature of highly effective school leaders and that without the ability to nurture trusting relationships the potential to improve organisational performance will be dramatically reduced.” (Harris, 2013: 551)

However, it was evident from focus group discussions that schools were at different stages of development in this area. Following a change of leadership, a number of schools have been reviewing their Vision, Values and Aims or Mission Statements to help clarify shared values and aspirations, build a collective understanding of context and shape future strategic leadership priorities. As a result, almost all schools noted a shift in culture towards a shared vision and a renewed enthusiasm for building staff leadership capacity through high quality CLPL programmes such as: Improving our Classrooms/ Departments, Osiris OTI Programme, Visible Learning, practitioner enquiry, partnership working and bespoke in-house professional learning opportunities.

Evidence from Local Authority Collaborative Improvement Visits (CIVs) would suggest that there has been an increased focus on distributive leadership across our schools since the launch of the Leadership Strategy in 2019. However, while staff could showcase what they were doing in their schools, there was limited evidence of staff being able to discuss in detail the features or impact of effective distributive leadership. Despite this, focus group discussions with Middle Leaders demonstrated a positive shift towards a more distributive model of leadership which was having an impact on their approach to leading their teams. Almost all secondary schools had introduced in-house leadership programmes for aspiring middle leaders and most had engaged with CLPL to support existing middle leaders such as; Education Scotland’s Collaborative Middle Leadership Programme and the Osiris Middle Leadership programme. This is leading to increased confidence in middle leaders to share practice beyond their own establishment and being more open to learn from others. It was clear that cultures have been established to try new things, innovate and improve. However, whilst almost all middle leaders agreed that CIVs are very positive experience which build their leadership capacity and professional knowledge and expertise, there is scope for a more coherent and structured approach to sharing practice via subject groups following CIVs.

It was evident that there is a collective understanding of the importance of collaboration and building leadership capacity across the school community which Bush argues,

“... is now accepted that leadership skills and capability extend well beyond the formal head, and that involving senior and middle leaders is likely to enhance the quality of decision making... Effective teams enhance leadership density, by spreading tasks, and have greater impact on colleagues and learners than a single individual.” (Bush, 2012:1)

There was a general view that school leadership teams trust middle leaders to carry out a given leadership role. Ideas are listened to and valued, and there is a shared expectation and commitment to improve the outcomes of children and young people. The majority of middle leaders feel trusted and empowered to lead their teams/remits. However, the next step would be to develop strategic and proactive middle leaders who are able to develop and channel “a dissatisfaction or restlessness with the present” (Davies, 2012, Chapter 9, p.6) into an increased ability to innovate and plan strategically for improvement – albeit within the school’s overarching vision for improvement.

Almost all senior leaders highlighted the need for the greater autonomy which is emerging in our schools to be accompanied by greater accountability and resilience. Built on foundations of trust and accountability, Atwal (2019) highlights the need for authentic responsibility, suggesting that Senior Leaders must give leaders the capacity to be innovative and make decisions linked to their area of responsibility, without constant monitoring. In addition, a robust approach to not only building leadership capacity but also resilience and accountability could encourage greater innovation and creativity, “Creativity, risk taking, and innovation thrive in a culture of intrinsic accountability.” Fullan, 2019: 15

There was a view amongst senior leaders that not all leadership opportunities for aspiring leaders prepared them for the accountability that comes with leadership. There is scope for leadership programmes within schools to explore this area more fully with aspiring leaders and to ensure that opportunities to lead come with opportunities to reflect and evaluate impact. There was also a suggestion that DHT remits could be better linked to Quality Indicators in order to create stronger conditions for strategic leadership and ensure accountability. This would enable greater sharing of practice amongst senior leaders and facilitate opportunities to collaborate across the seven secondary schools.

Middle leaders highlighted their professional growth with reference to the increased provision of opportunities to grow and develop professionally, learn continuously, and expand their own skills through the work life of the school. Participants shared that they are encouraged to lead their own professional learning journey and reflect on the professional standards to work collectively and innovate. Practitioner enquiry approaches are building agency and leading to collaborative professionalism. The PRD process is valued and a number of schools are making good use of a coaching approach to assist middle leaders in identifying their professional learning requirements. There was also an emerging theme of transparency. Middle leaders were more aware of their leadership potential. Individuals were able to share regular opportunities for both formal and informal career development discussions and it was evident that if middle leaders had an area of strength, they were encouraged to share their experience and put themselves forward for leadership activities.

Elmore argues that professional learning should be

‘collective good rather than a private or individual good, and its value should be judged by what it contributes to the individual’s capacity to improve and the quality of instruction in the school and school system’. (2002, p14).

Engagement with colleagues to reflect and share their findings is leading to change and promoting an active view of learning. Learning communities, within and between schools, are viewed as an effective way of bringing about and sustaining school improvements. Indeed, it is evident that middle leaders are having a positive effect and influence on school life. ERC’s Learning and Teaching Strategy which was launched three years ago, has also contributed to improvements in this area. A number of schools have engaged with outside partners to further strengthen and innovate their approaches to learning and teaching. In some schools, there is evidence of this focus on pedagogy leading to more consistent, creative and engaging approaches to learning and teaching. (possible link to SLHS and BHS case studies here???) As we move towards collaborative pedagogies, there are increased informal opportunities to learn and lead together to build capacity in the system. There has been an increase in the number of middle leaders visiting and collaborating with partner schools in the areas of learning and teaching, curriculum design and assessment and moderation. The excellent collaborative practice which emerged as a result of the Alternative Certification Model has been sustained and built upon across all secondary schools. As Fullan notes,

‘the power of collective capacity is that it enables ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things- for two reasons. One is that knowledge about effective practice becomes more widely available and accessible on a daily basis. The second reason is more powerful still - working together generates commitment’ (2010a p.72)

The conditions are now ripe for our schools to capitalise on this emerging practice by developing more formal opportunities to share and collaborate in these areas.

Middle leaders commented that there are more opportunities to take risks and focus on innovation to be future oriented and strategically driven. They are encouraged to look outwards to build capacity, and to be more flexible and fast-moving in the changing context. However, it should be noted that while middle leaders feel they have increased opportunities to take risks, there was evidence to suggest that this is emerging practice as relational trust continues to be established following period of change. Fullan (2019: 20) argues,

“Overcoming fear of risk taking is critical to challenging the status quo. To help leaders and teachers take risks, it is important to plan out strategies for change, take small steps first, and develop skills to effective risk taking.”

Whilst senior leaders espoused a commitment to considered risk-taking, there is still a degree of caution amongst many middle leaders. There is scope to develop middle leader capacity to engage more fully in strategic thinking, planning and processes to ensure the confidence to take calculated risks.

Participants suggested that building leadership capacity across the school and not just with a “select few” could help to create the conditions for considered risk-taking to flourish. Indeed Bennett et al. (2003a and 2003b) identified that the pool or “boundaries of leadership” should not be limited by formal role or position but defined by expertise and creativity.

<https://www.oecd.org/general/searchresults/?q=Improving-school-leadership>

Ultimately, we need to continue to build leadership capacity across our schools at all levels to (next steps)

- Prepare for future changes. How do our leadership approaches support this journey?
- Time for DHTs to collaborate and share good practice.
- Continue to develop relational trust.
- Develop resilience to accept accountability.
- Support middle leaders with the ‘how’
- Provide middle leaders with discretion over strategic direction setting and enhance their capacity to develop school plans with measurable outcomes
- Promote “data-wise” leadership. Provide support and training opportunities for middle leaders to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to monitor progress and use data effectively to improve practice.
- Develop approaches to modelling
- Create leaders for the future
- Focus on outcomes for young people
- Address staff mistrust and fatigue due to constant change.
- Develop an understanding that independent learning is positive, however we need to move to collective efficacy.

Overall, existing and aspirant middle leaders feel they are well supported and challenged to develop and continue to build the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding required of senior leaders. However, it is clear that there is scope to re-invigorate middle leadership with high quality opportunities to collaborate, share practice, take risks and innovate practice in relation to their leadership of curriculum and learning and teaching in order to continue to improve outcomes for learners and prepare for future challenges. There is also scope to build leadership capacity more widely across our schools and not just through existing promoted structures in order to create a sustainable pool of highly skilled and motivated leaders who are equipped to take the next steps into middle and senior leadership.

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