

## **THE ROLE OF INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION AS A STRATEGY FOR RAISING STANDARDS IN URBAN CONTEXTS: THE EXTENDED SCHOOLS POLICY**

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### **1. Introduction – The move towards extended schools**

Traditionally, schools have been largely single purpose institutions, devoted to educating children of a particular age and stage of learning. Depending on the educational culture of the particular country additional pastoral goals may be more or less developed and important, and in different contexts factors such as well-being, attitudes to learning and self-esteem have been deemed important outcomes of education (e.g. Van Landeghem et al, 2002). However, essentially schools have been occupied with the cognitive and to a lesser extent social development of youngsters up to age 18. Over the past decade, initiatives in countries such as the Netherlands, the Us and Australia that have emphasized schools as centers for their communities, both in the rhetoric of education reformers and in practical policy initiatives, while recently the English government has likewise moved in that direction. This is seen as especially beneficial where schools are serving disadvantaged areas (Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

Three key premises underlie this movement: the need to address psychological, health and sociological as well as educational issues if students from disadvantaged areas are to reach their full potential, the potential power of schools as organizations to reach out to their community, and the importance of stronger linkages with the community to improving parental involvement and, as a result of this, student performance (Hiatt-Michael, 2003). This movement has also received considerable support in some ‘futures scenarios’ (e.g. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001).

The vehicle through which this will happen is increasingly seen to be the creation of ‘extended schools’, or ‘full-service’ schools offering child care, social services, adult education, health services and other forms of provision to the community as well as education. Different models exist, but all share the fact that school facilities are used for delivering services in partnership with other agencies (Dryfoos, 1995). However, while the vehicle is the same, the underlying premises are based on essentially contrasting views of the role and esteem of schools in the community. The ‘outreach’ proponents assume that schools are well-embedded organizations, which will enhance attitudes of community members to the other services held within them. The ‘improving parental involvement’ view supposes that parents may have negative views or experiences of school, and that by getting them to interact with schools in a new context these problems may be overcome. This latter view has received some support from research evidence in school improvement, where schools in disadvantaged communities have been found to be quite successful in increasing parental involvement through adult education and service provision initiatives (Muijs et al, 2004, Madden & Hillman, 1993). Whether incorporating social services (as opposed to say, adult education classes) into schools is likely to have this effect is a moot point, however, as these services are not always themselves popular with recipients, and can be seen as alienating in their own right. Furthermore, the challenge is particularly great in disadvantaged areas as the home-school divide can be particularly great there (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). However, this movement has

received considerable support in some ‘futures scenarios’ (e.g. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001) and therefore more experiments in this area are likely.

The need for more joined up working between the different agencies working with children is another reason for the formation of extended schools. In England, the Victoria Climbié scandal highlighted the need for multiagency cooperation, and led to the government legislating for interagency work through the ‘Every Child Matters’ white paper. This was in fact not a freestanding or new policy, but rather the culmination of a move towards multiagency work seen as necessary to help achieve the government’s social inclusion agenda, as evidenced in policies such as Sure Start, Education Action Zones, and Connexions, as well as in work outside of education in the areas of domestic violence and sex work, for example (Boynton & Cusick, 2006; London, 2000).

The research evidence for this type of interagency work is mixed. In what is probably the largest study to date, Dyson et al (forthcoming) report that multiagency work has positive effects on the development of individual pupils, without necessarily changing the culture of the school or impacting more widely. These results echo those of the evaluation of the Victorian Full Service schools programme in Australia, which was found to have some benefits for students unlikely to stay on at school, while not showing significant wider benefits (James et al, 2001). In an earlier smaller scale study by Atkinson et al (2002), positive impacts were found in terms of delivering a wider range of services and leading staff involved to have a broader perspective on their work, though increased demands and pressures were also mentioned. Competing priorities and resourcing were mentioned as problems associated with multiagency work. Communication between agency staff was seen as a key challenge. Common aims, commitment and clear structures needed to be in place for the work to be successful. In particular, agencies and staff needed to want to be involved and be committed to multiagency work, rather than be coerced into it. In a review on the literature on supporting children in special circumstances, Statham (2004) found multiagency work that addressed the whole child rather than compartmentalizing services to be characteristic of the most promising approaches, as were links between adult and children’s services. Similar findings were reported by Dryfoos (1995) in an earlier US study. Warmington et al (2004) warn of a lack of fit between traditional structures and cultures and models of interagency work, and highlight the need for professional learning to take place before multiagency work can be effective.

One aspect of extended schools that has not been frequently studied is leadership. Specific research on leadership in extended schools is rare, though there is some evidence of the leadership challenges in extant literature, such as the need for careful planning and preparation for setting up the necessary collaborative arrangements (Dryfoos, 1995). Another challenge that arises where different agencies collaborate is that of power and influence. School heads will sometimes assume that the power they enjoyed within their own school will be extended to other agencies, which is understandably not necessarily the perception of workers in these agencies (Abrams & Gibbs, 2000). Interaction and communication skills are needed to interact with staff from other agencies (Dryfoos, 1995).

While, therefore, there is an emerging though still limited evidence base concerning multiagency work involving education, there does not appear to be a great deal of work on the impact of this work on schools, or on the leadership implications for school managers. In this study we will attempt to make a start at exploring these issues.

## **2. Methodology**

This study aims to explore interagency work carried out in extended schools from a leadership perspective. In particular, the perceived advantages, disadvantages and barriers to multiagency work in schools will be explored, as will the leadership implications, relations to school leadership and implications for leadership development.

Qualitative case studies were carried out in eight schools in the North East of England, that had been designated Leading Edge schools in this area, and were known for their pioneering of multiagency work. All served socio-economically disadvantaged areas (known in the UK as ‘challenging circumstances’). Most were in small to mid size post-industrial towns and cities, with one being in a former mining village.

One school (A) was a 11-18 community school serving a former mining community. The school has been part of Excellence in Cities and LIG, and has recently started to engage in multiagency work as an extended school.

School B is a large 11-18 inner city ‘City Technology College’, serving the inner city a mid-size post industrial city with high levels of social disadvantage. This school has been a part of LIG, Excellence in Cities and an EAZ.

School, C is an 11-18 Catholic comprehensive school. The school is part of LIG and Excellence in Cities, and is a Beacon school, and serves a socially disadvantaged area of a large city. As well as engaging in multiagency work, the school is also part of a Federation of schools.

School D is a high school in a semi-rural commuter town for a large city, and serves a more advantaged community than the other schools in this project. The school is seen as a leading school in the region in terms of professional development and innovative approaches to learning.

School E is an 11-18 comprehensive school serving a small town. Its intake is below the national average in terms of attainment, and above it in terms of special needs and free school meal eligibility. It is strongly engaged in community learning as well as working closely with a regional university.

School F is a special school for pupils with severe and moderate learning difficulties and pupils with emotional and behavioural problems, including a large number of pupils on the autistic spectrum. As such the school has extensive experience of working with paramedics, behaviour support teams and social services. It is also a Technology College. It serves an urban district.

School G is a primary school serving a disadvantaged inner-city borough, and is also an early years center serving pre-school children. It is largely through the early years center that multiagency (education, child care, social services and health care) work occurs.

School H is a large primary school serving a disadvantaged community in a small post-industrial town. The school was formed from an amalgamation of three older schools due to falling roles and is based in a new building. These facilities are used for work with the

community after school. The school works closely with social services, as well as a multiagency team set up in the area.

In each school interviews were undertaken with the head, a member of the Senior Management Team, a Middle Manager, a Classroom Teacher and a member of staff of a non-education agency with which the school was working (referred to for ease as ‘multiagency workers’ in the rest of this paper).

Multiagency workers had a variety of roles, including behaviour support, speech and language therapy and social services, and typically worked across more than one schools.

Interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview schedules, and were analyzed using the Nvivo software programme for qualitative data analysis.

### **3. Results**

#### General views on multiagency work

According to the heads of schools A, F and E, interagency work helps schools avoid isolation and is useful for benchmarking. It extends expertise in the school by growing the knowledge base staff have access to: ‘We now have much more expertise, much more experience (middle manager, school F)’. Some respondents felt that interagency work led to the school being more open to the outside, with a greater opportunity for the community to go into the school.

The head of school B felt that interagency involvement made the school ‘a nicer place’, and allowed staff to broaden their experience, while the head of school F felt it made his school more ‘vibrant’.

The ability to share practice was seen as a major advantage by several interviewees, especially in school C, though this was mentioned by interviewees in schools A, G and B as well. As the head of school G said ‘the key is, sitting in a multiagency group, someone who has the expertise can tell you, this is just not right’. A better understanding of good practice was said to result for teachers in school C. A respondent from school D described this as a ‘mutual learning process’, which, however, can only occur where there is trust on both sides. The head of school F felt that this process allowed him to influence decision making in partner organisations in a way that would not otherwise have been possible. According to the head of school F parents feel they get a better and more joined up service.

Financial gains were clearly important, mentioned as a main advantage in both schools A, B, and E.

Staff directly involved in interagency work tend to be the most positive about it. In the most positive cases, the collaboration with external agencies was described as ‘enriching and reassuring’ (head of department, school B). According to a teacher working closely with multiagency staff in school F ‘it stops little empires being built, and people are less able to play one of against the other’. ‘It’ benefited the children, the work with other agencies I’ve done. I would like to work with more outside agencies’ (classroom assistant, school H).

Some differences appear in responses depending on the type of agency the respondent works with. Government agencies, such as social services, tend to be seen as more bureaucratic and difficult to work with than private companies, such as football clubs. One interviewee specifically contrasted his experiences of working with private organisations to his experiences working with government agencies: ‘the work with Middlesbrough FC was great, but when we were on the Active Middlesborough working party with the council there was just talk, but nothing happened’. On the other hand, the head of school H saw the advantage of multiagency work lying in the ability to get fast targeted support without the bureaucracy that existed before.

Reasons to take on interagency work are varied, and can be distinguished as being more or less instrumental, ranging from ‘the money was there ‘ (head school A) and ‘enriches the school and extends networks’ (head school B), who sees this as a vital part of network development in preparation for a future without LEA’s where schools work together in Federations, to statements regarding the need to help all children.

While interviewees from schools A, E and B rarely mentioned students, one respondent in school D specifically mentioned the ability it fostered to put students and their needs at the heart of the school, while the head of school C likewise mentioned better provision for pupils with significant problems as a key advantage of interagency work. In particular, he feels they are able to get speedier support thanks to collaboration between schools and social services. The head of school C feels strongly that this allows the whole child to be addressed and that these services are most effective when locally controlled and school based, provided they are integrated into the daily work of the school, and are ‘readily available and accessible’, a view shared in school F. According to the head of school G ‘children don’t just need education, they need caring for overall, so the more people you have feeding in, the more holistic it becomes and the more you can address the whole child, and the more both children and parents benefit’. The fact that pupils may feel safer and more supported in school was also seen as a major benefit for some pupils. The head of school F is particularly keen on extending interagency work, and sees ECM as a great opportunity to do this.

For multiagency staff interagency work is seen as vital: ‘I don’t see how I could do it without an interagency approach’ (multiagency, school A). Similarly, in school G one interviewee mentioned the need for collaboration in view of the number of professionals that can be involved with one family.

### Barriers and facilitators

According to the head of school A interagency work takes a lot of effort with little positive feedback if other organisations don’t put the same effort in. He commented that with interagency work ‘we don’t always get out of it what we put in’. The time consuming nature of this type of collaboration was also stressed by a respondent in school D ‘it can be really slow and time hungry, and cuts across teaching time’. Time needs to be made in order to make the collaboration effective ‘bolt on at the end of the day just doesn’t work, everyone is tired and just wants to go home’ (head, school D)

There is also a perceived danger of effort leading to the school’s work and capacities to be spread too thinly, and in that way actually being detrimental to the school, which was mentioned by heads in both schools A and B (see also Creemers comments). ‘Time demands

on teachers can be problematic' (head, school C). Finding the right 'balance between the needs of the organisation, your time and the needs of their organisation' was seen as key by a head of department of school E. Lack of time is a common complaint, and one interviewee claimed that 'it can be overwhelming due to the effort it takes' (head, school E), while the head of school G complained that time was an additional pressure for her due to staff inability to take initiative. One interviewee from school F, however, specifically said that 'while time can be an issue, the rewards are so great that it really isn't a problem. I don't see it as a cost' (head, school F). Slow decision making and compromise were seen as problems by interagency staff as well.

An issue that many respondents commented on was the lack of cultural fit between the organisations involved, leading, according to the head of school A, to a 'lack of mutual respect and commitment', a 'clash of priorities' and a clash of cultures leading to problems in properly connecting the different agencies. One interviewee from the schools end described the problem as encountering a 'social worker type approach', which she described as being less concerned with standards and overly concerned with risk (head of department, school B). A lack of pace and expectations among the social service staff was a common complaint from school staff. One head of department in school A described agency staff as having 'lower standards of professionalism than ourselves', leading to a conflict of interest as the agency staff were seen as less likely to challenge pupils. According to the deputy head of school E 'they (in this case social workers and the police) don't understand the working processes and realities of schools'. Trust is seen as key here, but is impeded by the cultural differences and different ethos of the organisations involved. The long term view of many agencies contrasting with the shorter term performance driven culture of the schools. The extent to which this is mentioned as a problem does differ between schools, appearing least frequently in school C, where respect between partners is by contrast mentioned as a strength of the collaboration: 'it works here, because we really value and respect each other'. The head of school C feels that 'people work together in ways that are compatible with school culture'. This has taken a specific effort to bridge cultural gaps and to listen to the concerns of all involved. Trying to get coherence between the different organisations was seen as a key leadership task in interagency work by the head of school E. In school G interviewees complained that while when people working on the ground were very enthusiastic when they came together, when they went back to their organisation there could be suspicion around the possibility of organisations taking each others' resources. Ego clashes are mentioned as a specific problem in school G, where the question of who takes the credit arises, according to the head. The head of school H mentions some resentment from school staff who see multiagency work as easy: 'they just come into school from time to time, that is sometimes the impression. They just work with two children, why aren't they making more impact'.

Multiagency staff likewise see cultural differences as a barrier: 'we do have very different perspectives sometimes' (multiagency staff, school F), and mention the National Curriculum and timetabling as specific constraints to successful interagency working. 'It's sometimes hard to fit in work with an individual child, because of the curriculum, in the sixth form, where they don't have the national curriculum, I think that makes it easier' (multiagency, school F). They don't always feel fully included in the work of the school, one interviewee describing herself as 'although I'm based at the school, I think I'm seen more as a familiar visitor' (multiagency, school B). This is seen as problematic in terms of their relationship with the school: 'I think because you are working for another agency, this can be a problem for heads, because they feel they don't have full control over you'. One interviewee in school F contrasted this school favourably to others she worked with in this respect.

Shared goals and targets appear to be key if interagency work is to be successful. Targets, goals and their evaluation need to be shared. This factor was mentioned by all interviewees. Both sides need to see benefits ‘it needs to be a win/win situation’ (head of department, school E)

In order for interagency work to be successful it needs to be high on the school’s list of priorities. Staff at all levels of the organisation need to be involved in the networks and activities. Communication is key: ‘Name to name communication is essential for it to work’ (head of year from school D) ‘You’ve got to get to know people’s backgrounds to get to work together’ (teacher, school G). However, communication needs to be based on a real understanding : ‘if you’re not careful, the different terminology used by the different agencies will harm communication, the same thing can mean different things, and that is something that needs to be gotten out of the way at the start’. The importance of communication is also stressed by all interviewed multiagency staff. Building relationships is an important part of this ‘It’s about both, having the formal elements of communication, but also the relationships’ (multiagency, school E). Communication is seen as sometimes difficult in school H: ‘teachers will wonder, why haven’t I got information on that kid back yet’. However, while open communication is stressed, confidentiality of information is seen as an issue by some interviewees. ‘information has to be on a need to know basis, you have to think, sometimes, they really don’t need to know that’ (middle manager, school G).

School structures are generally not seen as problematic for interagency work by either school or agency staff (other than, for the latter, the timetable), and there is a clear sense that culture rather than structures determine the success of interagency work. However, where good practice was described shared collaborative planning and easy access to school staff were mentioned, as was the case in school G, where according to one middle manager relations between education and daycare had improved markedly since a joint assessment center was set up.

According to the head of school A, interagency work is mainly successful if you work specifically with those who want to work with you, and quickly cut off relationships with those who don’t. This was also mentioned by the head of school F: ‘occasionally, you’ll get someone who really doesn’t want to be here, ‘cos while in terms of helping children it’s great, as far as your career in the health service goes it’s not exactly the best thing since sliced bread’. This problem can be exacerbated if meetings are held where people are just invited without having any knowledge or interest in the area: ‘I have sometimes been asked just to fill a seat’ (head, school G).

In making multiagency work effective, schools are helped by their extensive experience of collaborating with other schools. School A, for example, works with other schools through its leading edge partnerships, work with the Specialist Schools Trust. This is said to be helpful in developing interagency work, though respondents commented (head school A), that it was easier to work with other schools as the benefits were seen to be equal, as was the status of the organisations involved. In school C likewise extensive collaboration with other schools in the area was seen as a useful opportunity to develop these skills. School F, as a special school, has extensive experience of working with other agencies such as health and social services, and is therefore more attuned to the different ways of working in these agencies.

Respondents in school C mention the need for flexibility and regular contact in order to help improve trust and relationships, seen as key to success. ‘Sensitive approaches, in which sharing occurs firstly in small groups were people have learnt to trust one another’ was mentioned by a head of department in that school.

More funding to release staff is seen as the major aspect that would help improve interagency work in school A, and funding and staff release are generally seen to be desirable in all schools studied.

### What does success look like

Interviewees were asked how they would define success, as multiagency work cannot very easily be judged by the traditional school outcome measures in terms of academic achievement.

The lack of hard targets for much interagency work was seen as problematic by some, though some solutions, such as surveys of staff on the effectiveness of the work were proposed, and other interviewees, such as the head of school C, argued that in the end interagency work should also lead to higher standards of achievement. The head of school G sees ‘seeing real change’ as the measure of success. ‘Targets mean nothing to me’. Teachers and middle managers interviewed in the school feel that milestones monitored in meetings are the key measure. ‘Being asked for advice’ was mentioned by one interviewee (middle manager school G). In school H, efforts are evaluated regularly, and the success of interventions is discussed. Less exclusions was seen as one measure of success, as was changes in pupil attitudes.

Others look at interagency working on a more individual level: ‘if it makes a difference to one pupil it’s worthwhile’ (Head of department, school D). In school F too, the focus was very much on the personal and social development of pupils: success is seen as: ‘Young people’s confidence, their ability to manage themselves and their ability to see themselves as valued and valuable (head, school F)’. The views of parents were also mentioned in this school.

Relationships were seen as a key indicator of success by a number of interviewees across schools. Having extensive relationships is seen as an indicator of success in itself by one interviewee, while one measure of success in interagency work is seen simply as ‘people still want to keep working with you’ and ‘they are still there at the end of the year’ (head school A). The quality of relations established is also seen as important.

### Leadership

It is often argued that collaboration between schools is correlated to more distributed forms of leadership, both enabling these and being enabled by them due to the opportunities for leadership available in these collaborations. Therefore, the question can be asked as to whether this is the case for schools collaborating with other agencies.

The head of school A described his leadership as hands-on, and claimed he could be both autocratic and distributed depending on circumstances, and on whether he trusted the individual involved. Overall, though the head indicated that distributed leadership was not the



norm in this school ‘power without responsibility won’t work’ The head feels that only a minority of staff want to take part in leadership, and that heads of department don’t necessarily know how to share leadership, a view confirmed by one head of department who claimed ‘I don’t know how to delegate or share leadership enough’. An extended leadership team was employed in this school consisting of three deputies and three assistant heads, all from the education side of the school. There is consultation with staff and pupils, though there does not appear to be a great deal of involvement of non-school staff. High standards and high expectations were seen as characteristic of the school by several interviewees.

The head of school B described his leadership as maverick and unconventional. In contrast to school A, the executive leadership team was small, consisting of the head, a deputy and an assistant head. Under this team there was an extended SMT. Distributed leadership is not common in this school, where leadership is largely done by the SMT and the heads of year. The head believes that staff don’t generally want to participate in leadership. ‘They were offered the opportunity, but most bypassed this.’ According to him, there are ‘not enough leaders around’. This view is shared by a member of the SMT, who likewise mentioned the quality of staff as a problem in distributing leadership. Therefore, instead of distributing leadership, an extended SMT was created with 15 members. This situation is improving, however, thanks to the ‘improved quality of intake from PGCE’, which has meant teachers taking on responsibility at a younger age, and specific staff are picked out for leadership responsibilities with associated pay increases. Some effort to distribute leadership is made in specific departments

School C likewise has a large leadership team, consisting of the head, a deputy head and 7 assistant heads. The headteacher is described by staff as ‘visionary’, while the deputy head exercises the day-to-day management of the school. In this school distributed leadership is encouraged, at least among middle management. As one middle manager commented: ‘We are fully involved’. Staff are encouraged to take the lead on small projects, and are often singled out for this, in preparation for taking on larger leadership roles. This distribution of leadership was deliberately increased over time by the head between 99 and 05. The head had initially lead through strong central control, but had progressively distributed leadership as he felt capacity in the school increase.

School D is described by one middle manager as ‘very much a top down bottom up school’, that mixes strong central vision with opportunities for all staff to get involved. A number of teams exist through which the leadership of the school is formalized, including an operational team, a curriculum team, a head of departments team, a heads of year team, and a research and development team alongside the senior management team. These structures are seen as enabling the distribution of leadership within the school. Staff receive training and inset to develop their leadership capacities, though not all are involved. As one respondent said ‘there is no point to watering the stones, we need to play to the strengths of individuals’. The school also has a strong student council.

Leadership in school E is described by respondents across the organisation as transparent and open. Leadership is described as distributive by some interviewees, though others claim decisions are taken by the SMT alone. Strengths and career progression are assessed for staff individually and support is given to those who wish to move forward. The head describes his own leadership as focused on distributive leading and capacity building as well as on achievement. Use of focus groups of staff is a common way of working in the school, and seen as an ‘easy way of getting information in decision making in a large organisation’. The

extent to which this leads to genuine involvement is disputed in the sense that different interviewees appear to have differing views on this. The Senior Management Team consists of the head, 2 deputies and 5 assistant heads.

The head of school F claims to use a wide range of leadership styles, and practices consultation widely, while also using wide ranging executive powers. He describes the school as a ‘can do’ school where ideas and input are welcomed. The leadership team consists of the head, a deputy and an assistant head. The staff council has decision making powers. The head can veto its decisions, but has not done so yet, though some teachers do feel that communication from them to the head could be clearer. A number of teams, such as a school change team, work on specific issues and allow staff to take on leadership roles. These have wide ranging autonomy, with the leadership team focusing on strategic direction. Staff are encouraged to take initiatives, and can bring forward ideas at staff meetings and through staff notice boards. ‘There’s pretty much open-access to the Deputy and the Head’ (teacher, school F). Values and philosophy are central to the head’s vision for the school. This extends to multiagency staff ‘I feel fully included in all decision making that affects us’ (multiagency staff, school F). This distributed form of leadership is not followed by all heads of department, however.

In school G, the head feels that her leadership style has changed a lot over time. The head describes herself as a ‘people person’. She describes herself as proactive, and not keen on delegation. She feels that staff in the school were not very good at taking initiative. ‘I kind of assumed that when we discussed something, and a decision was taken, they would go out and implement it, but in practice, for some people, that was wrong’. Over time she has distributed leadership more, as an understanding has developed between the head and staff. While the head talks about distributed leadership, this largely seems limited to relatively minor issues such as smoking areas and seating arrangements. However, staff can make suggestions. Staff describe her as having a strong vision ‘she has the vision, and we are there to make that happen’ (middle manager, school G). According to the head some staff want to get involved in leadership, but others ‘come to work, and just do the job and complete their hours. They do a good job, so we need people like that as well.’ She makes a strong distinction between leadership and management, with a clear emphasis on leadership being positive and management negative. She feels ‘leadership is part of the person, and can’t really be taught’. Multiagency staff are not involved in leadership.

The head of school H describes her leadership as hands-on and approachable. Moving from a smaller to a larger school has meant she has had to delegate tasks more, however. She is strongly committed to professional development, of teaching and non-teaching staff. The school has a large number of teaching assistants. As well as the head, the management team consists of the deputy head, Key Stage 1 and 2 managers, and an Early Years manager. She is thinking about creating teams, but currently decisions are made by the management team alone, though other staff are consulted. They are involved in decision making on an ad hoc basis if the problem to be solved fits their speciality. She has found distributing leadership hard, and has had to realize ‘that people have different qualities. I need to realize that I can’t think ‘it will be perfect, and everybody will be perfect’’. Staff describe her as supportive: ‘she’ll help you with anything she can’ (classroom assistant, school H).

Management of interagency work is largely done by deputy heads in school A, though leading edge and specialist teachers are also involved. Clarity about expectations is key, as is creating commitment among staff and getting interagency work into all aspects off school work, but

this hasn't worked for all staff in school A. 'Talking it up' is how one SMT member at school A described this. The SMT is also seen as crucial in school B, with elements such as expertise and providing a line of support for other staff being key aspects of their role in this regard. Their support is vital if the difficulties of interagency working are to be overcome. The senior leadership team has a less direct role in schools D and F, where it is seen to set out the strategic direction, but not necessarily be that involved with the day-to-day work. The speech therapist working with school F felt that strong leadership and a strong commitment from leadership to interagency working were vital, and distinguished school F from certain other schools she worked with. 'I've worked with schools where leadership was weaker, and that is harder going. Also the same is true in schools where leadership is strong, but there is not really a commitment to interagency work.'

Working with other agencies within an extended school context is seen to require some specific additional skills, such as the ability to negotiate, collaborate and engage with different ways of working. An open-mindedness and ability to take on board different perspectives therefore seem key, along with the interpersonal skills necessary for this. 'Leaders need to be less arrogant, more open to the ideas and ways of others' (head, school F). 'You've got to realize that agencies work in different ways. I had a tendency to think in the beginning: I could sort you out, make you work more efficiently, but over time I've come to realise, yes, that's fine too' (head, school H). Patience was seen as a key skill by the heads of schools B and C, again pointing to some tension in the work between agencies. Emotional intelligence, awareness of each others' strengths and weaknesses, and flexibility were mentioned additionally by two interviewees from school C, while the head of this school stressed tact, humility and diplomacy. The head of school G feels that a key problem in interagency work is that of leadership style. She feels her style may not be to everybody's liking, and that in particular the fact that she bases her leadership on values while others' base theirs on targets is an issue. 'I think those styles get in the way'.

The head of school H sees time management as the key issue 'you end up spending more and more time, when you do this, and the question is how to cope with that'. Making sure that interagency work is seen as relevant is another key management challenge, according to a middle manager at school H. 'It's getting everybody to see its right, really, that could be a problem'.

Distributed leadership is seen as an essential concomitant of interagency work by the head of school F. 'You need to let go, let people do things, but some heads may feel that is threatening, but it's the only way to make it work, because you really can't control everything.'

Interagency work and collaboration need to be part of the vision of the leadership, according to the head of school C, which needs to be geared to 'the common good, rather than just what's good for our school'.

### Leadership development

In all schools SMT members and most middle managers have taken part in some form of leadership development, such as NPQH or Leading from the Middle, as well as other courses developed by the local Leadership centres. Some agency staff had also had some leadership development, for example through Health Service programmes. This was not universal, however. None had received specific training for multiagency work.

Most respondents, while feeling that multiagency work requires a specific skill set, did not feel that more formal leadership training was the answer to upskilling them in this area. One exception was the head of school B, who felt that some specialist courses mixed with a portfolio approach and hands-on mentoring would be helpful. The deputy head of school C felt that NPQH had been useful, in that some of the learning she had experienced there had been transferred to interagency work. Similarly, the head of school E felt that NPQH had helped him to be less insular and therefore better prepared for multiagency work. Most respondents however did not feel that existing training prepared them well for multiagency work. In school G, the introduction of a required management certificate was seen by the head as actually damaging leadership in the school, by focusing mainly on management and ‘telling people they were doing everything wrong’.

Hands-on mentoring and coaching arrangements were seen as most likely to be useful, and this was reflected in views on leadership development respondents had already participated in. NPQH for example, was rated differentially by respondents, some commenting that it was insufficiently practical with regards to skills such as law and finance needed in school management. Use of role models and shadowing was frequently mentioned. The head of school C sees his own school as able to model this collaborative approach to a certain extent, and wishes to actively do so.

The head of school C feels strongly that leadership development needs a stronger focus on philosophy, values and moral purpose, as well as needing to look at systems that can foster collaboration better. He sees case studies as potentially most useful to this approach. Some theoretical base is seen as important by many interviewees.

Joint training of staff from the school and different agencies is seen as the way forward by the head of school F, who feels this would avoid people being stuck in their own perspectives.

#### **4. Discussion**

Multiagency work has recently been promoted as key to helping schools address the multiple needs of their pupils, especially in disadvantaged contexts, and there is some evidence from this study that this approach may be fruitful. As was found by Dyson et al (forthcoming), there is evidence that individual pupils can be helped by multiagency work, but also that some impact on the school as an organisation may occur. A broader perspective, widened expertise, and mutual learning were all mentioned in this regard.

However, it is also clear that multiagency work is complex and challenging, and in many cases has stretched the management capability of schools. A culture clash between agencies and schools is very much in evidence, with the performance-based culture schools in England are working with not sitting comfortably with what is perceived a both a more bureaucratic and longer term approach by agency staff. A clear conflict is in evidence between the focus on academic achievement of schools and the focus on affective and social outcomes of agency staff, which evidences itself in complaint about lower standards from some school staff. Clear shared aims and strong and personal communication are essential if the relationship is to be effective, but more attention to what would be successful outcomes is also necessary. The confusion regarding what a successful outcome of multiagency might be that was evident among interviewees may lead to schools not seeing the value of the work, and falling back on

the default position of attention to academic achievement at the expense of other outcomes, thus exacerbating the cultural differences found here. This also requires sensitive leadership at the school level, that is prepared to listen and learn, and values different perspectives brought to the table by different actors. Shadowing successful practice and mentoring arrangements are seen as most likely to help develop the additional skills needed to be successful in multiagency work.

An interesting finding from this study concerns the differences between schools. While all were selected on the basis of their strong engagement in multiagency work, it was clear that they differed substantially with regards to approaches, leadership and the extent to which they saw multiagency work as a boon or a burden to the school. These differences were not related to school phase or size, or indeed to the type of pupils served, but seemed to be linked to two key leadership factors: focus and distribution.

Focus refers to the perceived purposes of multiagency work. As mentioned above these differed strongly, and varied from very instrumental goals focused on material benefits to the school, to goals based around moral purpose with regards to helping the whole child. Distribution refers to the extent to which leadership in the school was distributed or largely the preserve of the Senior Management Team. It would appear from this, admittedly limited, sample, that where both strong moral purpose around multiagency work and distributed leadership occurred, perceptions of multiagency work were more positive. The former is not surprising, in that, in view of the heavy demands of managing multiagency schools, the additional motivation provided by moral purpose around the activity would be essential to putting in place the additional effort involved in such facts as communicative mechanisms, understanding different ways of working and dealing with the bureaucratic requirements involved. The second factor, distributed leadership, may be important for similar reasons. It is probably not possible for Senior Managers to take on the many additional tasks that may result from multiagency work without distributing leadership. Getting agency and school staff to take on leadership in their own collaborations may lead to greater understanding across the school, and practically help individual pupils. Furthermore, the finding that staff most closely involved with multiagency work are most enthused by it suggests that by involving them in leadership it is more likely that their enthusiasm is translated to other school staff, and indeed to the Senior Management Team.

## References

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