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# Leadership for closing the gap and reducing variation in outcomes: developing a framework for action

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Resource

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# Introduction

## Mind the gap

Behind the phrases ‘closing the gap’ and ‘reducing in-school variation’ are two of the most persistent and unyielding challenges the public education service has faced. Those two challenges are explained in detail in other parts of this module. The following pages contain a summary of the two concepts in order to introduce the framework that effective leaders use to tackle them.

## Closing the gap

Closing the gap is about identifying those groups of students who are least successful in a school or network of schools, reflecting on the causes and taking action to raise the students’ outcomes closer to the averages in that context and therefore closer to or, in high-attaining contexts, even further beyond, national averages.

For some time, the average attainment and wellbeing of most groups of children have been improving year on year. There is, however, a clear gap between that majority and a significant minority now being left some way adrift of national averages. To close that gap and to avoid that minority being trapped from an early age in a spiral of continuing disappointment, low aspiration and underachievement are profound challenges. Some groups of children tend to be more vulnerable to low attainment than others: boys a bit more than girls; poor children more than the better off; some ethnic minorities deeply and some hardly at all; looked-after children very much more than most. For many commentators and practitioners who believe that the gaps undermine the rights of young people and the needs of a coherent society, closing the gaps is both a moral and a pragmatic matter.

## Reducing in-school variation

Reducing in-school variation is about each school’s contribution to ‘closing the gaps’ by analysing the patterns of attainment across a school community, identifying student groups, classes or curricular areas where performance is below comparable norms **in the same school** and then taking action to raise their performance to acceptable levels.

National and international evidence shows that if, in each school in England, the least effective teachers and departments were as effective as the best in that school – not the best in the region or nation, just the best in that school – then outcomes for students overall would be transformed. School leaders need to deal with the very wide variation in outcomes that occur not only between groups of young people in their schools but between individual teachers and departments.

At an operational level, closing the gap and reducing in-school variation are usually overlapping and often intertwined activities. Many of the same children and staff will be associated with both although that is not always the case and leaders need to be alert to local idiosyncrasies. In a school or locality, action to close national gaps or reduce local variation can use the same change processes and will have the same objectives: improving attainment and wellbeing. Typically these will include:

- identifying an area that will be the priority for improvement
- analysing and understanding the issues
- deciding on a course of action
- developing the capacity of the people to do what is needed

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Importantly, those four bullet points work equally well for students and staff, individually or collectively. They are even more effective when applied to both groups. When the school is permeated by a culture of learning and development for both adults and children and when the next step in everyone's personal learning is a communal priority, whatever their age or status, then outcomes for all are likely to improve.

The focus on these gaps and variations raises three questions which are at the core of public, political and professional debate about the education service in England.

- What are the outcomes for children and young people for which schools in particular can be directly accountable or, at the very least, to which they should contribute?  
*This question, in broad terms, drives the systemic work around attainment and wider outcomes.*
- What can be done to ensure that improvements in national averages for children and young people are not achieved by raising outcomes for the middle and upper bands while leaving behind individuals and groups at the lower end?  
*This question, in broad terms, drives the systemic work around closing the gap.*
- What features of leadership and management help to improve the outcomes for all pupils and students while, in particular, closing the gap between the higher and lower attaining and achieving groups?  
*This question, in broad terms, drives the systemic work around accountability and leadership development.*

There are two quite different but deeply related kinds of answer to the three recurring questions.

- One set of answers is drawn from the wide range of views about the nature and purpose of education. These answers are the defining moral principles each of us brings to the public education enterprise.
- The other set of answers has a more technical, managerial dimension relating to the application of leadership in schools – what the effective features are and what works. These answers are at the core of school leadership as a profession.

A great deal has been said and written about the three questions and the possible answers. What the system has not provided until now is a clear guide to help school leaders to process the information and argument into a set of decisions and actions. The closing the gap framework for action aims to meet that need.

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# Lessons from effective leaders

School leaders who, in the jargon, are most effective at raising the bar and closing the gap draw on three sources of information:

- knowledge about performance gaps within and between schools
- knowledge in particular about the performance gaps across their school, the scale of the gaps and, so far as they can be understood, their causes and consequences
- knowledge about effective school leadership and school improvement

Successful leaders apply professional judgement to those three sources of information then use their own conclusions to develop their local approach. They are making continuous, contextually informed decisions which ensure that what their school provides is dovetailed with the needs of the young people, families and services in the local community.

At the core of the more successful approaches is an intense focus on the quality of teaching and learning designed to ensure that the gap between outcomes for different groups of students and different teachers within a school and the gap between the best in the school and the best nationally are tiny or non-existent.

That said, effective approaches are not simply focused on what happens inside a school and its classrooms. They are outward looking and associate the school with other contributors to children's learning: families, communities and other services. Their purpose is to make the sum contribute more than the parts ever could.

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## The framework: three themes, nine activities

The particular contextualised activities of effective school leaders vary from place to place but appear to be underpinned by a recurring framework (Table 1). The framework is built around three roles adopted by the leaders: navigator, manager and partner. These three might be described metaphorically as a triple-helix DNA for leadership. Like strands of DNA they have to be taken apart to be examined, explained and exploited. Like DNA they are not options for one another and cannot thrive independently. They only work when employed together in complex and varying combinations. Each of the three strands or roles is, in turn, linked with three kinds of activity, therefore nine activities in all. A bit like the nucleotides that bond across strands of DNA, the mixture of these nine leadership activities allows the framework to be contextual and dynamic rather than determined and hierarchical. The framework is not a sequence to be worked through in a linear progression; it is an aid to understanding how apparently unique responses can be created within a reliable architecture.

**Table 1: Closing the gaps: a framework for action**

	Role	Function	Activity
Leadership	Navigation	Securing the vision: setting a direction and nurturing development	<b>Awareness:</b> recognising and prioritising issues the organisation will need to address
			<b>Acceptance:</b> understanding that current practice may be a barrier while believing that improvement is possible
			<b>Advocacy:</b> creating a living vision and participating in focused workforce development to introduce sustainable change
	Management	Organising: problem-solving, creating order and providing consistency	<b>Analysis:</b> using data and other information to create a high-definition picture of how issues manifest themselves locally
			<b>Action:</b> emphasising priorities, and ensuring that change is explicit, funded and managed
			<b>Application:</b> relentless focus, in particular ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning – the basic compact between a school and its community – is first class
	Partnership	Modelling partnership: treating partners with equal esteem and deep respect	<b>Association:</b> being socially aware: nurturing the school as a community in its own right, as a member of its neighbourhood community and as a unit in a wider professional community
			<b>Alignment:</b> improving the alignment of the students’ home and school experiences without prejudice to what changes and where
			<b>Area focus:</b> engaging with the wider community in a partnership role because for young people there is no one size that fits all

The following pages summarise the main features of the framework for action. A more detailed exploration is available in the source publication (Mongon & Chapman, 2011).

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# The framework for action

The framework for action (the framework) is an easy-to-follow summary of the key activities pursued by leaders who improve outcomes for underachieving groups or reduce variation in attainment across a school or locality. It is based in part on the authors' own work in this field and in part on the wider lexicon of school improvement and effectiveness research. The approaches described in the framework are already familiar components in the conversation, development and training of many leaders.

Research has for some time reported a fairly well-defined repertoire of common themes in effective school leadership. Pam Sammons's review is a good source for anyone interested in a general oversight of that literature (2007) as is the New Zealand government's review of international practice (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). *Leading School Turnaround* (Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010) describes what the title says – the work of leaders successfully changing the trajectory of a school's performance. The following pages explore the particular ways in which those tactics for success are used to close gaps and to reduce variation in standards and outcomes.

The three-part framework of navigation, management and partnership is a device for summarising and exploring the behaviour of effective leaders. It is a lead into the insights or tactics they employ. It is not a tick-list of approaches or tactics. The framework is not a simple progression from analysing a situation then through to setting the direction and finally to delivery and implementation: very few school turnarounds are simply that linear and chronological. The work of effective leaders is vibrant, dynamic and reciprocal: once dissected it cannot easily be reassembled. If another metaphor is useful, the successful leader's repertoire is less a framework and more a cake mix, confirming Professor Tim Brighouse's view that running a school is a 'messy business' (Brighouse & Woods, 2008:26).

The three strands – navigation, management and partnership – are sufficiently distinct elements of the leadership role to allow comparison and contrast between the insights and tactics associated with each of them. Partnership is an addition to the two more familiar strands because of the emerging evidence that role definition in partnership arrangements between schools and between schools and other organisations is a core challenge in contemporary school leadership (National College, 2010; Hutchings, Smart, James & Williams, 2006; Leadbeater & Mongon, 2008). In complex arrangements, school leaders cannot always draw on the ex-officio authority that underpins leadership and management in their base organisations. They then draw – the most effective of them intuitively – on one of the key partnership approaches, association, as a distinctive way of operating.

Readers may also see threads through this framework of what Heifetz and Linsky (2002) and later Fullan (2005) characterised as either adaptive or technical approaches. The leadership and partnership elements tend to require adaptive solutions, ie ones that lie outside the current way of operating. The management elements of the framework tend to more technical solutions, or ones that require the application of existing know-how.

The following pages reflect in a little more detail on the three strands of the framework and the nine activities, three associated with each strand. The recurrent health warning is that the order of their presentation is neither hierarchical nor necessarily sequential.

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# Navigation

Navigation	
Securing the vision, setting a direction and promoting change	
Awareness:	recognising and prioritising an issue of inequity or injustice and a target group

**A strong sense of purpose and direction is required to solve apparently intransigent problems and that in turn, requires awareness, a clear line of sight on the issues needing attention.**

The history of gaps between different groups in the English education system is lengthy and well documented. Over the past two decades, the data, information and analysis for tracking those gaps have become increasingly sophisticated. Effective leaders are aware that the gaps appear not only between different groups of students but also between different teaching groups or departments, and that their leadership can help to reduce the gaps.

Gaps appear between groups of students measured on average. The marginally lower overall attainment of boys compared with girls sits alongside their different trends in subject choices at 16-plus and career paths beyond. The pattern of attainment across different ethnic groups leaves some well above and some far below national averages. It might be less surprising but still disappointing that looked-after children and children with special needs have such very low average outcomes. But the largest overall gap in average attainments is persistently between children from wealthy, professional families and those from poorer, working-class homes. Some schools successfully buck the trend and narrow those gaps significantly.

Gaps also appear within schools, between the averages of different teaching groups and departments. At primary school the effect of these gaps inside schools are reportedly 5 times greater than gaps between schools, and at secondary school as much as 14 times greater (Hopkins, Reynolds & Gray, 2005). It may have been historically difficult for leaders to judge whether that within-school variation reflected the quality of leadership and teaching or whether it was intrinsically based in the nature of a subject and its assessment. Relatively recent changes in classroom observation, performance management and the publication of national data sets have provided leadership teams with the information required to confidently analyse and compare performance within school.

Effective leaders are aware that performance gaps exist in the system. They are aware that unless they are vigilant, the gaps, like a constantly threatening virus, will contaminate their organisation. They constantly scan information about their organisation to check which of the gaps might be emerging there, which local gaps cause the most concern and which should be a priority for action. **Awareness** requires more than just knowing that there is a gap or variation. It also requires a view that the gap or variation is neither tolerable nor inevitable. That leads in turn to **acceptance**.

Navigation	
Securing the vision, setting a direction and promoting change	
Acceptance:	understanding that the school or service is both part of the problem and can also contribute to the solution

**Effective leaders are prepared to accept that the historic practices of their school may themselves be limiting its capacity for improvement and to close gaps. They accept that those practices should be considered for change at least as much as any external factors or inputs.**

The education service's knowledge of gaps and variation in standards and outcomes has not always led to that belief that something could or should be done. For much of the 20th century, schooling was held by most observers to be so self-evidently a good thing that only the limitations of a student's gender, class or ethnicity would prevent him or her benefiting. Even now, some people would claim that the relatively low attainment of boys, working-class children or some ethnic minority groups is the consequence of natural, perhaps even genetic dispositions. Others will argue that the problem lies deep in cultural and social dynamics beyond the remit of schools. In either case, the conclusion will be that the associated low attainment can only be remedied marginally by schools. It was only in the final third of the century that educational processes – teaching, assessment and curriculum – were widely implicated in the creation of unequal outcomes (Ball, 2003; Dennis, 1980).

Simply put, effective leaders believe that they and their staff are responsible for the outcomes from their work. They do not ask: 'what would you expect with people like this?', whether 'people' might refer to members of their local community, staff or politicians (Mongon & Chapman, 2008). They start by putting right the weaknesses under their control: in effect, the weaknesses within the school. They accept that to close gaps there are **implicit** and **explicit** features of the school that need to change.

- **Implicit features** include the professional expectations and prejudices that staff have for one another, for the students and for the community they serve. These play a large part in the way things are done in a school and therefore in outcomes for young people from different backgrounds (Gillborn, 2008; Tannock, 2008; Dunne & Gazeley, 2008; Lupton, 2004). When they diminish attainment, they need to be challenged.
- **Explicit features** mean the often variable working practices of the adults. Schools are not the only organisations that have to challenge existing practices, as one Scottish authority discovered when it compared notes on organisational change with a multinational oil company. Both found that one of their core challenges was to 'mobilise the workforce to accept the changes and clarification of problems to do with the challenge to traditional professionalism' (Boreham & Reeves, 2004:7).

If **awareness** and **acceptance** are necessary steps to closing gaps, they are not in themselves sufficient. Effective leaders also need two other key attitudes:

- a belief that the behaviour should be changed
- an understanding of how that might be done

Those two requirements lead seamlessly to **advocacy**.

Navigation	
Securing the vision, setting a direction and promoting change	
Advocacy:	creating a living vision and participating in focused workforce development to introduce sustainable change

**Effective school leaders constantly advocate the ethos, purpose and processes that they want for their school. They do this in part by promoting a well-grounded living vision, in part by modelling expected behaviour, in part through their persistent use of particular language and above all by their commitment to learning and development for people of all ages and status.**

Living vision (Innovation Unit, 2009) is a phrase that emphasises the importance of connecting any overarching vision with the day-to-day work of an organisation. A living vision, collaboratively created, avoids platitudes and is specific enough to connect with the staff's and students' sense of their own destiny. It is compelling, specific, grounded and can be tested in action. A living vision is an emotional and a practical device, a statement of 'how we are going to be and what we are going to achieve here'. It is a signpost for those who do not doubt that change is needed but may not immediately sense how it can be done.

Dynamic leaders consistently model the behaviour they expect from others by leading from the front, setting the tone and establishing a can-do culture (DCSE, 2008a:4). They understand that changing attitudes is far more important than publishing plans or organising structures. School improvement is more successful when people internalise expectations and that is achieved, 'largely through modelling commitment and focus using face to face relationships and not bureaucratic controls' (Elmore, 2004:82). Language is one of the key tools in the repertoire of modelling. One of the more accessible explorations of this theme is in Kegan and Lahey's description of how our words 'regulate the forms of thinking, feeling and meaning to which we have access which in turn constrain how we see the world and act in it' (2003:7).

Sponsoring and participating in personal development is one of the most effective ways in which leaders can nurture a living vision and promote change for improvement. Michael Fullan (2001) has written about how the insecurity of change and the need for new skills can combine to create an implementation dip, the point at which the leader as coach must help people to develop and invest in their capacity-building. Countering the dip involves modelling learning, reflection, evidence-based enquiry and personal development for staff and, through them, students. Collaborative and sustained workforce development is consistently associated with positive effects on student motivation and outcomes and on teachers' commitment, attitudes and confidence – arguably double the effect of any other leadership practice (Robinson et al, 2009).

Knowing which professional development to prioritise depends on **analysis, action** and **application** which comprise the summary of the second role, **management**, below.

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# Management

Management	
Organising, problem-solving, creating order and providing consistency	
Analysis:	using data and other information to create a high-definition picture of how an issue manifests itself locally

**Effective leaders combine numerical data and other information to create substantive and compelling evidence on which to base the case for development in their schools.**

**Analysis** is a professional hallmark distinguishing engineers from mechanics, architects from draughtsman and leadership from administration. In schools, it is the robust guarantee that improved outcomes for the right students are the main purpose of any action. It allows experience and learning to be shared, compared and contrasted across schools and across the education service. Schools in the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) narrowing the gap trial found that this 'was one of the easiest areas in which to make progress' (2009:11). Sound data and tracking systems at individual, key stage, year group and departmental levels were described as 'key tools for identifying where [in-school variation (ISV)] occurs and prioritising the areas where a reduction in ISV is most significant' (ibid:11).

Mongon and Chapman (2011) claim that the strength of analysis is twofold:

- **Analysis** satisfies ambitious curiosity
- **Analysis** is an aid to accountability

Effective leaders and their colleagues are impelled by curiosity - by the need to understand what works and to improve practice. They use robust evidence to inform their personal learning and operational judgements. Effective leaders also understand that robust evidence is the best way that experience and learning can be shared, compared and contrasted within and between organisations. That appears to lead directly to an enthusiasm for personal and communal learning which the adults can share with one another and convey to their students.

Effective leaders embrace accountability and so use analysis actively for their colleagues and for their students, not passively for external monitors. They shape the terms of their accountability by:

- describing individual and collective performance (using some criteria that are nationally designed and others that are locally selected for local purposes)
- comparing performance with expected standards (some of which are individual, some collective, some local, some national)
- providing a contextual commentary on, but not excuses for, individual or collective performance (in order to understand where and how to focus the energy for improvement)
- selecting the local outcomes by which they, their staff and students are prepared to be judged alongside national targets (recognising that national targets are not the only worthwhile targets)

Numerical data is not the only valuable aid to analysis. Narrative behaviour trails or audits are some of the ways used to create written or oral reports and to inform a school's self-awareness, not least about its more vulnerable children (CUREE, 2009a; 2009b).

Management	
Organising, problem-solving, creating order and providing consistency	
Action:	focusing directly on the target group and the issue, and ensuring that the new activity is explicit, funded and managed

**Effective leaders focus activity in their schools by emphasising a limited number of critical priorities and ensuring that the importance of those priorities is evident in the resources and management interest they are allocated. 'A clear focus on a limited number of goals has been identified as a key characteristic of effective and improving schools' (Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll & Russ, 2005:94).**

Successful schools focus the efforts of individual adults and young people on the agreed priorities. This is in part a self-directing task and in part a task for management who will need to join, support and monitor the design and implementation by their colleagues of robust and targeted strategies. This is what Davies calls aligning the people and the organisation to the strategy by changing the mindset and behaviour of the people within the organisation (2009). School leaders in Davies's research often achieved this by using conversations with their colleagues. These conversations developed increasing depth and engagement, first with a tentative exploration of ideas, then with increased knowledge and participation, next increased motivation, commitment and ambition and finally to building personal and organisational capability. This in our terms is the transition from advocacy to action, though the process is neither simple nor linear.

An important feature of **action** is recognising that in a full workload, new activity usually requires the end of some other, perhaps even valued, activity. Peter Drucker calls this systematic abandonment, deliberate and regular decisions to end some activities (2007). These decisions are just as important as decisions on what new or different things to do. They are less difficult when the activity is not working or unpopular but more difficult when the old activity is seen as acceptable or even desirable by some staff.

Workload is, of course, an issue in the schools we have worked in though we are constantly told by leaders and other staff alike that it is not the critical factor. Success and appreciation, themes that are constantly promoted by high-leverage leaders, appear to be far more influential on staff's endurance than a calculation of hours and weight of work. This kind of open and collaborative culture is consistently reported as the best way of producing the necessary momentum and improvement. Research by the TDA found the more successful programmes for reducing in-school variation:

*"reflect the extent of trusting relationships and collaboration within their existing culture. Where trust is at lower levels and collaboration is not well-developed, smaller steps will be required."*

(TDA, 2009:9).

Once **analysis** is as complete as it can be and the course of **action** outlined, leaders **apply** themselves and their organisation to ensuring that the activity takes place and the expected improvements emerge.

Management	
Organising, problem-solving, creating order and providing consistency	
Application:	implementing the plan and in particular ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning – the basic compact between a school and its community – is first-class

**Effective leaders are relentless and implacable in ensuring that the school’s priorities and common processes, always including a focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, are accepted and applied by everyone involved.**

Central to this for schools, as it would be for any service industry, is ensuring that whatever else happens and whatever else they do, their core activity is of unremitting high quality. For schools, although health and safeguarding are also vitally important matters, the core activity is teaching and learning. Because the core compact of any school with its pupils, families and community is that children will learn, the quality of teaching will be where school leaders will always apply most of their energy.

The relentless emphasis on teaching and learning as a key component in the leadership of effective schools permeates our experience with high-leverage leaders as well as the research literature. The emphasis is important because the quality of teaching has more impact on the attainment of students than any other factor under the control of the school. High-quality teaching is the bedrock on which attainment is built and the only underpinning component capable of sustaining a school’s ambition to contribute to other outcomes in children’s lives. Everything else implodes without it.

High-leverage leaders understand that the effect of the quality of teaching becomes even more important because it has a greater bearing on children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. In successive annual reports Ofsted has confirmed the strong association between deprivation and poor provision (Ofsted, 2010:37). Reporting on observations of teaching in Year 5 classes (pupils aged 10) and using free school meals (FSM) entitlement as an indicator, Sammons and her colleagues concluded:

*“It appears from the observations in Year 5 classes that the quality of teaching tends to be poorer in schools with higher levels of disadvantage, while the behavioural challenges in terms of pupil behaviour in class tend to be greater.”*

Sammons et al, 2006:2-3

Effective leaders might agree with Dylan Wiliam’s analysis that the quickest way to improve pupil attainment is to improve the teachers already available not because they are not good, though some are not, but because they could be better (Wiliam, 2009). Replacing teachers is an important but slower option so Wiliam proposes that the changes that make a difference to student performance are changes in the practice of existing teachers. In some effective schools application involves the introduction of standard operating procedures (SOPs), and the introduction of ‘tighter specification of systems, procedures and responses’ to ensure consistency, reduce the isolation of individual staff or departments and to clarify expectations of pupils across the school (Reynolds, 2007:15).

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# Partnership

Partnership	
Modelling equal esteem and equitable authority	
Association:	being socially aware: nurturing the school as a community in its own right, as a member of its neighbourhood community and as a unit in a wider professional community

**Effective leaders promote and sustain change in work habits by influencing the way that people feel about one another. They tend to believe that their school is a community where outcomes will improve if relationships allow everyone to learn together. They therefore tend to believe the same of other professional communities and of neighbourhood communities. They are intuitive community builders and investors in social capital.**

This approach is described here as association because the explanation requires a word that is less taken for granted than either 'community' or 'partnership'. It requires a word that will provoke curiosity about the emotive connections effective leaders activate, affective dimensions that transcend the functionality of so many workplaces and working partnerships: 'This behaviour is rooted in a value system and sense of moral purpose... They drive high expectations without losing their sense of empathy or eroding anyone's dignity' (Mongon & Chapman, 2008: 9).

John West-Burnham and George Otero (2006) described leaders like these building 'relational trust' (a phrase derived from Bryk & Schneider, 2002) which consists of:

- respect: acknowledging one another's dignity and ideas
- competence: believing in each other's ability to fulfil responsibilities
- personal regard: caring about each other enough to go the extra mile
- integrity: trusting each other to put children's needs first even in the face of tough decisions

West-Burnham and Otero concluded that leaders with this disposition are well placed to integrate the differences of which even more complex systems, partnerships and communities are composed.

Leaders like these can then adopt a style which includes (Mongon, 2010:3):

- an inextricable commitment to hard and soft outcomes, regarding measured attainment as interdependent with outcomes for health, wellbeing and community cohesion
- a seamless approach to work inside or outside the school so that they treat other professional communities and the local neighbourhood community with the same high regard they give to their school community
- a belief that the medium is the message and that the way that adults are treated and treat one another cannot be different from the way in which pupils are treated and expected to treat one another

**Association** eventually moves a stable school beyond distributed leadership into what MacBeath (2008) calls 'cultural distribution', when people exercise initiative spontaneously and collaboratively, when the demarcation between leaders and followers is less formal and when the strength of the school is located in its collective intelligence and collective energy.

Partnership	
Modelling equal esteem and equitable authority	
Alignment:	improving the alignment of the students' home and school experiences without prejudice in what changes and where

**Effective leaders minimise the dissonance between students' experiences in school and their experiences in the families and community where they spend the other 85 per cent of their time and also between different providers working with children and their families.**

Effective leaders are absorbed by the factors within and close to schools that they can influence. In particular these include:

- teacher attitudes that continue to show ingrained deficit stereotypes for some student groups (Gazeley & Dunne, 2005; Gillborn, 2008)
- parental engagement, which is generally associated with higher outcomes for young people though the evidence is tenuous (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003)<sup>1</sup>
- student ambition, which is often underestimated and therefore scapegoated<sup>2</sup>

Effective leaders are purposeful about removing the barriers between schools, families and communities, enhancing the mutually valuable connections between them and raising ambition across all three. It is an approach that requires the active engagement of parents as complementary educators and of students as active learners. For effective leaders, 'Parents and students are agents, not consumers: their actions help constitute education as a public sphere' (Martin, McKeown, Nixon & Ranson, 2000). Parents and students are not recipients of education, they are the co-creators and in that case it needs to be for the better.

Purposeful, creative and flexible engagement – making parents feel valued and valuable – is one of the common features across a series of Ofsted reports describing successful work with both black Caribbean children and young people (Ofsted, 2002a; 2002b) and with white boys from low-income backgrounds (Ofsted, 2008).

<sup>1</sup> There is also some debate about what is meant by 'engagement' and how that leads to better outcomes (Feinstein, Duckworth & Sabates, 2004; Hills & Stewart, 2005). Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) do not conclude that this means that parental involvement cannot be promoted: rather, that applying the best of what is known about parental engagement would lead to real progress.

<sup>2</sup> Young people are generally optimistic irrespective of their ethnic or socio-economic background (DCSF, 2008b). Ambition, however, is woven from two threads: aspiration (what is hoped for) and expectation (what is realistically anticipated). For some young people the two elements become unhelpfully separated when low expectation, arguably with good reason, begins to dominate.

Partnership	
Modelling equal esteem and deep respect	
Area focus:	engaging with the wider community in a partnership role because there is no one size that fits all

**Effective leaders are adept at engaging with neighbourhood and professional communities beyond their schools so that these communities and the school become mutually supportive.**

Effective school leaders value coherent service delivery to meet the needs of young people and endorse the contribution schools can make to the full range of outcomes for young people. They have a clear, all-round view of their position in local educational networks. They understand the political environments in which they operate, locally and nationally. They adopt the education service’s initiatives for their school, drain the contribution and divert the constraints.

Schools and services that build a strong partnership with their communities and with one another appear to be involved in five tasks (Leadbeater & Mongon, 2008):

- effectively managing their organisation’s own resources to ensure that the core service is of good quality
- drawing in resources from the community to complement the organisation’s own, for example employing and developing local people in ancillary roles
- investing in new ways of working with families and social networks (perhaps commissioning groups to provide services or offering services in new locations)
- investing to create social capital that may have only a long-term payback for the organisation (such as making facilities available for community organisations or adult classes)
- acting as a platform for community activity in which much of the value escapes capture and flows back into the community (leading a community regeneration group, for example)

Engaging in this wider role comes at a cost which will have to be justified to the school’s leadership team and also to the governance arrangements for the activity – the school governing body either directly or indirectly and perhaps also local governance arrangements established just for the purpose.

Effective leaders see value in it and Huxham and Vangen suggest four key reasons among others why they might be right (2005:5-6):

- sharing resources if one organisation’s resources do not match the task
- sharing risk when the consequences of failure in a project are too much for one organisation to bear
- efficiency, to be derived largely from economies of scale
- co-ordination and seamlessness of different services, in particular when that is valued by the users

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