

Between ‘bastard’ and ‘wicked’ leadership? School leadership and the emerging policies of the UK Coalition Government

Nigel Wright

Abstract

Barker argues that in England under New Labour, school leaders and teachers have been ‘bastardised’ and suggests that the situation in 2010, with a general election afforded an opportunity in education policy for the ‘pendulum to swing’. In this article, the key points about ‘bastard Leadership’ are briefly summarised. The article then develops a view of schools as sites of complexity and ‘wickedity’ as an alternative to the linear reductionist approaches of managerialists. These two perspectives present the extremes of a spectrum against which the trajectory of school leadership can be viewed as it emerges from the New Labour years and is now being developed by the Coalition Government. Evidence from ministerial speeches and the Coalition Government's flagship White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, are used to examine key issues of freedom and trust, reducing bureaucracy and increasing autonomy for schools as ways of exploring the extent to which the new government's policies on school leadership are, or are not, moving away from those of their New Labour predecessors.

Keywords: school leadership, policy, Coalition Government, ‘bastard leadership’, ‘wicked leadership’

Notes on contributor

Nigel Wright is senior lecturer in education at the University of Hull.

Introduction

In recent years school leadership in England has been increasingly heading towards a crossroads, a complex junction where many issues meet. Routes converging on this crossroads include firstly a political one, whether government policy; secondly, a sustainability one, will there be enough applicants for head teacher posts or not; and finally, one relating to the nature of leadership itself, to what extent are school leaders seen either as ciphers in a managerialist project or authentic leaders able to determine the direction for their schools and communities. Politically, 2010 saw the end of 13 years of the 'New Labour' experiment which had stressed 'Education, education, education'¹ and its replacement with a coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, the first coalition government at Westminster since the end of the Second World War in 1945. In *The Pendulum Swings: Transforming School Reform* Barker² presented an incisive critique of the 'New Labour' years, arguing that:

The long term implications of the financial and economic crisis, and the prospect of a General Election, have created a rare opportunity to reinvent education policy by learning from past mistakes.³

On the topic of school leadership Barker argued that under New Labour:

leaders and teachers are bastardised as their goals and targets are set for them ... [and that this was] encouraging a system-wide compliance reflex and discouraging independent thought and innovation.⁴

This article focuses on the third of the routes at these crossroads – how will the nature and possibilities of school leadership be developed, as part of a continuing managerialist project or along a trajectory admitting greater autonomy and based on a different conceptualisation? The article briefly recapitulates key points about 'Bastard Leadership'⁵ as an approach to school leadership before developing an alternative perspective through the idea of 'Wicked Problems'.⁶ These two conceptions are then used to represent opposite ends of a spectrum of perspectives on leadership. The article subsequently presents an exploration and critique of emerging school leadership policies from the UK Coalition Government. The article concludes by considering whether or not the coalition is heading in a more 'wicked' direction and whether Barker's views on the opportunities to eschew bastardisation are being realised. What evidence is there so far that the pendulum might be moving?

Bastard and Wicked Leadership

On 'Bastard Leadership' Barker⁷ has built on ideas originally developed by Wright⁸ in which he argued that school leaders were being denied the scope for authentic leadership as they were being increasingly drawn into the managerialist approaches developed by New Labour. The critique was expounded as:

What is currently being propounded by central government is 'bastard leadership'. 'Bastard leadership' is not leadership, however modified. It is essentially different but the rhetoric and discourse are similar. Glatter suggests that 'Institutional leaders are seen as conduits of government policy and the content of the field is beginning to be defined by government agencies rather than within the field itself' (1999, 263). Leadership as the moral and value underpinning for the direction of schools is being removed from those who work there. It is now very substantially located at the political level where it is not available for contestation, modification or adjustment to local variations. This 'bastard leadership' can also be understood as a form of managerialism.⁹

Such a managerialist approach has its origins in New Public Management¹⁰ and substantially pre-dated New Labour as Wright documented in his 2001 paper. A key factor fostering greater managerialism in education and schooling was the development of an internal market after the Conservative Government's 1988 Act. During the New Labour years, managerialism was enhanced though an increase in legislative imposition, attempted micro-management of schools from Whitehall and punitive monitoring by Ofsted. Research by Smithers and Robinson¹¹ for the NUT reported that head teachers had been asked to shoulder no fewer than 58 new legislative impositions. Among some of the more well known of these, their interviewees referred to The National Strategies, School improvement partners (SIPs), Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs), workforce remodelling, teaching assistants, requirements for data management and pupil tracking, curriculum changes, excellence and enjoyment, self evaluation forms, Health and Safety, Every Child Matters, healthy eating and extended schools.

Not all research has accepted the 'Bastard Leadership' thesis. Critics have included Gold et al.¹² and Bottery¹³ whose studies on head teachers demonstrate that many tried to balance the pressures of government demands against what they saw as the best interests of the children. It seems that attempting, as many do, to avoid doing 'bastard leadership' could contribute to a value conflict. This situation was identified by Hoyle and Wallace¹⁴ who suggested that one of the ways in which principals handled this was by being:

Ironists, who have not internalized managerialism and are often critical of it, but who have fashioned their own commitment by being 'flexible, adaptive,

creative, opportunistic, collaborative with a drive towards self-improvement and self-development' – the description of a primary head teacher labelled as a 'composite' head by Woods et al.¹⁵

A key issue for school leadership in the second decade of the twenty-first century is sustainability and some research evidence does point to aspects of the managerialist approach of New Labour as contributing to early retirements and difficulties in recruiting to school headships. The *Independent* reported that:

More than a thousand head teachers quit their jobs early last year because of the pressure they were under...¹⁶

There is now a shortage of principals,¹⁷ and the issue of recruitment to headship has been researched longitudinally.¹⁸ In the United Kingdom, Shepherd reported that six figure salaries were failing to attract headteachers:

Teacher leaders said ministers had been warned of an impending shortage of head teachers, and had to do more to tackle an excessive workload and change the 'negative culture of accountability'. The analysts found faith schools now found it the hardest to recruit heads, with 37% of posts readvertised in 2008/9, compared to 26% in 1997/8.¹⁹

In 2010, *The Independent* ²⁰ reported that the chief executive of the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services said that some retired head teachers would be asked to consider staying on in a part time capacity as a way of alleviating the recruitment problems.

Additionally, the pressures of accountability often lead directly to the vulnerability of the principal's job, as noted by Smithers and Robinson:

Overall, workload was the main reason the heads thought there were recruitment difficulties, with accountability a close second, particularly the vulnerability of the heads to sacking in the light of a bad Ofsted report. Why should a comfortably placed teacher want to put his/her head above the parapet?²¹

'Bastard Leadership', as part of a managerialist approach, was built upon central government direction and prescriptions, a regime of targets, predicated on a view which emphasised the homogeneity of schools, leading to 'one size fits all' solutions based on linear heuristics for a wide range of educational issues. It was then enforced by a regime of strict compliance with failure entailing 'a professional death penalty'²² for unsuccessful head teachers.

One implication of the centralising and controlling interests of central government lies in the oversimplification of understanding the nature of schools, the problems they face, the local variations which impinge on their operating context and the development of ‘one size fits all’ solutions. In this section, a consideration is presented of schools firstly as complex adaptive systems and secondly as a locus for ‘wicked problems’. This is explored with a view to offering a different set of conceptual lenses to develop a position on school leadership which is antithetical to ‘Bastard Leadership’. The school leadership policies of the Coalition Government can then be examined and located along the spectrum.

Firstly, literature on complexity²³ provides a new dimension for our understanding of schools. For the purpose of developing the analysis here, a complex adaptive system (CAS) according to Plsek and Greenhalgh²⁴ is:

...a collection of individual agents with freedom to act in ways that are not always totally predictable, and whose actions are interconnected so that one agent's actions change the context for other agents.

This resonates with many conceptions of the organisational nature of schools. Some of the key features that they identify include the unpredictability of agents within a CAS such that the actions of one change the context for others. Agents and systems are ‘nested’ and issues such as paradox, creativity, surprise and emergent behaviour are not the problematic issues they might be in more linear systems. The boundaries between sub-sets and sub-systems within a CAS are fuzzy. Some of the key problems arising in such organisations will be of similar complexity. This view recognises a substantially greater degree of heterogeneity and plurality in schools than a ‘Bastard’ approach.

Secondly, the term ‘wicked problem’ was coined by Rittel and Webber²⁵ and subsequently developed in the literature relating to various disciplines and fields of study.²⁶ In their original typography a wicked problem: has no definitive formulation; means that every solution is a one-shot operation where every solution counts; is essentially unique and every wicked problem is a symptom of another one. There is no immediate or ultimate test of a solution and solutions are not right or wrong but simply better or worse. Table 1 attempts to show how *some* of the issues facing schools including leadership can be aligned with Rittel and Webber's criteria and so be considered as wicked.

Table 1.

The opposite of a wicked problem is a ‘tame’ one. A ‘tame’ problem can be solved by linear, reductionist techniques and simple heuristics. The danger for politicians and school leaders is to attempt to reduce wicked problems into tame

ones, which can be interpreted as a managerialist approach or a form of ‘Bastard Leadership’.

If the argument is accepted that schools can be seen as a form of CAS and that many of the problems they face are indeed wicked, then such a view would run counter to many of the tenets of ‘Bastard Leadership’. Centrally legislated solutions to some of these wicked problems have been and could continue to be significantly problematic. The Coalition Government has signalled a change from the policies of the previous administration towards school leadership and this change will be examined to see whether or not the changes represent significant movement along the spectrum.

Table 2 presents Rittel and Webber's ‘wicked problem’ headline statements along with tactics for a ‘tame’ solution, the ‘Bastard Leadership’ characteristics reflecting a mechanistic, means/ends approach which accompany this and then the qualities needed to handle the problem ‘wickedly’. The latter view offers the possibility for viewing stakeholders in schools in both a Kantian and more humane way.

Table 2.

Viewing the way ahead through coalition principles

The Coalition parties published the terms on which they agreed to co-operate in a statement in May 2010.²⁷ In the Foreword, the leaders of the respective coalition parties outlined the key features of the principles which they hoped would underpin the new government. In the context of this article, it is interesting to note that in the early paragraphs they say:

We share a conviction that the days of big government are over; that centralisation and top-down control have proved a failure... it is our ambition to distribute power and opportunity to people rather than hoarding authority within government... Similarly, there has been the assumption that central government can only change people's behaviour through rules and regulations. Our government will be a much smarter one, shunning the bureaucratic levers of the past and finding intelligent ways to encourage, support and enable people to make better choices for themselves.²⁸

Noteworthy are the views that centralisation, top-down control and rules and regulations are elements of the failed aspects of the previous regime. They conclude their Foreword by stressing the key values which they say underpin their approach, namely ‘freedom, fairness and responsibility’. They look to ‘reforming government, a stronger society, a smaller state and power and responsibility in the hands of every citizen.’²⁹ So, could this signal a

recognition that important aspects of education and school leadership are in fact ‘wicked problems’ and will the approach of the Coalition herald something of an end to ‘Bastard Leadership’?

The Coalition Agreement gave specific policy indications across 31 areas for policy development and implementation, including a section (26) devoted to schools. In the eight months since the publication of the agreement, education ministers have been developing policy and this can be assimilated from study of speeches and more importantly from the White Paper on Education published in November 2010, *The Importance of Teaching: the Schools White Paper*.³⁰ The next section of this article explores these sources with a specific focus on school leadership.

Coalition views affecting school leadership

Freedom and trust

One key feature of early Coalition Government statements is the emphasis on changing the way government works. This is how David Cameron expressed it when speaking about the ‘Big Society’:

For a long time the way government has worked – top-down, top-heavy, controlling – has frequently had the effect of sapping responsibility, local innovation and civic action. It has turned many motivated public sector workers into disillusioned, weary puppets of government targets... So we need to turn government completely on its head.³¹

Later in the same speech he acknowledged the corollary of this which is that ‘we’ve got to give professionals much more freedom’. In an earlier Podcast³² he indicated that he was leading a government that ‘trusts people who work in our public services, instead of dictating to them...’ This line was also stated by Michael Gove in a speech to the National College Annual Conference where he said:

I believe that heads and teachers are the best people to run schools – not politicians and bureaucrats... At the heart of this Government's vision for education is a determination to give school leaders more power and control.³³

On the surface, this might sound like a death knell for ‘Bastard Leadership’ but the question is power and control to do what? ‘Bastard Leadership’ was a critique of the lack of scope for leaders to determine the values and ‘ends’ for which their schools exist. Gove's answer was, ‘Not just to drive improvement in their own schools – but to drive improvement across our whole education system.’ Improvement per se is a second order value. Presently this statement

by Gove doesn't define what improvement is to be in, how it is to be achieved, assessed or who should stipulate what it is. The White Paper (Department for Education 2010) recognises a tension faced by head teachers in that they:

...feel that their ability to do what is right for their pupils and communities is constrained by government directives and improvement initiatives.³⁴

Nick Gibb, the Schools' Minister, took the rhetoric further with the comment that, 'We're going to place greater trust in professionals to give teachers more freedom to decide how to teach.'³⁵ In order for government to demonstrate this increased trust, school leaders will need to be given greater scope to determine the curriculum and direction for their schools. So far, however, the White Paper³⁶ indicates that where head teachers are to be given greater powers, it is to deal with matters like underperformance of teachers (para 2.33), through the reduction of unnecessary bureaucracy (paras 2.46–2.53), through ending centralised target setting for schools (para 2.54) and by reviewing all existing guidance (para 2.58) 'to remove what is not necessary and sharply cut back what is left'. The aspiration of this is stated in para 2.59: 'Through taking these steps we will free schools from externally imposed burdens and give them greater confidence to set their own direction.' It is not clear how these examples contribute to demonstrating greater trust, allowing teachers to decide not just how, but what to teach.

In following the drift in Gibb's speech to the Grammar School Heads Association's National Conference, his comments on giving teachers freedom were immediately followed with remarks about Academies and the freedoms which they offer, particularly from Local Authority control. In the light of Government statements about the importance of democratic accountability,³⁷ it seems somewhat disingenuous to suggest that Academies are what freedom is about when their governing bodies only have to have one parent member and the sponsor occupies the key role. This link between giving more freedom and trusting professionals more and the establishment of Academies was also made by Lord Hill in the House of Lords when he moved the Second Reading of the Academies Bill.³⁸ In not making the local community the principal stakeholder in Academies, as advocated by Barker,³⁹ the coalition is missing an opportunity to broaden the democratic basis of schools. Superficially, it might seem that coalition intentions in respect of freedom and trust are moving in a more 'wicked' direction, but the underlying message suggests that scope for 'Bastard Leadership' is still evident.

Reducing bureaucracy

The extent of bureaucratic demands on school leaders has grown almost exponentially in recent years. The controlling aspects of this from Self

Evaluation Forms to centrally stipulated targets have been substantial contributors to the demands of 'Bastard Leadership'. The coalition's desire to reduce bureaucracy will appeal to many and while examples given include ending the SEF (Self Evaluation Form) and the FMSiS (Financial Management Standard in Schools), it will remain to be seen from those bureaucratic controls which are retained, how much freedom schools really have. In the White Paper⁴⁰ the reduction of 'unnecessary prescription and bureaucracy' (para 2.46) is considered to be a part of making teaching and school leadership 'more attractive'. 'Statutory duties and requirements' are considered by the authors of the White Paper to 'reinforce a compliance culture, which is undesirable' (para 2.49). A key feature of recognising wickedness is in accepting the local and contextual nature of organisations. The White Paper makes a start in this direction when it endorses the view that 'good schools evaluate themselves rigorously' and that a centrally prescribed form may not be helpful (para 2.53) and its criticism of the regime of targets presented in para 2.54 underlines this. It is possible that these changes in bureaucratic requirements may see a reduction in the managerialist demands of 'Bastard Leadership'. Whether or not this permits schools to be seen in more 'wicked problem' terms and so makes them more humane places to be will take time.

A potential further step in this direction is the signalling of change to the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). This is a mandatory requirement, that all head teachers in maintained schools in England hold the qualification before appointment. The Coalition has indicated that it sees the present format of the qualification as focusing too strongly on 'how to implement government policy rather than on the key skills required for headship'.⁴¹ The Coalition Government has asked the National College, the body responsible for the qualification, to learn from MBA and Masters in Public Administration courses. If in doing this the qualification more genuinely represents work at Level 7, described by the QAA as 'decision making in complex and unpredictable situations',⁴² then there may be room for a more 'wicked' perspective.

More autonomy for schools

Providing more autonomy for schools and their leaders is a message which comes strongly through ministerial speeches and is very evident in the White Paper.⁴³ In the latter there are in excess of 40 references to aspects of autonomy. Autonomy is hailed in the document as something of a panacea; Messrs Cameron and Clegg state the following in their Foreword to the document:

The OECD has shown that countries which give the most autonomy to head teachers and teachers are the ones that do best. Finland and South Korea – the highest performing countries in PISA – have clearly defined and challenging universal standards, along with individual school autonomy.⁴⁴

The pronouncements do, however, set a tone which is increasingly against ‘Bastard Leadership’:

But our direction of travel is towards schools as autonomous institutions collaborating with each other on terms set by teachers, not bureaucrats.⁴⁵

And it is assumed that by having greater autonomy, school leadership will once again become attractive:

As we make schools more autonomous, taking up a leadership role will become more attractive and more important.⁴⁶

Some cautionary points need to be entered. The White Paper indicates that ‘autonomy’ is almost a panacea. What it does not elaborate is what the boundaries of this autonomy will actually be and whether ultimately it will differ significantly from the previous government in the extent to which it is prepared to allow schools to set their agendas.

Conclusion: between ‘Bastard’ and ‘Wicked’ Leadership – where is the Coalition Government on school leadership?

Eight months after the General Election, a good deal has been said by ministers and through the White Paper. The intentions to afford more freedom and trust to school leaders and teachers, the desire to reduce bureaucracy and micro-managed control are signs that the Coalition Government is moving away from many of the cherished approaches of its predecessor. Benignly, these could be construed as a diminution of ‘Bastard Leadership’. The recognition that technical rationalist approaches are limited and that professionals have to be trusted to ‘make decisions in complex and unpredictable situations’⁴⁷ is a step in a more positive direction. Matters like ‘freedom’, improvement and autonomy require careful definition by government since where the parameters are set on these issues will allow a sharper assessment of the extent to which the Coalition have moved away from ‘Bastard Leadership’ and are taking a more ‘wicked’ view of schools. Against this have to be considered the implications of the Coalition's Free Schools and Academies policies which may rejuvenate the market pressures within the school system which originally gave rise to ‘bastard leadership’. A ‘wicked’ trajectory, therefore, could be a false dawn. Time will tell.

Notes

³Ibid., 16.

⁴Ibid., 168.

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⁹Ibid., 280.

⁷Barker, *The Pendulum Swings*, Ch. 5.

⁸Wright, 'Leadership, "Bastard Leadership" and Managerialism'.

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²¹Smithers and Robinson, *School Headship*, iii.

²²Barker, *The Pendulum Swings*, 168.

²³R. Stacey, *Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics*, 2nd ed. (London: Pitman, 1996); R. Lewin, *Complexity: Life on the Edge of Chaos* (London: Phoenix, 1993).

²⁴P.E. Plsek and T. Greenhalgh, 'Complexity Science: The Challenge of Complexity in Health Care', *BMJ* 323, no. 7313 (2001): 625.

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³⁰Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching*, Cm 7980 (London: TSO, 2010).

³¹D. Cameron, The Big Society Speech, July 19, 2010, <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/07/big-society-speech-53572>.

³³M. Gove, Speech to the National College Annual Conference, June 16, 2010, <http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/speeches/a0061371/michael-gove-to-the-national-college-annual-conference-birmingham>.

³⁴Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching*, Cm 7980 (London: TSO, 2010), para. 1.3.

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³⁹Barker, *The Pendulum Swings*, 170.

⁴⁰Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching*.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, para. 2.38.

⁴²QAA, *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (2008), 5,
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⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 3–4.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, para. 15.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, para. 2.37.

⁴³Department for Education, *The Importance of Teaching*.

⁴⁷QAA, *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications*.

Table 1

Table 1. ‘Wicked’ characteristics related to issues of school leadership and development.

Rittel and Webber's headline for a wicked problem characteristic	Rittel and Webber's elaboration of wicked problem characteristics	Application to issues of school leadership and development
1. There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem	‘The information needed to understand the problem depends upon one's idea for solving it... One cannot understand the problem without knowing about its context; one cannot meaningfully search for information without the orientation of a solution concept; one cannot first understand, then solve.’ (161–2)	Schools are heterogeneous and so there will be different ideas about how an individual school should be led, in what direction and how it might be developed. Schools are context driven, no heads or teaching staff are the same and students and parents certainly aren't. Solution concepts are impacted by a policy context which is inherently unstable as it is predicated upon short time scales due to election cycles.
2. Wicked problems have no stopping rule	‘In solving a chess problem or a mathematical problem, the problem solver knows when he has done his job... Not so with planning problems. Because...the process of solving the problem is identical with the process of understanding its nature, because there are no criteria for sufficient understanding and because there are no ends to the causal chains that link interacting open systems, the would be planner can always try to do better.’ (162)	No level of improvement can be considered to be absolutely satisfactory because heads and schools, like planners, can always try to do better. The causal chains operating in a human open system like a school community are very complex and there are no ends to these sufficient for leaders to say definitively ‘we've cracked it!’
3. Solutions to wicked problems are not true or false, but good or bad	‘For wicked planning problems there are no true or false answers. Normally many parties are equally equipped, interested, and/or entitled to judge solutions, although no one has the power to set formal decision rules to determine correctness.’ (163)	A school community comprises many stakeholders, students, parents, teachers and staff, governors and local communities. They are all interested in and entitled to judge solutions and outcomes about how their school is led and developed. What might be considered good by some might not by others.
4. There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem	‘With wicked problems ... any solutions after being implemented will generate waves of consequences over an extended – virtually unbounded – period of time.’ (163)	Leadership and development solutions after being implemented generate waves of consequences. Consider a policy to employ early entry at GCSE for students who are expected to get a grade on the C/D boundary. Early entry allows the school the opportunity to count those who pass and devote their curriculum time to other subjects. Those who fail can have another go in the summer exam session in the hope that they might do better and so enhance the school's position. Such an approach carries outcomes affecting students/parents, teachers and school leaders over a very long period.
5. Every solution to a wicked problem is a ‘one shot operation’ because there is no opportunity to learn by trial and error, every attempt counts significantly	‘With wicked planning problems, however, every implemented solution is consequential. It leaves “traces” that cannot be undone...the effects of an experimental curriculum will follow pupils into their adult lives.’ (163)	Following on from the example above, students who were entered early and gained a C grade were effectively denied the opportunity to gain a higher grade, which they might indeed have done six months later. Then when they apply for a university place it is quite possible that their lower GCSE grade counts against them.

Table 1. 'Wicked' characteristics related to issues of school leadership and development.

Rittel and Webber's headline for a wicked problem characteristic	Rittel and Webber's elaboration of wicked problem characteristics	Application to issues of school leadership and development
6. Wicked problems do not have an enumerable set of potential solutions	‘There are no criteria which enable one to prove that all solutions to a wicked problem have been identified and considered... In fields of ill-defined problems and hence ill-definable solutions, the set of feasible plans of action relies on realistic judgement, the capability to appraise “exotic” ideas and on the amount of trust and credibility between planner and clientele that will lead to the conclusion, “OK, let's try that.”’ (164)	The complexity of leading and developing a school is such that problem and solution definition are intrinsically uncertain. Therefore leaders have to be able to move outside rule-governed approaches and develop trust to decide a course of action. This could be different in all schools.
7. Every wicked problem is essentially unique	‘Despite seeming similarities among wicked problems, one can never be certain that the particularities of a problem do not override its commonalities with other problems already dealt with.’ (165)	Schools do belie some similarities, indeed quite a few. However, in dealing with large numbers of human actors one can never be sure of the relative importance of the particularities or that they will behave as in previous or other similar but different circumstances.
8. Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem	‘Problems can be described as discrepancies between the state of affairs as it is and the state as it ought to be. The process of resolving the problem starts with the search for causal explanations of the discrepancy. Removal of that cause poses another problem of which the original problem is a “symptom.”’ (165)	The problem outlined earlier concerning early entry at GCSE is a good example of the emergence of unintended outcomes and the creation of subsequent wicked problems further ‘down the line’.
9. The existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways. The choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem's resolution	‘There is no rule or procedure to determine the “correct” explanation... The reason is that in dealing with wicked problems there are several more ways of refuting a hypothesis than there are permissible in the sciences.’ (166)	Consider the popular issue of improving standards, by which is meant test and exam scores. When results plateau, there are divergent ways of refuting the explanatory hypothesis for this simplistically in terms of ‘poor teaching’.
10. The planner has no right to be wrong	‘Here the aim is not to find the truth, but to improve some characteristics of the world where people live. Planners are liable for the consequences of the actions they generate; the effect can matter a great deal to those people that are touched by those actions’. (167)	Changes engineered by leaders in schools can and do affect many actors. Solutions should be considered in terms of the extent to which they have improved some characteristics of the world in which people live and leaders have to be able to admit that they got things wrong at times.

Table 2. Contrasting ‘Bastard’ and ‘Wicked’ approaches to problems.

Rittel and Webber's headline for wicked problem characteristics	Mistaken tactics employed to ‘tame’ wicked problems	‘Bastard Leadership’ characterised by:	Wicked qualities for heads to deploy
1. There is no definitive formulation of a wicked problem	Create a set of <i>a priori</i> targets for solving the problem	Being deterministic	Being open-minded
2. Wicked problems have no stopping rule	Meeting the targets is the stopping rule	Being closed	Accepting provisionality
3. Solutions to wicked problems are not true or false, but good or bad	Hitting the targets is the right answer	Being simplistic	Accepting of multiple perspectives
4. There is no immediate and no ultimate test of a solution to a wicked problem	The immediate test is ‘has the target been met?’	Employing empirical measurements	Trusting/faithful
5. Every solution to a wicked problem is a ‘one shot operation’ because there is no opportunity to learn by trial and error, every attempt counts significantly	Assume that schools are homogeneous and so are susceptible to technical prescriptions, so apply more targets	Being mechanical	Demonstrating professional responsibility
6. Wicked problems do not have an enumerable set of potential solutions	Solutions don't require judgement, just the application of targets	Being formulaic	Being creative
7. Every wicked problem is essentially unique	Apply system wide panaceas – targets	Being <i>dirigiste</i>	Being cautious
8. Every wicked problem can be considered to be a symptom of another problem	Create incremental steps to tame the problem	A blinkered linear view of causation	Being reflexive
9. The existence of a discrepancy representing a wicked problem can be explained in numerous ways. The choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem's resolution	Do not acknowledge discrepancies in problem definition, if the criteria aren't met then apply sanctions	Epistemological exclusivity	Being inclusive
10. The planner has no right to be wrong	As in science where there are no proofs for hypotheses, only potential refutations, an improved school is one which has met its targets; one which hasn't, by definition, has failed	Ontological presumption	Demonstrating humility