

Distributed leadership in the UK primary school: An analysis of the views of a headteacher

By

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Abstract

Currently, leadership is a recurring theme in the field of education. There is also a number of research that examined school leadership from different perspectives. Some of these studies pay greater attention on school leadership policies while others focused on the key role of school leadership. Leadership is, as will be shown in this chapter, key to developing school practices that support schools to become effective organisations. Although researchers usually defined leadership according to their individual perspectives and the aspects of the phenomenon which is of interest to them, some perspectives have been more influential than others. In this sense, these authors see leadership as a process which encourages staff at variety of levels take on leadership role. This approach of leadership not only synthesises distributed model but also provides an opportunity to capture how leaders encourage and manage school improvement in practice. With this mind, this chapter examines the nature of leadership in one school in the UK to see whether it facilitates distribution of leadership. The data was collected using semi-structured qualitative interview with the headteacher of the school. The data collected was analysed by reading the interview transcript many times, highlighting what was considered important. From the headteacher's responses, recurring school practices – collaboration, shared leadership, learning culture, school connection with communities and school response to SEN children - emerged. However, these findings should be considered with caution because the study was carried out in one school. A reasonable number of schools would have possibly provided more corroborated evidence. However, the findings can possibly further thinking in other schools with similar situations.

Keywords: Leadership, distributed leadership, instructional leadership, inclusion, school practices

Introduction

Nowadays, leadership is a recurring theme not only in education but also in other fields across the world. Despite its rise in eminence globally, there is still a debate in the literature, presented in section one, about what leadership actually means. For example, some scholars focus on the characteristics and behaviours of leaders while others place emphasis on the situation in which leaders work. These differing views exist because leadership in each context will be determined by the history, culture and politics of that context. Acknowledging therefore the differences that exist across countries, and the uniqueness of the overall leadership picture for each context, a particular analysis of what leadership looks like in an inclusive school in the Northwest of England, where the study takes place, will be presented in section four of this chapter. It will be necessary to indicate what leadership means in theory, explore models of leadership and then to look for it in practice within the case study

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section provides an overview of how leadership theories and models evolved over the years. The second section is the review of empirical evidence on leadership in schools. The third section describes the research methodology which includes the description of the researched school and the methods of data collection and analysis. Analysis of school practices is presented in the fourth section. The discussion on the

school practices continues in the subsequent section. The final section provides a concluding thought.

Leadership in practice

Presently, there is a number of leadership theories and models used in education. These models and theories are briefly described, beginning with ‘trait’ or ‘great man theory’. This theory focuses on specific qualities one must possess to be a leader and such qualities are, impossible to acquire but, innate (see Uslu, 2019). It is clear that this theory concerns with identifying characteristics that labelled some individuals as leaders and as non-leaders. This theory lacks in providing better and clear characteristics of leaders, as different qualities were identified by different researchers (Sivaruban, 2021). This suggests that there is no uniform list of leadership traits and claim for such qualities depends on the situation and action taken by leaders. This leads to the consideration of behaviour theory of leadership.

This theory, which emanates from impressive results from effective school research, aims to make sense of type of leadership behaviour that help schools to become effective (Derue et al., 2011). They went on to classify effective leadership behaviour into four categories: task-oriented behaviour, relational-oriented behaviour, change-oriented behaviour, and passive leadership. Task-oriented behaviours concern with defining tasks, organising members, determining task performance standards, and ensuring the standards are met by group members. Relational-oriented behaviours place a lot of emphasis on strong relationships among group members. Change-oriented behaviours focus on driving change through inspiring a clear mutual vision and motivating creative thinking and risk taking by group members. Passive leaders are those who care less during times and exact control when problem exists in their organisations (Uslu, 2019).

This categorisation of behaviour was challenged by the proponent of contingency leadership theory (see Harrison, 2018 for detailed analysis). He claims that these categories of behaviour, as is traits, could not fit all contexts and situations. Therefore, effective leadership practices are, he further argues, highly determined by the situation in which leaders work. This suggests that experience and expertise levels of group members in a particular context and situation will determine which leadership models are likely to support organisations to become effective. Thorough expositions on the development of this and other theories discussed above are available in other chapters (see Thomson & Heffernan, 2021). This chapter narrows the discussion to two educational leadership models: distributed leadership and instructional leadership.

Instructional leadership

This model of leadership was influenced by school improvement research focusing on the qualities of effective school principals (see Eacott & Niesche, 2021 for thorough analysis). These principals were found to be more concern with teaching and learning programmes in their schools (Spillane & Kenny, 2012). Therefore, the role of instructional leader is simply to define the school mission by outlining and communicating school’s goals. Second, manage instructional programmes by coordinating the curriculum, supervising and assessing the instruction, and monitoring student progress. Third, promote learning culture by providing opportunities for staff professional development, incentives for teacher and learning, and implementing academic standards (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). This suggests that instructional leaders are responsible for oversight of multifaceted tasks related to teaching and learning. It is however argued that such leaders cannot effectively attend to both time-consuming bureaucratic responsibilities and comprehensive teaching and learning tasks (Eacott & Niesche

2021). It is also argued that school heads do probably have less knowledge and skills than a subject teacher in a given curriculum area (Cuban, 1988). This calls for urgent need for the distribution of leadership role in schools.

Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership shifts the role of leaders from leading teaching and learning tasks to facilitating collective work of practitioners at and around their schools (Hargreaves & Connor, 2018). The main role of leaders is, Hargreaves and Connor (2018) argue, the development of positive social relationships. This form of social relationship emphasises the need to create a collaborative structure where teachers can coordinate their practice to achieve shared goals. To achieve this shared goal, the school leader is required to empower teachers and other staff to work in teams, assign functional roles to teacher and other staff in running the school, and change the school to become learning organisation (Kools & Stoll, 2016). Learning organisations provide teachers and other staff with continuous learning opportunities to improve their practices (Harris & Jones, 2018). In this interpretation, a school leadership is not rested on one individual but distributed or shared with a team. The team can comprise the school leader, his deputies, teachers and other staff, and students in the school. The school also builds connection with communities (Kools et al., 2020). The communities include parents and other resources that the schools can utilised to improve student learning. This interpretation of school leadership is adopted in this chapter.

The chapter now turns to some empirical research about the principal leadership in order to contextualise and affirm the focus of this chapter.

Review of empirical evidence

There is a number of research that examined school leadership from different perspectives. Some of these studies focused on the key role of school leadership while other research pay greater attention on school leadership policies (DeMatthews, 2021; Gurr, Longmuir & Reed, 2021; University of Nottingham, 2015; Bolivar, Lopez & Murillo, 2013).

In their analysis of leadership in context, Bolívar, Lopez and Murillo (2013) noted two types of schools: strong and weak organisations. In the latter school, teachers work independently in their classroom. In the former school, school cohesion and collaboration, distributed leadership, and professional learning communities are favoured and practised. School leadership is, they suggests, key to ‘creating the institutional conditions that promote the effectiveness of schools as organisations’ (p. 20). They conclude that the effects of leadership depend on several factors. These include school leadership practices.

School leadership practices in 25 national contexts was analysed by an international project (see University of Nottingham, 2015). The project identified successful school principals, principals in schools that underperform and principal identities. The research concludes that ‘regardless of country, culture and socio-economic context, successful principals attend, with their teachers, to the broad moral, social and ethical issues in educating pupils as well as achieving excellent student results in academic tests and examinations’ (ibid, p. 3). Though this project exemplified the qualities and strategies of successful school leaders in primary and secondary schools in different socio-economic circumstances in different contexts, there was a lack of evidence, in some of the case studies (e.g., Jacobson & Johnson, 2011), of leadership practices associated with development of inclusive schools that accommodates both students without and with disabilities.

DeMatthews (2021) reports one such attempt at two elementary schools in the US, where the leadership practices of the two principals developed effective inclusive schools. The leadership practices include creating a culture of change-oriented collaboration, planning and evaluating, building capacity and developing/revising school plans. The principals also highlight the importance of collaborative inquiry, sharing of information, and challenges associated with school transformation. The research identified not only the features which support, but also those that hinder the creation of these inclusive practices. The research is also important in relation to the different methods used to collect, triangulate, and verify data. However, important stakeholder voices - of students and their families – as acknowledged by DeMatthews (2021) are absent.

The analysis of the views of students, and their families, and other people working within and around schools in order to develop understanding of how principals create effective inclusive schools is also reported in Gurr, Longmuir and Reed (2021). Their research findings show how the principals create a school connection with parents and other communities to foster inclusive values in their respective schools. The values and vision developed in Patron Saint Catholic Primary School reflect Catholic identity - compassion, understanding and supporting all. Commitment to equity and diversity, establishing stable relationships and student-centred learning are the core values and programmes developed in, a self-identified progressive and innovative, Fairview High School. The principals succeeded in transforming their schools not only because their values, visions, and programmes were aligned with that of parents and communities but also the involvement of parents in culture of thinking, inquiry to learning, and privileging student voice and agency. For example, parents are engaged with discussions on issues related to students learning. Staff are also allocated time to engage in professional learning to explore practices in their schools. Equally, students are empowered to engage in 'progressive social activities' or to explore features of their school and learning. Although this research is limited by the nature of bounded, small number, qualitative case studies, it is interesting how the schools organised students and staff into teams and the unique roles to positional and functional leaders – features of inclusive education leadership reported in Kugelman and Ainscow (2004).

They examined types of leadership practice that foster inclusion in schools in England, Portugal and the United States. This means the schools represents very different countries though. 'Each [of the schools] serves a culturally and linguistically diverse population of students and educates children with disabilities and other special educational needs in general education classrooms alongside their peers' (p.135). In addition to these attributes of their students, the schools also shared common organisational features related to inclusive education and leadership. These organisational features which other studies described (see DeMatthews, 2021; Gurr, Longmuir & Reed, 2021; University of Nottingham, 2015; Bolivar, Lopez & Murillo, 2013) and the detail discussion will not be repeated in this paragraph. The paragraph summarises the shared and unique features of leadership demonstrated by positional and functional leaders in inclusive schools.

Positional leaders are, as evidenced by Kugelman and Ainscow (2004), responsible for the operation of their schools. They are referred to as headteacher, principal, and president. They, alongside their deputy or vice, are 'responsible for organising and managing their schools and held accountable by centralised, external management systems for the performance of the staff and students' (p.139).

Specifically, positional leaders facilitate collaborative practices associated with effective inclusive schools (DeMatthews, 2021; Gurr, Longmuir & Reed, 2021; University of Nottingham, 2015; Bolivar, Lopez & Murillo, 2013). Such leaders adopt management structures that encourage social interaction and participation among students and staff. Staff are also given some responsibility for daily operation of their schools (Gurr, Longmuir & Reed, 2021). They organise team meetings, support one another in classrooms, manage staff development programmes, and represent their colleagues at school boards, and/or mentor new staff (Kugelman & Ainscow, 2004). They also take a specific responsibility for oversight of student learning and well-being, curriculum development, school policy committee, and school inclusion project (Nottingham, 2015). This clearly shows a distribution of functional leadership among staff. Although it seems that some staff take more specific management roles and responsibilities, all of them share the inclusive values and vision of their positional leaders (DeMatthews, 2021).

This chapter looks for and presents leadership practices found in the researched school in the UK. Before doing that, the methodology utilised in the research is briefly described below.

Methodology

This chapter presents data which forms part of a study exploring school practices in St. Arnold primary school. This primary school, which was established in 1844, has a strong commitment to multi-agency working. The catchment area of the school is a well-established ethnic minority community, with a number of race heritages that include Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Indian, Chinese, African and also a number with dual heritage. Thus, the school's intake is culturally diverse. On roll, the school has almost three hundred and sixty (360) students, allocated in twelve classrooms. There are mixed age groups in all classes except one nursery and one reception class. The attainment of the children on entry to the nursery is just below that expected of children aged three. About one third of the students have English as an additional Language, which is a very high proportion for primary schools nationally. There are few refugee children. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals (at about 35%) is above the average for schools nationally. And the proportion of children with special educational needs is in line with the national average and there are only four students with a statement of special educational need. Most of their needs relate to moderate learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural problems. Student mobility is slightly above the average for schools nationally (Ofsted, 2003). At the time of this research there were twenty-nine (29) classroom teachers and teaching assistants, including the headteacher and three assistant heads (who form the Leadership Team). It should be re-stated again, the premise of this study is to see how school practices promote inclusion in this school.

Again, the data presented in this chapter draws on the interview with the headteacher of the school, Mr Beard - Pseudonyms are used for the school and headteacher. Mr Beard taught in primary schools for many years and was a deputy headteacher in three schools in Stockport before he assumed the headship of St. Arnold school in 1990. He also served as head of 'Card Kendrick Unit', a district team responsible for observing and assisting children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. He was also an active member of 'Joint Children's Unit' and 'Ward Coordination Group', which bring together various services that are available to children and families in this part of the city of Manchester. The headteacher was interviewed using a semi-structured format focussed on school practices that support inclusion in the school. He shared his perspectives of school conditions and the data collected was analysed by reading the interview transcript many times, highlighting what was considered important – emerging and relevant themes. These were reviewed by the headteacher who also responded to my

interpretations and transcription of the interview. Triangulation between headteacher interview and fieldnotes was used to check and re-check data. To inform this chapter, further analysis of the interview transcript was done to consider themes specific to this chapter. From the headteacher's responses, recurring inclusive school practices emerged and are presented in the next section.

Inclusive school practices

As state above this chapter only presents themes that emerge from the interview with the headteacher of St. Arnold primary school. The school has developed some practices that help to promote inclusion. The school practice, as identified in the interview, involve creation of some organisational structures explained below.

Shared leadership in the school

In reference to this structure, Mr. Beard says:

‘...I will probably say we work in a dispersed leadership pattern. What I mean by dispersed leadership is the fact that for some years I have not had a deputy. We have three assistant headteachers, who are the representatives of each part of the school. They work closely with me in what we call our Leadership Team, and they very much share the leadership and management roles in the school...’ (Headteacher Interview, 22/05/06).

He went on, commenting on the current teachers' preparedness to take on leadership roles at departmental levels to bring together the 'best team for the job':

‘we divided the school into teams and as well as the assistant heads, the Foundation team, the key stage 1 team, the lower and upper key stages 2 teams, each has a team leader with management responsibility, and we met every other week in the form of what we call Senior Management Team, that is where we bring up the day-to-day management issues of the school, and I would expect those team leaders to act as departmental leaders and ensure quality in their teams.’ (Ibid).

When asked whether he feels there is a clear understanding by the staff of these processes within the school, he answered:

‘... I am confident all those people know their roles. For example, regarding leadership teams, some few years ago we looked at the headteacher's role and looked at various aspects of it and decided how it was going to be delegated. So, we said, with mutual understanding, who is going to take a lead on the development and financial leadership roles, one of my assistants takes the lead on the coordination of development planning, and another on school improvement fund and the management of it’(Ibid).

It can be inferred from the above that leadership in the school is accepted as a function to which many staff contribute, rather than a set of responsibilities vested in a small number of individuals. It also seems that the development of this leadership practice, particularly among teachers is unlikely to occur without some form of learning that provides a stimulus to reflect on the existing skills, experiences and current understandings of how inclusive classrooms can be created. This leads us to the second management structure - staff professional learning.

Learning culture in the school

In this regard, it was interesting to know how new ways of learning are generated and shared in the school. Describing the areas of learning culture in the school, Mr Beard said:

‘Well, we are not practising the traditional IN-SET of sending people to courses, but within the school, we are helping people to develop their own expertise’ (Ibid).

He elaborated:

‘Well, we have a staff meeting every Monday; actually we are having it tonight (Monday). It is about teaching and assessment. It is more about effective questioning for the children and organising the questions for them....and in fact they [the meeting days] are booked mostly in advance by the various coordinators, who are subjects of our school improvement plan this year...We adopted a model whereby we have a staff meeting with professional inputs every other week, and then the intervening week with the staff in their teams, we discuss how the implementation of the new approach, whatever it is, will be approached.’(Ibid)

In addition:

‘... we have a love of offering support for each other...’ (Ibid)

This would seem to suggest that this ‘love for support’ would be manifested in some form of collaboration among staff. This, as perceived, means staff need to share practice and engage in teamwork. It seems, then what is needed is a more inclusive, collaborative approach to planning, now that the school’s leadership style and professional learning culture for improvement have been re-established.

School improvement plan and teams

One way of exploring such processes was through the way the school prioritises its areas for improvement, and the way the planned activities are implemented in the school. Explaining on this, Beard said:

‘.....each year we tried to prioritise a limited number of areas which we address within the following twelve months of our school improvement plan. Some of these would be not so much involved with teaching. For example, this year we set a priority on attendance and punctuality, but sometimes it might be on curriculum, and at another it might be on improving pupils’ writing skills, for example, over a year and we will look at training opportunities in that areas...’

‘Sometimes during the trainings, we use resources from the local authority and in most times the coordinators always ask me if they can have a lead in the staff meeting, which they are very keen to do that for their subjects...So the programmes are devised according to priorities of the school improvement plan... The actual sessions themselves, the Mondays and the training days are at the hands of my colleagues, actually plan them and delivered them, so tonight one of my assistant heads, who is one of our literacy coordinators will be leading the meeting, sometimes it will be outsiders’ (Ibid).

As noted, in their collaborations, there has been an emphasis on what the school identified as its priorities, for example, improving attendance and with teachers in subjects groups and across departments, sharing their expertise on how to bring improvement in this area. Improvement in this regard 'helps to keep children [especially those with challenging background] at the school, which is a quite achievement for the group' (Headteacher Conversation, fieldnote, 6/10/06). This clearly points to what the school should be doing in collaboration with parents and the community to develop the school so that it sees its priorities in terms of overcoming student challenges and improving learning in general.

School connection with communities

In the words of the headteacher, both parents and the wider community are also involved in the school in a number of ways. For example, the school had 'a very effective parents/teachers association (PTA) that organises all sorts of social events [like excursions and visits exchange] for kids...' (Headteacher Interview, 22/05/06). In terms of involvement of the community, the school had a good relationship with its local Church, St. Arnold's Anglican Church, and the 'link we have with the church, of course, brings great benefit to us and our students' (Ibid). One of the benefits was in form of utilising the Church as a resource for teaching and learning.

It follows from the above that the school involved many of those with a stake in its operations. Those with a stake in the school include the community, parents, teachers, and students. The data showed some community resources are known and drawn by the school, and parents' skills are utilised for improving the well-being of the children. But what was more interested was to see how teachers are supporting all students in their classes. The focus here was on how active participation by children, including those with SEN, is encouraged in the school

School response to SEN children

This school, Mr. Beard said, has developed an inclusion focus on identifying children with moderate learning difficulties that might be effectively included in the mainstream classrooms.

'I think already, since a couple years ago we are pretty good at dealing with special needs as a cluster within the school. The way we approach this, we take some children transferring them in from the school for children with moderate learning difficulties. We aim to observe them and make sure that they are assimilated into the school...but this is only the extension of the existing strategies we have, which involves something you are aware of, differentiation and devising specific programmes for most children. You should be aware that we are now taking children into the Barrier Free Partnerships from Lancastrian school, and the two children [Simon & Louis] we have taken so far, they broaden our approach to teaching children with SEN' (Ibid).

Although this quote clarifies the school strategies of supporting children with special needs. But it does not clarify who takes the responsibility for children with SEN in the classrooms. In spite of this, the data identified what seem common features of schools where inclusion has succeeded. These features as explored in the data are interrelated. The data described the process of developing a shared framework for improving practice with well-defined priorities. The system was designed specifically to promote inclusion, and all staff are involved. Staff training that enhances skills, knowledge and experiences is seen as having positive benefits for the school. Ownership by the whole school community, including parents, is viewed as critical to success. Building upon this, the data described the importance of defining professional roles

within school to ensure that all take some responsibility for the management of the school and the children.

Discussion

This section discusses leadership practices found in an inclusive school in the UK. The practices focus on school structures that can bring about improvement in schools. In this case study, the headteacher's views serve as a means of getting a rounded picture of the structures he puts in place to transform his school. His views on those structures are discussed below.

Distributed Leadership & Team Planning

It is argued that school leadership is key to 'creating the institutional conditions that promote the effectiveness of schools as organizations' (Bolívar, Lopez and Murillo, 2013: 20). They went on arguing that the effects of leadership depend on several factors. These include school plans and leadership practices. One such practice is the distribution of authority by school leaders. In other words, successful school leaders encourage staff at a variety of levels to take on leadership roles (Kugelman & Ainscow, 2004).

Orientation towards such leadership practice was evident in the case study school. The headteacher and his three assistants held official positions of responsibility for the operation of the school. Despite holding this time-consuming bureaucratic position, they created and supported non-hierarchical organisational structures in running the school. Many individuals are involved in key decisions and that reflects the values and beliefs central to improvement in the school. For example, as the headteacher explained, they divided the school into different teams. The management team consists of leaders of all key stages in the school. The team leaders met with the headteacher every Monday of the week to share their knowledge, skills, and experiences on the day-to-day issues of the school and each 'leader was expected to act in the same way in his department'. Within departments, each member had a role and a clear responsibility; some teachers, in addition to their subject teaching, took on other responsibilities within the school. For example, a particular teacher was the International School Co-ordinator, another teacher was responsible for ICT and all the computers in the school and the other was leading the coordination of History and Geography teaching (see Kurawa, 2010). These are examples of how leadership was distributed in the school.

The example also showed that the headteacher oriented the staff to work closely with him and to share the positional and functional roles in the school. Orientation in this way brings a new experience to teachers, especially those who are used to working only in their classroom (Nottingham, 2015). This report suggests that such teachers may experience shared leadership and responsibility of planning a curriculum for all the children. One curriculum area that staff, at the case study school, was collaboratively planning to improve was how to use drama to teach History, Literacy and Religious Education lessons so as to get children to do a lot of activities in these subjects, and that makes it more interesting to the children. Looking at the school in this way, its orientation can be described as distributed leadership though. It is clear from those who describe this leadership that its success depends ultimately upon reconceptualisation of the nature and delivery system for adult professional learning ((Harris & Jones, 2018)). This leads to the discussion on staff capacity building.

Building capacity of staff

Effective schools are learning organisations, with teachers and other staff continuing to be learners, keeping up-to-date with their subjects, responsibilities and with advances in understanding about inclusive practices (DeMatthews, 2021). Though conventional In-service

teacher training is the pivot for interrupting and updating teacher thinking to improve learning of all children, successful staff professional development addresses contextual matters to create the conditions that facilitate the learning of adults (Kools et al., 2000). Such learning happens when staff are allocated time to collect data about learning and teaching, observe teaching in classroom, and use that evidence to reflect and improve practice in their schools (Gurr, Longmuir & Reed, 2021). As shown in the preceding section, Mondays and the five teacher training days are devoted for staff reflections, inquiry to learning and planning for the overall learning environment. This involved, as cited above, looking on how to use Drama to teach History, Literacy, and Religious Education. This shows how the school takes one curriculum area and turns it perhaps into appropriate activities, materials, and class arrangements. These appropriate activities, materials, and class arrangement are perhaps design to take due account of children differing abilities, needs, and learning style. In this way, it can be suggested that staff professional learning in the school is associated with inclusive school practice. This, in effect, will provide on-going support and encouragement for individual teachers and other staff to make positive changes for effective practice (DeMatthews, 2021).

It is argued that traditional in-service training is insufficient to enable the school to develop, wider perspectives on the planning for whole school and, possible responses to students' individual needs. This study revealed that conventional in-service training was one of the ways for staff professional development in the school. All teachers, particularly subjects' co-ordinators were at various times sent for a course by the school. One said: '...next month I will be on course to see how we can use computers to help children with special educational needs,' another teacher said: 'we sometimes go on courses delivered by the LEA'. However, the headteacher cautioned: '...we send people on courses as they became available as long they met their needs, and needs of the school based on the school improvement plan'.

It is assumed that the outcomes of the staff professional learning would be trialled in the classrooms. No evidence was found on the experimentation in the classroom of what was planned during staff learning activities. Does this suggest that the school is less concerned with enquiry and reflection? Perhaps not, indeed, the school pays attention to certain ways of engaging with evidence that seems to be helpful in encouraging critical discussion during staff professional learning. The study revealed that the school has carried out a number of questionnaire surveys soliciting parents' views and focus group interviews with students. For example, this forms part of the school's annual self-evaluation, where they critically discuss the responses and expressions made by the various stake-holder groups. These responses and expressions, it can be argued, will support teachers toward engaging in questioning of their actions and how the actions are connected to their personal beliefs about teaching and learning. This natural process of self-evaluation can help teachers see things in new ways, leading in turn to growth as professionals. Of course, this resonates with what Gurr, Longmuir and Reed (2021) described as a culture of thinking and inquiry to learning. Nonetheless, this new culture requires the involvement of stakeholder groups in the learning processes.

Involvement of Stake-holder Groups facilitating response to diverse needs

Kools et al. (2020) emphasised the importance of building connection between school and communities around the school. The communities include parents and other resources that the schools can utilised to improve student learning

It is evident from the interview with the headteacher that the school had developed multi-agency relationships and advisory groups consisting of members from social and health services, St. Arnold Anglican Church, Ward Co-ordination Group, 'Card Kendrick Unit' and

with members of the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA). For example, the PTA is involved in planning and organisation of concert and sport events for kids. The school was also using its local church as a resource for teaching religious education. The reciprocal support the school receive from 'Barrier Free Partnerships' with the Lancastrian school has been in operation for some time and is flourishing. The development of appropriate support for children with Special Educational Needs is now regarded as a distinct possibility by many staff and parents. The LEA also provides the school with support through teacher consultants and other provisions.

The involvement of non-teaching staff, especially teaching assistants and SENCO, in the coordination of learning process can also be described as an inclusive practice in the school. Indeed, teaching assistants, subject teachers and SENCO work together to plan the activities for those perceived as having special educational needs: 'Sometimes Stacey [the SENCO] calls in here because she works with the two children with special needs, and I designed the tasks which she teaches them [SEN children]'.

Involvement of this specialist and other stake-holder groups in the planning and decision-making processes in the school are co-ordinated by positional and functional leadership teams. The data revealed that these teams were organised in ways that facilitate interaction and participation among staff within departments and centrally. Centrally, the headteacher, his three assistants and departmental leaders, including the SENCO, oversee the day-to-day running of the school. In departments, leadership is distributed among the members, such as curriculum co-ordination and assisting others with instruction and classroom management.

It seems that the school adopts a 'graduated response' to children with SEN. The response ranges from curriculum differentiation to an Individual Educational Plan, which is cooperatively planned by the Special Educational Need Co-ordinator (SENCO), classroom teacher and others involved in the child's education. This provision for children with SEN in England relates to, as described in the 1997 Green Paper, integration. Integration takes three different forms. The first one is locational integration, which refers to physical location and exists where special classes are located in mainstream schools or a special school is located on the site of a mainstream school. The second is social integration, which refers to social interchange between children with SEN and others and includes eating, playing and engaging in out-of-classroom activities together. The last one is functional integration, which takes the form of joint participation in educational programmes which have been carefully planned to ensure that all the children benefit (Fredrickson & Cline, 2002:70-71). The views expressed by the headteacher indicated that SEN children are not enjoying functional integration or simply inclusion. Inclusion differs from integration. The latter is about making restricted educational modifications for children with SEN in schools which themselves change to a limited extent overall. The former aims at reorganising schools so as to meet the learning needs of all children (Ainscow, 1999). It is important to clarify the difference between the two, as, in practice, many people use them interchangeably.

Conclusion

It follows from the literature that inclusion is about educating pupils, irrespective of their physical conditions or social circumstances, as well as achieving excellent student results in academic tests and examinations' (Nottingham University, 2015: p. 3). This requires leadership that creates school practices that promote both equity and excellence (Bolívar, Lopez and Murillo, 2013). This study found that the headteacher has developed school practices which were characteristically collaborative. The study also showed that collaboration in the school was a form of practice in which teachers and other staff continue to be learners (Kools et al.,

2000). Central to this process was the commitment by staff in the school collecting and interpreting responses of parents and students about teaching and learning and using the findings to transform their school. Interestingly, the data showed that leading this process of improving children's learning is shared throughout the school. For example, some staff lead meetings during planning and decision-making processes, and others lead during in-service activities. A few more oversee the co-ordination of subjects, SEN, and planning and organisation of social activities for the children. In this way, the process would produce an overall enhancement in participation among not only those within the school, but also other stake-holder groups within the community.

However, this data need to be considered with caution because the study was carried out in one school. A reasonable number of mainstream schools with SEN children would have possibly provided more corroborated evidence for the findings. However, these findings that were derived through the research for the particular school can possibly further thinking in other schools with similar situations.

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