Leadership of teaching and learning: closing the gap

John West-Burnham, September 2010
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1. Summary

Perhaps the most important and most challenging aspect of leadership in schools is the imperative to secure excellence and equity. For leaders in the classroom, middle leaders and school leaders ensuring the highest possible level of performance for all has to be the central imperative. In the most effective schools (and the most effective educational systems), excellence is available to all. In the least effective schools and systems, there is a tail of underachievement. The dominant factor in effective school leadership has to be shortening the tail or, more appropriately, closing the gap between levels of achievement so as to raise standards for all.

Leadership for learning and teaching focuses and extends what is already known about effective school leadership in general and learning-centred approaches in particular. Effective teaching and learning are best defined as the conscious selection from a range of strategies of the particular approach most appropriate to the needs of the learner. The specific components of learning-centred leadership may be summarised as:

1. Values that focus on enhancing personal achievement and wellbeing for all
2. A commitment to raising standards by closing the gap
3. Leadership that sees the quality of teaching and learning as its core purpose
4. Leadership that is widely distributed across the school community and serves as a collective resource
5. Strategies to create a broad community of parents and agencies to support learning
6. Ensuring that the implementation of policies is a process focused on the needs of individuals

These leadership principles have to be underpinned by management strategies that focus on creating a management infrastructure to minimise within-school variation, enable student voice, develop school systems and structures and embed teaching and learning strategies into consistent practice across the whole school and over time.

Closing the gap is a complex process; this resource seeks to help school leaders identify, address and engage with the factors that will close the gap.
2. Introduction

This resource starts from a very simple premise – the core purpose and business of schools is the quality of teaching and learning that enables children and young people to achieve. In his first major speech after taking office, delivered at the National College’s annual conference 2010, the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, stated:

[The ethical imperative of our education policy is quite simply to make opportunity more equal. We have to overcome the deep, historically entrenched factors which keep so many in poverty, which deprive so many of the chance to shape their own destiny, which have made us the sick man of Europe when it comes to social mobility. It is a unique sadness of our times that we have one of the most stratified and segregated school systems in the developed world. We know, from Leon Feinstein’s work, that low-ability children from rich families overtake high-ability children from poor families during primary school. And the gap grows as the children get older. A child eligible for free school meals is half as likely to achieve five or more GCSEs at grade A*-C, including English and maths, than a child from a wealthier background. By 18 the gap is vast. In the most recent year for which we have data, out of 80,000 young people eligible for free school meals, just 45 made it to Oxbridge. That’s fewer than some private schools manage by themselves. We are clearly, as a nation, still wasting talent on a scale which is scandalous. It is a moral failure, an affront against social justice which we have to put right.]

Gove, 2010

In a speech to the Reform Conference on 1 July 2010, Nick Gibb, Minister of State for Schools stated that:

Government has a responsibility to ensure high standards; schools have a responsibility to promote an ethos of excellence and aspiration with opportunities for extra-curricular activities and sport. But it is the responsibility of pupils and their parents to ensure that their behaviour at school is of a standard that delivers a safe and happy environment in which children can concentrate and learn.

Gibb, 2010
He went on to argue:

*Children who come from knowledge- and education-rich backgrounds start school with an in-built advantage over those who do not. If the school then fails to make up the knowledge deficit, those divisions widen still further.*

*Leon Feinstein’s research has shown that low-ability children from wealthy backgrounds often overtake and outperform more able children from poorer backgrounds by age 5, with the differences between children’s cognitive development related to parental social status emerging as early as 22 months.*

Gibb, 2010

E D Hirsch writes brilliantly about the importance of knowledge gained early on. He says, ‘Just as it takes money to make money, it takes knowledge to make knowledge.’

He goes onto say:

*Those children who possess the intellectual capital when they first arrive at school have the mental scaffolding and Velcro to gain still more knowledge. But those children who arrive at school lacking the relevant experience and vocabulary – they see not [and] neither do they understand.*

Hirsch

Which is why he believes, as I do, that: ‘It is the duty of schools to provide each child with the knowledge and skills requisite for academic progress – regardless of home background’.

Every school leader is confronted on a regular basis by the reality of inconsistency across the school. This may be minor, alternative interpretations of school uniform, or it may explain the school’s failure to improve, for example the variation in performance between departments. Variation is the enemy of improvement, and eliminating variation is the greatest challenge in securing entitlement and consistent quality of experience. This has proved to be one of the greatest challenges in securing school improvement and raising standards:

*According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), variation in performance within schools is four times as great as variation in performance between schools. The result is that the UK has one of the biggest class divides in education in the industrial world.*

*In comprehensive school systems, within-school variation in pupil attainment seems to be much greater than between-school variation...a recent DfES study of 2003 data showed that in value-added terms, Key Stage 2 (KS2) within-school variation is five times greater than between-school variance, for KS3 it’s 11 times greater and for KS4 it’s 14 times greater.*

NCSL, 2005:3

The biggest single variable (30 per cent) that explains within-school variation is teachers – teaching strategies, professional characteristics and classroom climate explain the often-disturbing variation within schools.
Three broad conclusions seem to emerge from the research analysing the factors influencing student learning. First, student background characteristics - especially social, economic and cultural background – frequently emerge as the most important source of variation in student achievement... Second, school-related factors, which are more open to policy influence, explain a smaller part of the variations in student learning than student characteristics. Third, among school-level variables, the factors that are closest to student learning, such as teacher quality and classroom practices, tend to have the strongest impact on student achievement.

Pont et al, 2008:33

Effective school leadership has always sought to focus on the needs of every learner and all teachers are intuitively aware of the impact that engagement with the individual pupil or student in response to her or his needs can have. Equally, it is essential to have a portfolio of teaching and learning strategies that meets the needs of a wide range of students and responds to contextual and accountability issues. It is only with an unremitting focus on the factors that are closest to student learning that schools can be confident of making a difference by taking control of the things they can actually control.

Figure 1 shows the variables that will inform a school’s ability to close the gap in terms of the areas where it has the greatest potential impact and leverage. Consistently high-quality teaching and learning strategies are the area of greatest potential significance. Such strategies require a management infrastructure to support work in the classroom, which in turn are contingent on a culture and ethos created by effective leadership. There is no doubt whatsoever that engagement with families and enhancing the quality of family life will have an enormous impact on educational outcomes. Equally, developing effective communities and seeking to redress the negative impact of poverty are strategies that will help to close the gap. In some contexts, the school will be a very significant agent in this respect. However, the capacity of a school to affect broad social issues is generally less than its potential to ensure high-quality teaching and learning.

Figure 1: Variables affecting a school’s ability to close the achievement gap
Focusing on teaching and learning in response to the needs of learners is an opportunity to combine policy and professional imperatives. It offers a portfolio of strategies that relate directly to the imperatives of raising standards and securing equity, as well as tangible opportunities to address individual wellbeing, progress and achievement. At the same time, a focus on teaching and learning provides alternative strategies to raise attainment, secure performance and sustain school improvement, and offers a systematic response to the overarching issue of creating a school experience that prepares young people for life in the 21st century. It is also worth stressing that bespoke approaches are part of the new agenda in the management of all public services and represent one of the greatest challenges to our thinking about the nature of the relationship between provider and client.

Part 3 of this resource explores the components of a strategy to close the gap. The rest of this resource summarises the four elements in any school’s approach to rethinking approaches to teaching and learning:

- components of effective teaching and learning (part 4)
- management infrastructure needed to support learning strategies (part 5)
- relevant leadership strategies (part 6)
- strategies to support change (part 7)

Each section concludes with a question or questions designed to support personal reflection and discussion and there is a diagnostic review in section 8. The review is designed to help you relate the principles and evidence presented in this resource to your own context as a leader and to begin to develop strategies that enhance the quality of teaching and learning so as to close the gap as is appropriate in your context.

**Review and reflection**

What are the key variables informing the achievement of every pupil in your school?

Is there a gap in your school’s performance? How significant is it and what causes it?

What strategies have you used that have made a difference to the success of individual pupils and the overall performance of the school?

Where have you had the greatest impact as a teacher and leader?

What are the implications of this discussion for self (you as a leader), school (the effectiveness of your school) and system (broader local and national issues)?
3. Strategies for closing the gap

There are many outcomes supporting the movement towards emphasising the quality of teaching and learning as the central function of school leadership and management:

- a powerful intervention strategy to enhance individual achievement and attainment
- a vehicle to focus school improvement strategies and minimise variation
- a powerful means of working towards closing the gap
- a focused policy to help secure achievement and attainment for every child, inspire their enjoyment of learning and enhance personal wellbeing
- a means to secure and embed the entitlement of every pupil to effective teaching and learning
- a strategy to overcome social disadvantage

There is a need to recognise the moral dimension of closing the gap in the quality of learning. It is not just another initiative with a range of techniques. It is perhaps best seen as a powerful opportunity to focus on the core purpose of schools - the quality of the learning of every individual - by developing a direct link between principle and practice.

Focusing on closing the gap can also be seen as a powerful strategy to address one of the most taxing issues in education in England - the ratio of excellence to equity. As a system we are very good at excellence, but we are less confident about equity. An explicit focus on closing the gap offers a direct means of sustaining excellence and moving towards equity through an explicit and highly systematic strategy which focuses a school’s leadership and management energies and resources on the core purpose of educational achievement for all.

In order to secure effective teaching and learning, there is a need to develop a model that shows how the different components of school management and leadership can be seen in an integrated and interdependent approach. The model in Figure 2 shows closing the gap by focusing on teaching and learning at the centre of any strategy and the classroom experience as the pivotal point of every dimension of the school’s work. The model also reflects the range of interdependent variables that will operate in any given school. It is important to stress that not all of these variables apply equally to all situations. One of the purposes of this resource is to give you an opportunity to identify those aspects of your school’s approach that are working well and are effective and those that require intervention and development.
Each of the factors identified in Figure 2 is considered in detail in the subsequent sections of this resource. However, it is most important to stress at this stage that Figure 2 should be seen as purely symbolic. It cannot reflect the complexity of the interaction between each of these elements, in particular the varying degrees of significance of each element for individual schools. The diagnostic review in section 8 of this resource may help to clarify, focus and prioritise the dominant issues facing your own school. Equally, many of the judgements associated with this area will, inevitably, be subjective and attention needs to be paid to the evidence base for conclusions drawn.

**Figure 2: Leading change**
The one factor that is common is the issue of change and innovation; securing closing the gap will, for the majority of schools, require some degree of change. Indeed it can be argued that the leadership of effective teaching and learning is a continuous process of change, as is all learning. In order to support the review and analysis involved in approaching closing the gap, the relationship of each component of Figure 2 is outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1:**

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It is, of course, incorrect to draw an absolute divide between management and leadership – they have to be in a symbiotic relationship. However, it may be helpful to distinguish between those activities that are essentially operational and need to be embedded in the daily life and practice of the school and those that are primarily concerned with broader, strategic issues.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of leadership in enabling effective teaching and learning. Leadership that is focused on learning has the greatest impact on performance and achievement. Leadership for learning can be seen as having three specific components: developing a strategic approach, managing the operational issues and creating a culture that reinforces a focus on teaching and learning.

The strategic approach involves two main leadership activities; first, developing scenarios with staff and governors that bring the possibilities of alternative approaches to learning to life. Second, school leaders will need to link the implementation of the various components of closing the gap with school improvement strategies and long-term planning.

The operational issues are concerned with the incremental movement of the school towards embedding the working practices associated with closing the gap into roles, structures, policies and strategies. An example of this would be the way that many schools have moved their pastoral systems into a mentoring approach with clear consequences for the role of teachers and other adults, the deployment of time to support students and the provision of support and training.
The most challenging aspect for school leaders will be the change of culture required in some schools to make highly effective learning a secure entitlement for all learners and to ensure consistently high-quality provision. The work that most schools have done on equity and inclusion is an obvious example of changing the values that schools work by, the language that they use and the criteria that they employ in review and evaluation. There is very powerful evidence that school leaders have the greatest impact on school culture through the shared vocabulary they develop, use and reinforce, as well as through their modelling of appropriate behaviours and by their interventions to support and embed new ways of working. Leaders who focus on vision and values are most likely to bring about a fundamental change in culture and working practices. The issues around enabling and securing effective learning and teaching are summarised in Ofsted’s publication *20 outstanding primary schools excelling against the odds in challenging circumstances* (2009).

The approaches illustrated by the schools in their journey from good (or worse) to outstanding (or better) differ in their details but have a number of common features. They are all well-thought-out, implemented and consistently applied. They make the best use of staff expertise. They set out to give children a worthwhile experience at school in a structured, safe and interesting environment. The following principles and priorities emerge clearly, again and again:

- Restore order and calm so that teaching and learning can take place.
- Ensure that high expectations are set and that everyone – pupils, parents, staff and governors – is clear what those are.
- Get the pupils and parents involved, engaged and committed so that they cannot later complain that they ‘did not know’.
- Lead by example; demonstrate the behaviours you expect of others and show that you are prepared to do anything you might ask of them.
- Set and demonstrate high standards for teaching and learning.
- Look early on at the curriculum, the school day and pupils’ experiences of school.
- Monitor and evaluate every aspect of the school’s performance.

Above all:

- Gauge the ability of staff to adopt consistent approaches: in teaching and learning, in applying policies – especially relating to behaviour – and in routines and basic practices. As one chair of governors said: ‘Staff need to be aboard the bus’ when the school embarks on its journey of improvement.
The characteristics of outstanding secondary schools have much in common with the primary model:

- They excel at what they do, not just occasionally but for a great proportion of the time.
- They prove constantly that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement, that speaking English as an additional language can support academic success and that schools really can be learning communities.
- They put students first, invest in their staff and nurture their communities.
- They have strong values and high expectations that are applied consistently and never relaxed.
- They fulfil individual potential by providing outstanding teaching, rich opportunities for learning and encouragement and support for each student.
- They are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the educational progress, personal development and wellbeing of every student.
- Their achievements do not happen by chance, but by highly reflective, carefully planned and implemented strategies which serve these schools well in meeting the many challenges that obstruct the path to success.
- They operate with a very high degree of internal consistency.
- They are constantly looking for ways to improve further.
- They have outstanding and well-distributed leadership.

Ofsted, 2009:6

**Review and reflection**

What are the implications of this discussion for self (you as a leader), school (the effectiveness of your school) and system (broader local and national issues)?
4. Teaching, managing and leading to close the gap

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4.1 Self-managing learners

A central feature of any model of effective learning is the focus on building the confidence and capacity of the individual learner – in a sense empowering the learner. This is a fundamental outcome of effective education as it is central to their employability and success in further and higher education. It is all about developing personal responsibility in the learner. This is usually interpreted as:

- giving the learner a sense of their own efficacy and value as a learner
- assisting learners in developing personal skills and strategies to enable self-management and direction
- supporting the development of deep learning approaches
- building a repertoire of learning strategies in order to offer a range of learning options
- developing student skills for further study and employability

There are numerous formulations of the possible components of a learning-to-learn strategy. A generic model would include the following elements:

- self-management, organising time, workload and projects
- developing a sense of personal effectiveness as a learner, using learning styles, developing effective learning behaviours, developing resilience and concentration
- building confidence in literacy, oracy and numeracy
- learning how to research, organise and present data
- developing skills in analysing, explaining, justifying, demonstrating causality and developing a logical argument
- developing confidence in working with others, notably on a one-to-one basis and in small groups
- becoming metacognitive, learning to review and reflect and becoming reflexive as a learner
4.2 Teaching and learning strategies

One way of understanding the key factors in securing effective teaching and learning is to see the work of teachers and leaders in terms of the continuum shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3:

In this model, the first position represents the teacher as sole arbiter, determining what, when and how something is taught. The seventh position would be totally controlled by the learner. Effective learning probably takes place between points two and six, ranging from the highly effective whole-class teaching approach to the classic one-to-one tutorial working on a bespoke learning strategy within a common curriculum and shared educational context. The movement across this spectrum is the art and science of differentiation, responsiveness and professional judgement. What is vital is that the full spectrum is available. Every experienced teacher knows that a particular pedagogic technique will work well with some topics but not others. Equally, some groups of students will be more responsive to some strategies than others. One of the perceived differences between different sectors of the school system is the extent to which students have access to personal support and, with their parents, are active participants in their learning.

There are multiple models available to identify the components of effective teaching and learning. In many respects, the Ofsted criteria provide the most significant models, as set out below, in respect of teaching and learning:

*Teaching is at least good and much is outstanding, with the result that the pupils are making exceptional progress. It is highly effective in inspiring pupils and ensuring that they learn extremely well. Excellent subject knowledge is applied consistently to challenge and inspire pupils. Resources, including new technology, make a marked contribution to the quality of learning, as does the precisely targeted support provided by other adults. Teachers and other adults are acutely aware of their pupils’ capabilities and of their prior learning and understanding, and plan very effectively to build on these. Marking and dialogue between teachers, other adults and pupils are consistently of a very high quality. Pupils understand in detail how to improve their work and are consistently supported in doing so. Teachers systematically and effectively check pupils’ understanding throughout lessons, anticipating where they may need to intervene and doing so with striking impact on the quality of learning.*
The pupils acquire knowledge, develop understanding and learn and practise skills exceptionally well. Pupils demonstrate excellent concentration and are rarely off task, even in extended periods without direction from an adult. They have developed resilience when tackling challenging activities in a range of subjects. Their keenness and commitment to succeed in all aspects of school life and ability to grasp opportunities to extend and improve their learning are exceptional. Progress is at least good in each key stage, key subjects and for different groups and is exemplary in some.

The Ofsted framework provides a very clear model of what outstanding teaching and learning look like; an alternative approach, with many of the same criteria might look like Table 2.

**Table 2:**

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Students are able to relate new learning to prior knowledge and experience.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Students are able to negotiate topics, themes, projects and related modes of learning and assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Teachers scaffold learning through mentoring, facilitation and dialogue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Rubrics are available to support learning strategies and describe behaviour that supports learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Collaborative approaches are used whenever appropriate, eg, shared problem-solving.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Questioning is open: ‘why?’ and ‘how?’ rather than ‘what?’ or ‘when?’</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Lesson planning focuses on student, not teacher, activity.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Standards, outcomes and procedures are explicit and consistent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>The student experience is one of challenge, enquiry and investigation; problem-solving is the dominant learning experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Cognitive strategies are used in a consistent way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>There are opportunities for reflection, review and feedback.</td>
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A very powerful and very important example of all the above elements in practice is the advice of the Primary National Strategy on phonics and early reading.
The report recommends that high-quality phonics work will be most effective when:

- it is part of a broad and rich curriculum that engages children in a range of activities and experiences to develop their speaking and listening skills and phonological awareness
- for most children it starts by the age of five, subject to the professional judgement of teachers and practitioners
- it is multisensory, encompassing simultaneous visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities to enliven core learning
- it is time-limited, such that the great majority of children should be confident readers by the end of Key Stage 1
- it is systematic, that is to say, it follows a carefully planned programme with fidelity, reinforcing and building on previous learning to secure children’s progress
- it is taught discretely and daily at a brisk pace
- there are opportunities to reinforce and apply acquired phonics knowledge and skills across the curriculum and in such activities as shared and guided reading
- children’s progress in developing and applying their phonics knowledge is carefully assessed and monitored

4.3 Curriculum knowledge

Closing the gap requires clarity and focus in terms of the entitlement of every pupil and student in terms of both the content of the curriculum and the means to access, understand and apply that understanding. This means ensuring that every learner has the essential elements of literacy and numeracy. This can then be built on in order to ensure that learners have access to the foundations of the various types of knowledge necessary to academic achievement, social effectiveness and employability.

In practice this might mean:

- securing competence and confidence in literacy and numeracy as the key to the curriculum
- developing access to a broad canon of knowledge to serve as a foundation to academic, social, cultural and moral understanding
- establishing the foundation for deep learning through the development of intellectual skills and dispositions
- encouraging the disciplines of learning: ‘steady and essentially unending progress in the mastery of a skill, craft or body of knowledge’ (Gardner, 2006:40)
- developing the discipline to be a self-managing learner capable of accepting responsibility for one’s own progress
- developing the skills to learn from and with others
- building a portfolio of skills and strategies to ensure effective learning and teaching are translated into academic performance
4.4 Mentoring and support

It is difficult to envisage how any model of effective teaching and learning could work without being underpinned by mentoring and an entitlement to personal support. Mentoring is widely seen as the most effective way to support deep learning, to secure understanding and to bring about personal change. In this context mentoring is usually characterised as being:

- a long-term, one-to-one relationship
- based on high-level interpersonal skills
- focused on supporting the learner’s personal effectiveness
- a blend of challenge and support

Mentoring has a number of specific functions in ensuring that individualised learning works:

- mentoring academic progress and development
- supporting learning-to-learn strategies and review and reflection to enhance learning effectiveness
- advising and guiding on curriculum choices and learning strategies
- reviewing wellbeing, attendance and engagement in learning

In an effective and responsive learning environment, mentoring may well be a dominant activity for teachers and other adults. However, it is important to stress the importance of peer mentoring, ie learners mentoring learners in terms of specific aspects of curriculum content and topics and in providing support at the critical phases of school life.

The work of mentors, counsellors and tutors has traditionally included:

- helping with induction
- monitoring academic progress
- agreeing learning targets term by term
- maintaining expectations
- encouraging ambitions
- arranging additional support
- helping the child make choices
- maintaining contact with parents
- liaising with other professionals and agencies

Review and reflection

What are the implications of this discussion for self (you as a leader), school (the effectiveness of your school) and system (broader local and national issues)?
5. Management to support closing the gap

This section explores the management systems and structures that are necessary to ensure the successful implementation of a strategy to secure effective teaching and learning. It has to be recognised that vision and values are not enough of themselves to secure successful implementation - leadership has to be balanced with effective management to translate principle into practice. The four elements of this section are defined as management and infrastructure topics because they are essentially supportive of the broader leadership and strategic issues of securing equity and excellence. Managing in-school variation and student voice are components of a strategy, not leadership activities in their own right. For example, in most matters student voice does not make policy - it contributes as part of the consultation process. Managing data in its own right would be the ultimate in bureaucracy - it is a leadership tool. Minimising in-school variation is a crucial component of closing the gap - but it will not create excellence and equity of itself. Each of the elements in the management category will vary in significance according to context. This is demonstrated in Figure 4:

Figure 4:

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- Cultures and values
- Learning-centred
- Distributed leadership
- Collaboration
The shaded, diagonal rectangle in Figure 4 is the area of optimum effectiveness where there is recognition of the relationship between management and leadership as essential elements in the same process. The relative balance between them will be determined by the context of the school, so sometimes it may be necessary to focus on the management infrastructure, while in other situations the leadership element may be more significant. The elements in this section are all essentially to do with systems, how the school actually works. They will vary in significance according to the particular approach adopted by the school, ie they will not all be required to work to the same level of significance at the same time.

5.1 Minimising within-school variation

One of the strongest arguments for closing the gap through effective teaching and learning is that it offers one of the most powerful strategies to reduce within-school variation.

The most recent significant studies highlight the following strategies as being the most effective in reducing within-school variation:

- changing school ethos and culture to focus on individual and collective responsibility and accountability for pupil achievement
- developing data-informed school policies and teaching strategies so as to enable evidence-based interventions in classrooms and for individual students. This implies sophisticated data collection and management systems and data-literate staff
- increasing openness and transparency about teaching practices through peer observation and support, middle leaders’ active engagement with classroom practice and increased professional dialogue about effective teaching and learning
- ensuring a more appropriate fit between individual students and their curriculum experience
- developing standard operating procedures, common protocols and shared criteria to ensure the availability of models of best practice, develop a common language and facilitate monitoring and review
- school-based professional development, used to consolidate and embed all the above points, to create a culture of enquiry into professional practice (using action-research models) and support peer mentoring and coaching

Pupil voice is particularly important in this context. Possible applications might include:

- perceptions of effective learning and teaching
- feedback on learning experiences
- lesson observations by students
- involving students in continuing professional development
- surveys focusing on the learning experience
5.2 Student voice

Effective leaders listen. This has been true of effective leadership throughout history and it applies as much to schools as in any other context. However, the right to participate and to be consulted has to be set within the overall strategic accountability of school leaders, and it is not leadership in the same sense. Listening to students is an important element in securing an effective strategy and building consensus, but it is essentially a supportive activity in the context of the school’s long-term improvement strategy.

The case for student participation is powerfully expressed by Johnson (2004):

*The growing view of children as competent, active contributors with a right to a say in those matters that affect them, has led many schools to introduce new approaches to pupil participation. Furthermore, published literature and new research continues to show this increased openness to working with children in school improvement has the potential to make schools both more responsive to their needs and more engaging. Arguably this is particularly important in the key area of teaching and learning. In any event, this increased openness to collaborative working will inevitably bring with it a range of exciting opportunities for adults and children alike.*

Johnson, 2004:3

If closing the gap strategies are to work then they require children and young people to become active partners in their learning. In the most general terms this means being highly responsive to the individual’s entitlement to the curriculum that is most relevant to their needs. In other words, the curriculum becomes a personal experience of learning rather than generic provision. This implies students as active participants in their learning being able to make authentic choices.

Practical expression of student voice could include:

- involvement in planning and designing curriculum experiences
- participation in monitoring, review and evaluation procedures
- feedback to staff through lesson observations
- regular satisfaction surveys
- collaboration with students in other schools
- bridging with the local community

It would be fundamentally wrong if these principles were not also applied to all staff. For many schools, the movement towards distributed leadership is also including students. If equity is to be embedded into a school’s culture then students have to move from consultation to participation in terms of their involvement with the management and leadership of their learning. There may be a case for student groups to parallel school leadership and governance groups in all matters to do with effective learning and the school as a learning environment.
5.3 School systems and structures

One of the most significant factors in closing the gap in a real and sustainable manner is the development of systems and structures that will ensure consistency, equity and sustainability. There are three relevant concepts here:

1. Fitness for purpose: a process is appropriate to the extent to which it is fit for the designated purpose.
2. Form follows function: the way something is designed should be a reflection of its core purpose – a family saloon is very different to a sports car.
3. From find and fix to predict and prevent: prevention is better than cure.

Schools may need to review their internal structures and processes to establish the extent to which they are designed to enable closing the gap:

- the development of structures, roles and processes to support and embed consistent strategies and processes
- leadership and management relationships that make accountability real and personal
- flexible timetabling arrangements to maximise choice and embed alternative learning strategies
- close liaison and integration with other schools and providers to ensure co-ordinated provision across institutions
- rigorous and systematic monitoring systems to manage attendance, access to support and academic progress
- computerised monitoring and support systems to ensure valid data for managers
- redefining staff roles to balance responsibility for curriculum delivery and learning support
- creating school structures to reinforce effective learning, eg house systems, learning teams, peer mentoring

Examples of the contribution of ICT to effective teaching and learning might include:

- maintaining accurate, detailed and accessible data on learners’ academic progress, notably as a resource for academic mentors
- managing students’ learning pathways to ensure continuity, progression and appropriate coverage
- support for academic mentoring by building a detailed profile of the learner
- acting as a resource bank for all the opportunities available for study in the school, local learning networks and other sources
- providing access to learning activities through a school intranet
- supporting effective learning activities through appropriate software
- providing access to various integrated learning systems
- managing assessment resources and the assessment of a range of learning activities
5.4 Data-rich management

Any successful management intervention must support an approach that integrates strategic planning, annual planning and budgeting. It must provide reliable data based on performance analysis in areas critical to that plan: it is impossible to even contemplate closing the gap without knowing the size of the gap and its specific dimensions and components. In most business and industrial contexts, data-rich management is seen as essential to ensuring consistency by reducing and eliminating variation. Management information systems (MISs) are found in every manufacturing plant, hospital ward, traffic system and restaurant kitchen. The intensive care ward of a hospital is essentially a data-rich environment, as is the air-traffic control system of an airport. Your car is reliable because of the use of data to eliminate variation in the assembly plant.

What is usually described as a management information system involves a planned system of collecting, processing, storing and disseminating data in the form of the information needed to carry out the functions of management. In a way it is a documented report of the activities that were planned and executed in order to allow appropriate choices to be made in response to evidence about performance, with feedback that informs the development and improvement of every aspect of the business. In effect, MISs must not only indicate how things are going, but why they are not going as well as planned where that is the case.

Schools will need a range of data in order to be precise and focused in developing strategies to close the gap, for example:

- demographic and socio-economic profiles
- baseline entry data
- comparative data, eg Fischer Family Trust and RAISEonline
- key stage performance data
- individual pupil academic progress profiles

Review and reflection

What are the implications of this discussion for self (you as a leader), school (the effectiveness of your school) and system (broader local and national issues)?
6. Leadership for effective teaching and learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective teaching and learning</th>
<th>Management/infrastructure</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>- Self-managing learners</td>
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<td>- Cultures and values</td>
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<td>- Learning-centred</td>
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<td>- Distributed leadership</td>
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<td>- Collaboration</td>
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There are countless ways of defining and explaining the nature of leadership. In the most general terms, leadership is seen to be primarily concerned with the strategic issues and with the core purpose of the organisation. In essence, leaders define long-term direction and the focus of the collective energies and resources of the business. However, this element is not sufficient to secure effective leadership or organisational success. There needs to be a moral element – the sense of collective responsibility and a recognition that even the most technically sophisticated business relies on human engagement and interaction. Compromising any one of these elements almost always compromises the organisation as a whole. It is worth stressing the danger of neglecting leadership behaviours in the belief that good management will achieve the same outcome. For the purposes of this discussion, the following, very simple model (Figure 5) may suffice:

**Figure 5: Three elements of effective leadership and their relationship to each other**

Leadership in education is concerned with:
- principle - the moral basis of the school
- purpose - the core business of the school
- people - social relationships in the school

For leadership to have optimum impact, it seems reasonable to argue that the three elements identified in Figure 5 need to be in overlapping to a significant degree. In an ideal situation, purpose, principle and people are inextricably entwined. The problem arises when one of the elements is relatively weak or missing. For example, purpose without principle can result in the end justifying the means, while principle without people means that values will remain ideal or abstract and not inform day-to-day working. Student voice of itself is not enough to secure effective policies, and thus challenging in-school variation is a portfolio of techniques, not a strategy in its own right.
6.1 Leadership to create a culture and values system focused on the learning of the individual student

At its most fundamental level of expression, leadership is about securing clarity of values and shared purpose. These two factors are significant variables in determining the culture of any school. In the context of focusing on the learning of the individual student, the following principles and purpose would seem most appropriate to informing leadership strategies and behaviours:

- an explicit focus on, and commitment to, the wellbeing of every individual
- working to secure both excellence and equity across the school system by minimising within-school variation and maximising individual potential
- recognising the move from provider-led to client-led public services
- helping to create a shared commitment to closing the gap through the development of shared scenarios for the future

It is difficult to see how the challenges identified by the Minister of State on p5 can be responded to without a focus on a range of approaches to effective teaching and learning. This in turn implies:

- a shift from the focus on the school, year group or subject as the starting point for school planning to a focus on the individual learner
- the development of policies and strategies that reinforce and embed the focus on teaching and learning to close the gap
- the development and deployment of staff to ensure effective learning for all
- the creation of monitoring, review and evaluation strategies that focus on the experience of the individual learner
- the development of integrated strategies to ensure effective working with all agencies
- the development of an integrated approach to effective learning for all

However clear the moral consensus around learning, there is a corresponding need to translate that imperative into a clear strategy that might include the following elements:

- a clear scenario for the future of the school designed around an explicit focus on quality teaching and learning
- budgetary planning that focuses on the resource implications of approaches to learning
- staff capacity to work in the new learning environment
- a review of roles and responsibilities to ensure that form follows function
- capacity to work in networks and clusters
- the forging of links between all phases of education to ensure continuity, progression and consistency
6.2 Leadership that is learning-centred

Southworth (2004) has identified three strategies that leaders can use to influence the quality of learning and teaching in schools: modelling, monitoring and dialogue. As is shown in Figure 6, these elements are closely interrelated.

Figure 6: Three strategies that influence teaching and learning

Source: Southworth, 2004

Southworth (2004) defines the three elements in the following terms:

**Modelling**

Modelling is concerned with the power of example. Teachers and headteachers believe in setting an example because they know this influences pupils and colleagues alike. Research shows that teachers watch their leaders closely. And teachers watch what their leaders do in order to check if leaders’ actions are consistent over time and to test whether leaders do as they say. Teachers do not follow leaders who cannot ‘walk the talk’. (Southworth, 2004:6)

**Monitoring**

Monitoring includes analysing and acting on pupil progress and outcome data (e.g., assessment and test scores, evaluation data, school performance trends, parental opinion surveys, pupil attendance data, pupil interview information). Leadership is stronger and more effective when it is informed by data on pupils’ learning, progress and achievements as well as by direct knowledge of all teaching practices and classroom dynamics. (Southworth, 2004:7)

**Dialogue**

Dialogue in this context is about creating opportunities for teachers to talk with their colleagues about learning and teaching. The kinds of dialogues that influence what happens in classrooms are focused on learning and teaching. Leaders create the circumstances to meet with colleagues and discuss pedagogy and pupil learning. (Southworth, 2004:8)
The combination of these three strategies forms a powerful nexus that has the potential to:

- secure and embed the moral purpose and culture of the learning-centred school
- provide a model for effective leadership at school-, team- and classroom level
- personalise leadership engagement with colleagues
- model practice of the most effective relationships with learners
- demonstrate high-profile, consistent commitment to the core purpose of the school

For Sergiovanni (2001):

> Learning earns the center-stage position because it is a powerful way for schools to adapt, to stay ahead, and to invent new solutions. At the heart of any successful change is a change in culture which makes new goals, new initiatives, and new ways of behaving part of a school’s norm structure.

Sergiovanni, 2001:119

### 6.3 Distributing leadership to build capacity across the school

Leithwood and his colleagues (2007) provide two compelling arguments for distributed leadership:

> Our conclusion from this evidence as a whole is that leadership has very significant effects on the quality of school organisation and on pupil learning. As far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement trajectory in the absence of talented leadership. One explanation for this is that leadership serves as a catalyst for unleashing the potential capacities that already exist in the organisation.

Leithwood et al, 2007:5

and:

> The most significant results of this study for our purposes, however, were the indirect effects of total leadership on student learning and achievement, through its direct effects on the three dimensions of staff performance. Total leadership accounted for a quite significant 27 per cent of the variation in student achievement across the school. This is a much higher proportion of explained variation (two to three times higher) than is typically reported in studies of individual headteacher effects.

ibid:12

In essence, the impact on pupils’ learning is far greater if leadership is seen as a collective capacity across the school rather than as the personal status of a few individuals.
Bennett et al (2003) identify three key characteristics of distributed leadership:

*Distributed leadership is not something ‘done’ by an individual ‘to’ others, or a set of individual actions through which people contribute to a group or organisation. Rather, it is what Peter Gronn calls ‘an emergent property of a group or network of individuals’, in which group members ‘pool’ their expertise. This ‘concerted action’ of people working together takes place within a pattern of interpersonal relationships, and brings about a situation in which the amount of energy created is greater than the sum of the individual actions.*

*Distributed leadership suggests that many more people are involved in the leadership activity than might traditionally be assumed.*

*Distributed leadership sees varieties of expertise being widely distributed across many people.*

Bennett et al, 2003:3
Distributed leadership is pivotal to the success of any strategy committed to closing the gap, given that the latter implies greater richness and complexity in provision, more diffuse organisational structures and the need to ensure consistency, coherence and accountability. The model that was discussed in section 5 on learning-centred leadership applies to all those engaged in the delivery of effective learning, not just traditional patterns of school leadership.

The practical implications of distributed leadership include:

- redefining leadership in schools so that it is seen as situational (school, team, classroom) rather than linked to hierarchical status
- empowering individuals and teams so that authority and decision-making are located at functional levels
- developing a team-based structure and making teams the basis for leading and managing
- opening leadership development provision and programmes to all
- focusing on developing teacher and student leadership as a major source of capacity and sustainability

One of the most powerful potential benefits of distributed leadership is to increase a sense of personal responsibility and accountability and to remove dependence on school leaders, so creating a culture of interdependent learning. Excellence and equity in learning involve leadership being widely available in every aspect of the school's life.

6.4 Collaboration

The achievement of high-quality teaching and learning across all schools will only be accomplished through sophisticated networks and interdependent relationships involving schools in partnerships with parents and carers, other schools, the wider community and other agencies involved in the provision of services for children and young people. Effective learning involves a focus on the whole student as learner: the school cannot work in isolation from all the other partners that contribute to effective learning and educational success.

Focusing on learning and teaching to close the gap means that school leaders will need to develop highly effective strategies to:

- integrate parents and carers into the learning process, eg the idea of parents as co-educators
- develop highly interdependent working through local partnerships with other schools colleges, universities and other providers, especially with regard to 14-19 provision
- ensure that extended services enable access to effective learning opportunities
- relate the focus on teaching and learning to other public services as part of the movement towards personalising services
- develop links with the local community and virtual communities to maximise learning resources and opportunities
- support moves towards rethinking governance to recognise the changes outlined above

Review and reflection

What are the implications of this discussion for self (you as a leader), school (the effectiveness of your school) and system (broader local and national issues)?
7. Leading through a change process based on professional learning

Closing the gap may represent a significant challenge, in personal and organisational terms, to long-established beliefs, practices, structures and procedures. It is essential that school leaders secure commitment and build confidence in new ways of thinking and working. The principles of leading change are now widely understood, if not always acted on. Ensuring equity in the classroom, school and the wider system is more than another change – it has the potential to be a fundamental reworking of the historic pattern of schooling. It is therefore vital that school leaders use the change process as a model of best practice. This would seem to involve:

- building leadership knowledge and capacity around the theme of closing the gap and all its elements
- being open and transparent and maximising communication about the process
- building a shared consensus around the values and principles informing closing the gap, seeing it as an entitlement rather than a tactic
- ensuring that every stage of the change process is preceded and reinforced by relevant and effective professional development strategies
- having a strategy that works through incremental change involving different components of closing the gap and different elements of the school to maximise success, thus building confidence and acceptance
- maximising networking to learn from the success of others and to disseminate successful practice
- ensuring that the change process is inclusive and involves all stakeholders
- monitoring, reviewing and evaluating against values and strategies

There seems to be a very high consensus as to what constitutes successful approaches to closing the gap; what is clear is that there is no blueprint and no single right way of doing it. There are multiple pathways and this is confirmed by the evidence from schools that have started the process of rethinking approaches to teaching and learning. Soles et al (2007) provide examples of the common elements in their schools:

- We all work with our staff and community to articulate a vision and approach to learning that works for us in our context.
- We use data to understand all our students’ progress and focus our resources accordingly.
- We provide high-quality continuous professional development for all staff that is also personalised to meet their needs.
- Our pupils are genuinely involved in shaping their learning, even in one case by being involved in developing and monitoring the school development plan and reporting to parents on progress.
- We are prepared to think ‘outside the box’ on any aspect of how we engage and support learning if we think it is needed, and we collect and use evidence that it is making a difference.

and by:

- leading by example, including modelling how students are treated and setting expectations for high achievement
- using data to track pupils’ achievements, analyse their progress and evaluate the quality of teaching (monitoring)
- generating discussion about teaching and learning (dialogue)
- sustaining school improvement
- creating structures, systems and processes to underpin all of the above

Soles et al, 2007:8-9
Andrews (2007), reflecting on his own experience offers more specific guidance:

1. Ensure that school culture, philosophy and practices are such that students are already used to working independently, taking responsibility and having a voice; it's not enough to know what the vision is yourself, everyone has to understand and to get behind it.
2. Start small with a few committed members of staff who can then help embed the project and over time get the whole staff on board.
3. Ensure all members of staff – including support staff – whose work will be affected by the project are kept up to date with what is happening.
4. Devise an effective communication strategy so everyone is aware of what you hope to achieve and how the project will enhance student learning.

Andrews, 2007:19

What seems to be important is that there is no single best way to close the gap. Schools need to build on existing strengths and areas of high confidence, develop capacity and commitment and create a long-term scenario that demonstrates leadership commitment and a clear sense of the changes in culture and practice that are needed to reinforce best practice and to ensure consistency of provision and entitlement.

**Review and reflection**

What are the implications of this discussion for self (you as a leader), school (the effectiveness of your school) and system (broader local and national issues)?
8. Diagnostic review

For each of the elements of a strategy to close the gap, use the following review to consider the current status of the topic in your school. Score each component:

- A = fully established, confident and consistent practice across the school
- B = emergent practice across the school or established in parts of the school
- C = at the planning and development stage
- D = not yet on the school’s agenda

You might also find it helpful to put your scores in Table 3 below showing the variables in order to get a quick visual overview of the current status of closing the gap in your school.

**Table 3: Scores for variables in my school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Issues and implications</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self-managing learners</td>
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<td>2. Teaching and learning strategies</td>
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<td>3. Curriculum knowledge</td>
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<td>2. Student voice</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. School systems and structures</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Data-rich strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Leadership to create a culture and values system focused on closing the gap</td>
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<td>2. Leadership that is learning-centred</td>
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<td>3. Distributed leadership to build capacity across the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Leadership that works through collaboration and partnerships</td>
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There are several ways in which you might make use of this review:

- as the basis for school-, departmental or team planning in terms of closing the gap
- as an audit of existing strengths and development needs
- as an agenda for team meetings over time
- as the basis for in-school development activities
- as the basis for the formulation of a collaborative strategy across schools
- for personal review and reflection
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