



Leadership and School Improvement : Recent research on how successful leaders build and sustain success in England

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Key Aim of Research

To identify and map empirically grounded direct and indirect causal and associative relationships between effective leadership and pupil outcomes

Objectives

- **Collect and analyse attainment + other data at a national level over time to identify more effective/improved schools;**
- **identify and describe key characteristics (types, qualities, strategies and skills) of leadership practice and relate these to existing literature and theories of leadership;**
- **explore associations between key indicators of leadership practice and measures of improved pupil outcomes;**
- **investigate whether different forms of leadership practice vary in the nature and/or magnitude of their impact;**
- **develop models to investigate statistical relationships between measures of leadership, school processes and changes in pupil outcomes;**
- **conduct in depth case studies of more effective/improved primary schools to provide rich descriptions of leadership practices, actions and strategies and increase understanding of how these may be linked with improvement in school conditions and pupil outcomes.**

Mixed Method Research Design

Literature Review

Analyses of national attainment & value added (VA) school performance data

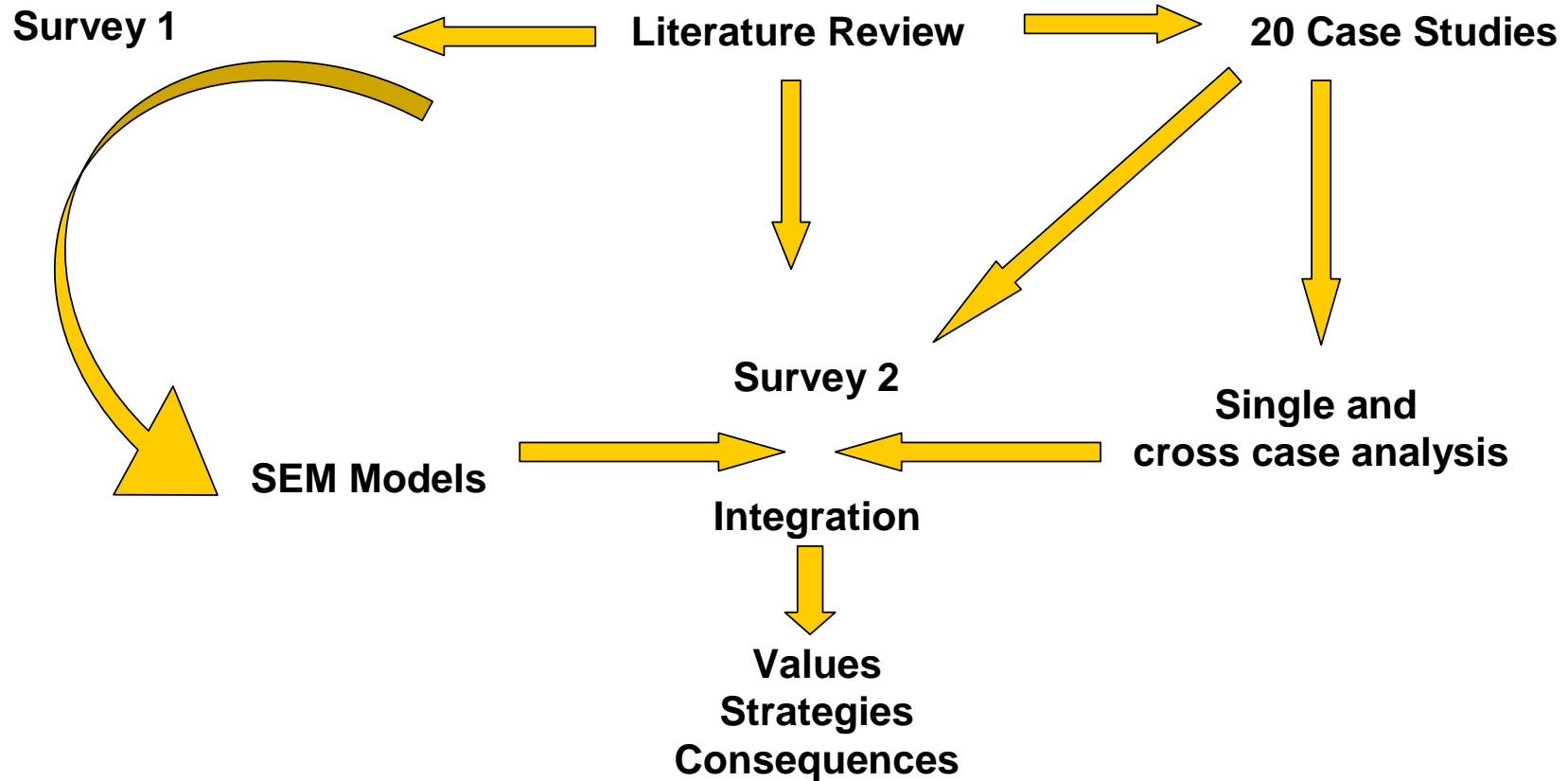
Questionnaire surveys

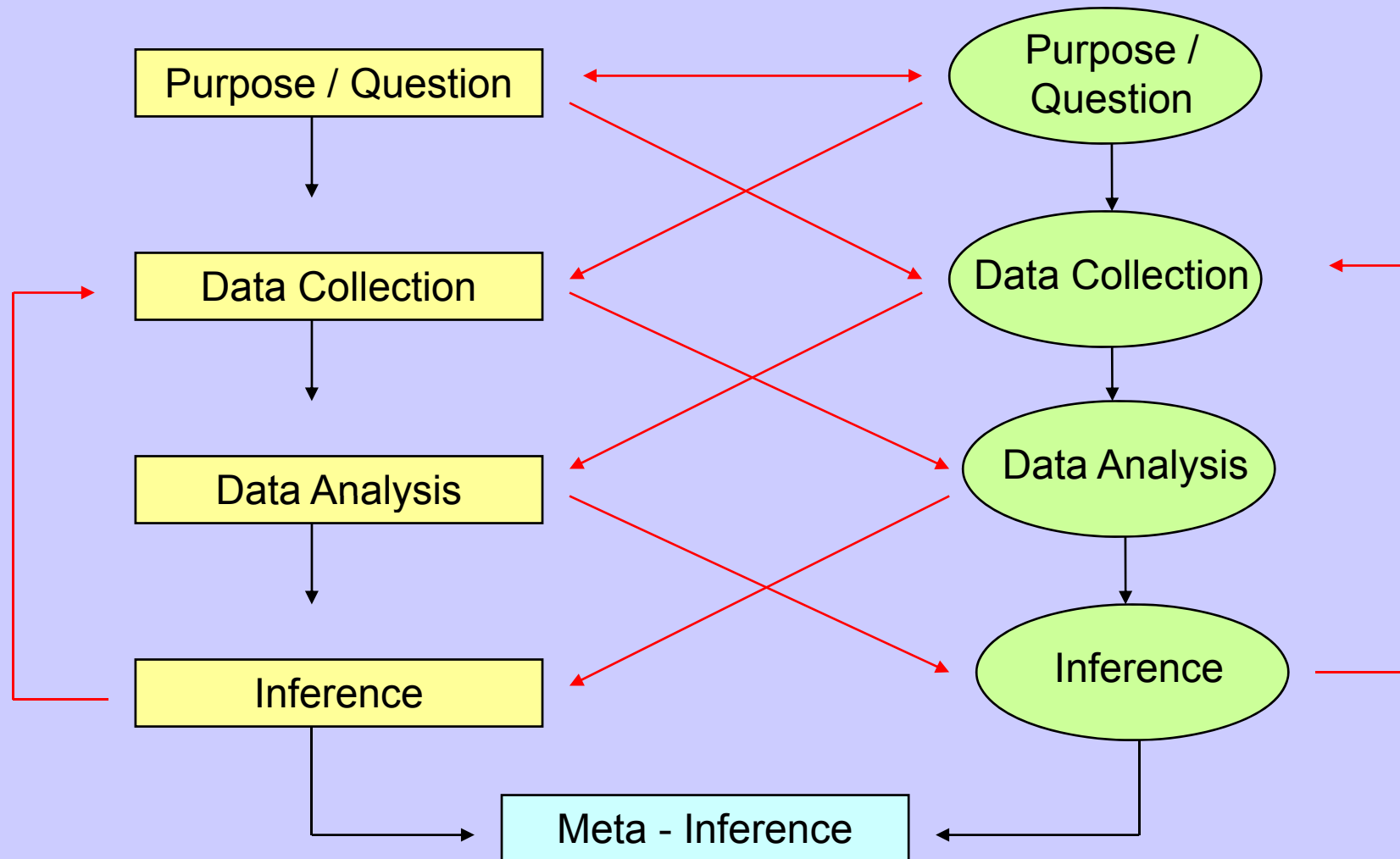
School case studies

Research Design: Integrating evidence about effective / improved schools

Quantitative strand
Attainment VA analyses
Identifying sample of
effective / improved schools

Qualitative strand
Interview and documentary
data from a variety of internal
and external stakeholders





Leadership & Pupil Outcomes Research followed a Fully Integrated Mixed Methods Design (After Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003)

Initial Literature Review

'Seven Strong Claims for school Leadership'

1. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
2. Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
3. The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
4. School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions.
5. School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.
6. Some patterns of distribution are more effective than others.
7. A small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leadership effectiveness.

Sampling for the Survey Phase

- i. Analyses identified 3 groups of schools that had experienced sustained improvement or stable high effectiveness, relative to schools serving similar pupil intakes across 3 years 2003-2005
 - Low to medium/high
 - Medium to high
 - Sustained high
- ii. No recorded change of headteacher
- ii. The level of social disadvantage of the pupil intake (by FSM band) to include sufficient numbers of disadvantaged schools

Quantitative Methods

- i. Analyses of attainment and value added data (FFT, DCSF) for all schools in England over 2003-2005
- ii. Questionnaire survey of 2600+ head teachers and 8000+ key staff in their schools. Responses from 740 schools representing 24% for primary and 32% for secondary heads and approx 20% for key Staff
- iii. Identification of effectiveness and leadership characteristics based on survey results.
- iv. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) & Structural equation Models (SEM) to explore underlying dimensions and create statistical models

Case Study Sampling : Primary

PRIMARY	FSM1	FSM2	FSM3	FSM4
Stable High	A	C		H I
Moderate-High		B	F	
Low- Moderate/High			D E G	J

Case Study Methods

Based on three visits (of 1 day) per year, across 3 years case studies involved:

- **20 head teachers (10 primary, 10 secondary)**
 - **70 key staff (20 primary, 50 secondary)**
 - **120 colleagues (60 primary, 60 secondary)**
 - **600 pupils (x 2 cohorts)**
- i. Interviews (two or three times per year)
- a) **Head teachers (each visit)**
 - b) **SMT and key staff in leadership roles (once per year)**
 - c) **Colleagues (representing a range of experience)**
 - d) **Chair of governors or parent governor**
- ii. Pupil questionnaire (once per year)

School Context and School Improvement Groups

Primary:

Improvement Groups	School Context (FSM Band)		
	FSM 1&2	FSM 3&4	Total
Low to Moderate/High	55 (34.4%)	105 (65.6%)	160 (100%)
Moderate to Higher Moderate/ High	67 (71.3%)	27 (28.7%)	94 (100%)
Stable High/ High to Higher	112 (91.8%)	10 (8.2%)	122 (100%)
Total	234 (62%)	142 (38%)	376 (100%)

Key Interim Findings: Broadening Participation & Distributed Leadership

- Effective Leadership relies upon an increasingly close and collaborative relationship between headteachers and the SLT
- The creation of new 'distributed' leadership roles and patterns was a consistent feature of effective/improved schools
- The level of leadership experience of the headteacher has an association with the level of change implementation to structures in the school
- Broadening participation in and communication about the changes needed to promote improvement is a key leadership strategy

Key Findings

Changing Curriculum Pedagogy & Assessment(1)

- Head teachers and other leaders had expanded the curriculum beyond the confines of the traditional academic subjects, in order to boost student engagement in school and, thereby, their achievement
- A key leadership strategy in the effective schools was that of placing a high priority and consistent emphasis upon improving classroom teaching across the school
- Allocating and distributing personnel and resources appropriately to foster student achievement was a focus for a significant number of headteachers and other leaders in the school

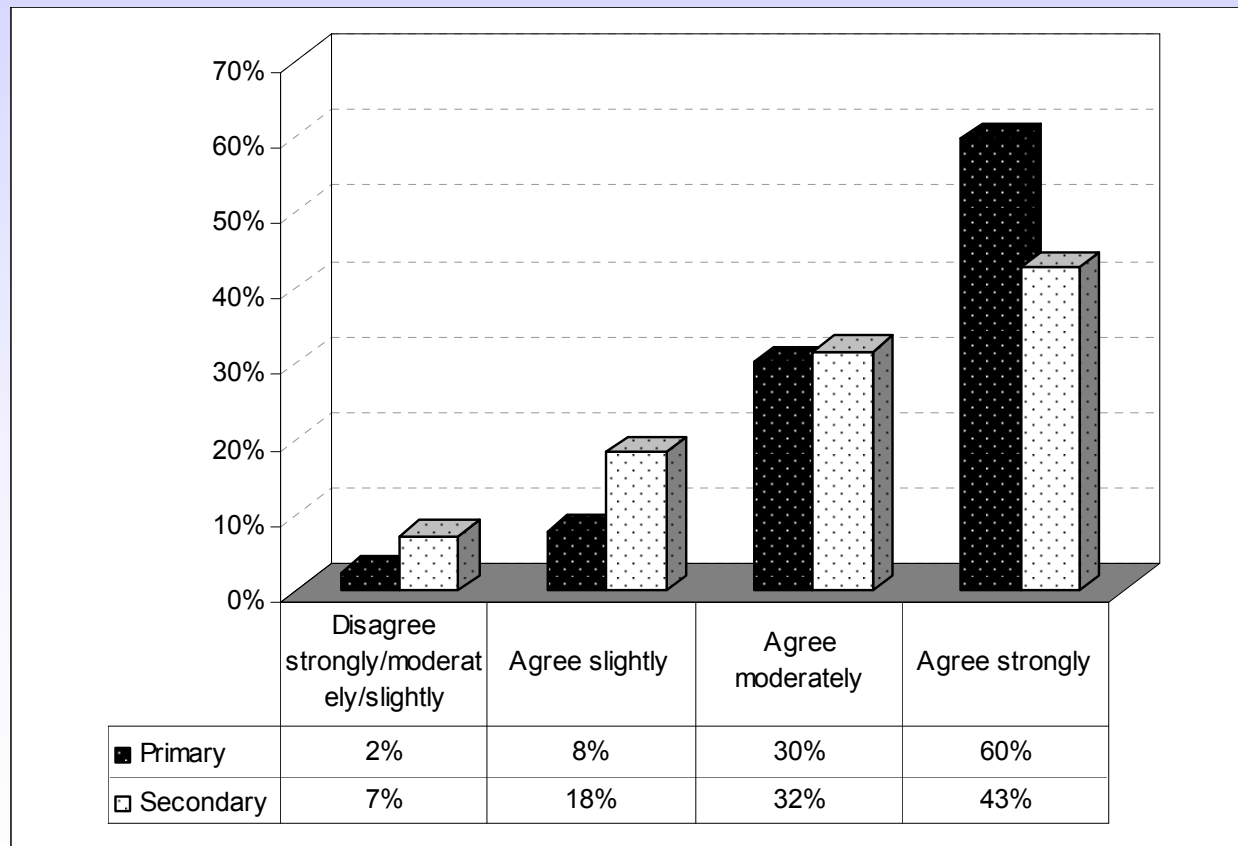
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Key Findings

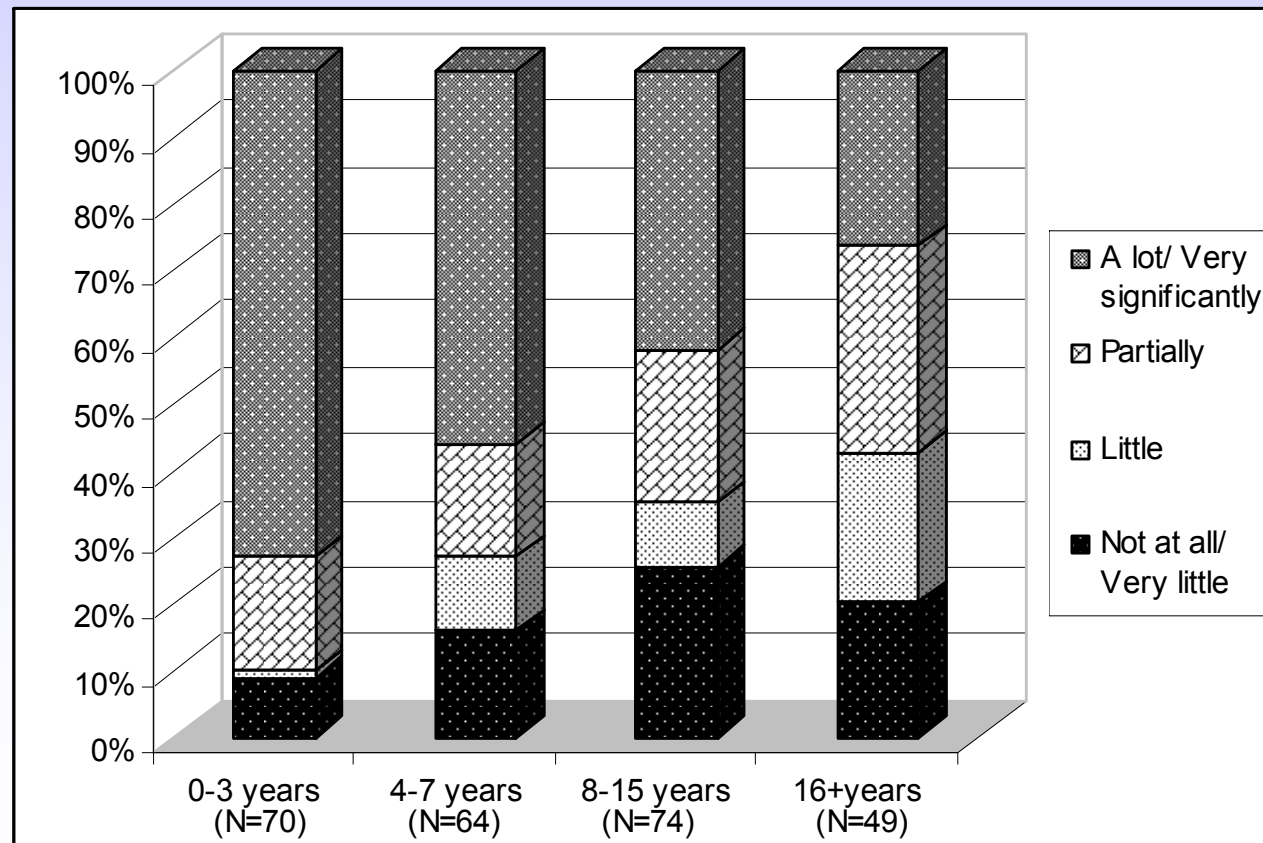
Changing Curriculum Pedagogy & Assessment (2)

- Head teachers and staff in the schools were using increasingly detailed analyses of student progress and achievement data to inform their teaching
- The use of performance data was reported more conclusively by schools improving in disadvantaged contexts

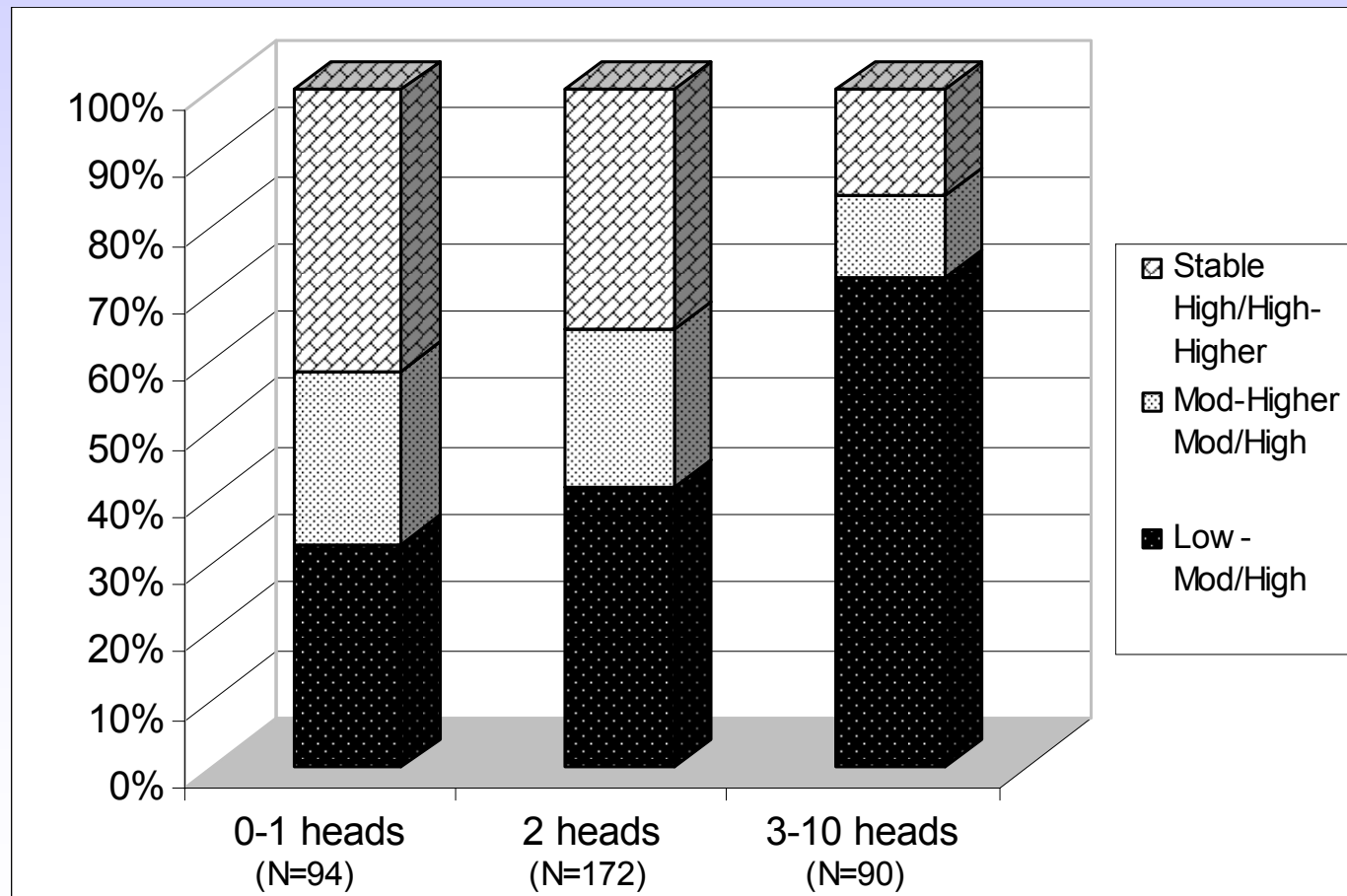
Differences between primary & secondary staff perceptions of headteacher encouragement to think of learning beyond the academic curriculum



Primary heads' experience in school and the extent of reported change in giving staff a sense of overall purpose



Numbers of heads in post over last decade in the school and improvement group (secondary)



Key Findings: School Improvement Groups

- The categorisation of schools into three distinctive groups reveals statistically and educationally significant differences in certain leadership features and practices
- There are important relationships between school context and the school improvement group, and between school context and headteachers' time in post
- Schools in the Low Start Group had made greater improvements in changing school culture, climate and addressing teaching and learning and use of performance data during the last three years than other schools.
- Heads & Key Staff were significantly more likely to report substantial improvement in pupil behaviour, attendance, attitude and motivation for schools in the Low Start Group
- Headteachers in the Low Start Group were more likely to prioritise strategies to improve teaching and learning and the use of data than those in the Stable High effective group

Continued

**Structural Equation Modelling:
Examining Underlying Dimensions in the
Survey Responses**

Structural Equation Modelling: Definition

- Hypothesis testing approach: to establish whether the theoretical scales derived from the literature are empirically confirmed in our sample of more effective/improved schools.
- Structural equation modelling (SEM) is 'inherently a confirmatory technique' (Kelloway, 1998: 7):
 - shows relationships between theoretical variables (i.e. latent variables) and the manifest indicators (i.e. observed, measurable indicators). How far are models consistent with the empirical data?

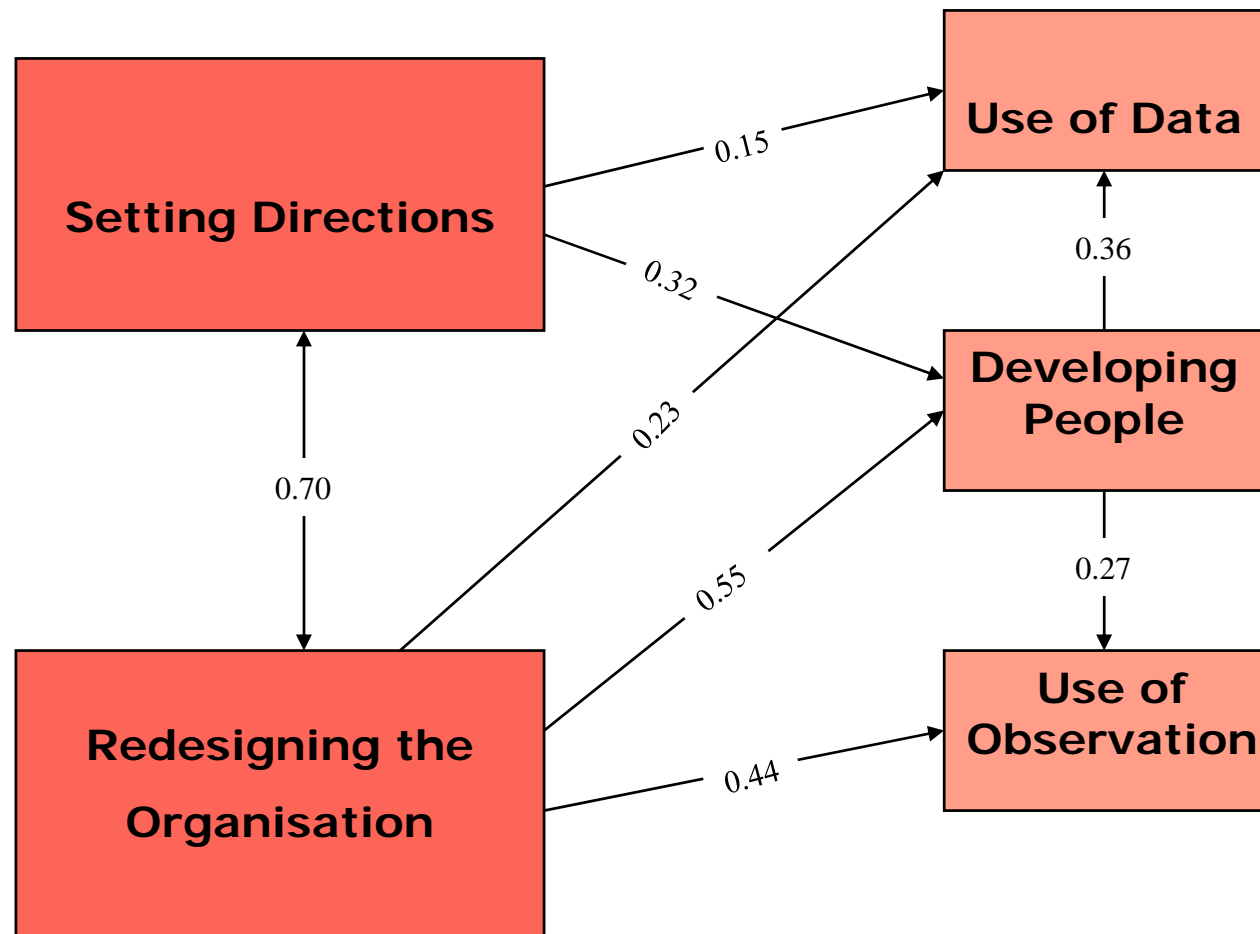
The observed variables for the five-factor CFA model on Leadership Practice (Secondary)

Dimensions	Questionnaire Items			
Setting Directions	1d.demonsrating high expectations for staff's work with pupils	1e. demonstrating high expectations for pupil behaviour	1f. demonstrating high expectations for pupil achievement	1g. working collaboratively with the Governing Body
Developing People	2b. encouraging staff to consider new ideas for their teaching	2e. promoting leadership development among teachers	2f. promoting a range of CPD experiences among all staff	2g. encouraging staff to think of learning beyond the academic curriculum
Redesigning Organisation (Internal Strategies)	3a. Encouraging collaborative work among staff	3e. Improving internal review procedures	3h. Allocating resources strategically based on pupil needs	3j. Structuring the organisation to facilitate work
Use Of Data	4g. encouraging staff to use data in their work	4h. encouraging all staff to use data in planning for individual pupil needs		
Use of Observation	4b. regularly observing classroom activities	4c. after observing classroom activities, working with teachers to improve their teaching	4d. using coaching and mentoring to improve quality of teaching	

**Structural Equation Models: HT Perceptions of
Leadership Practices and Changes in Pupil
Outcomes
over Three Years**

A Tentative Model (Secondary)

Tentative Model of Leadership Practice in Effective/Improving Schools (secondary headteachers)



Major Categories of Successful Leadership - Literature

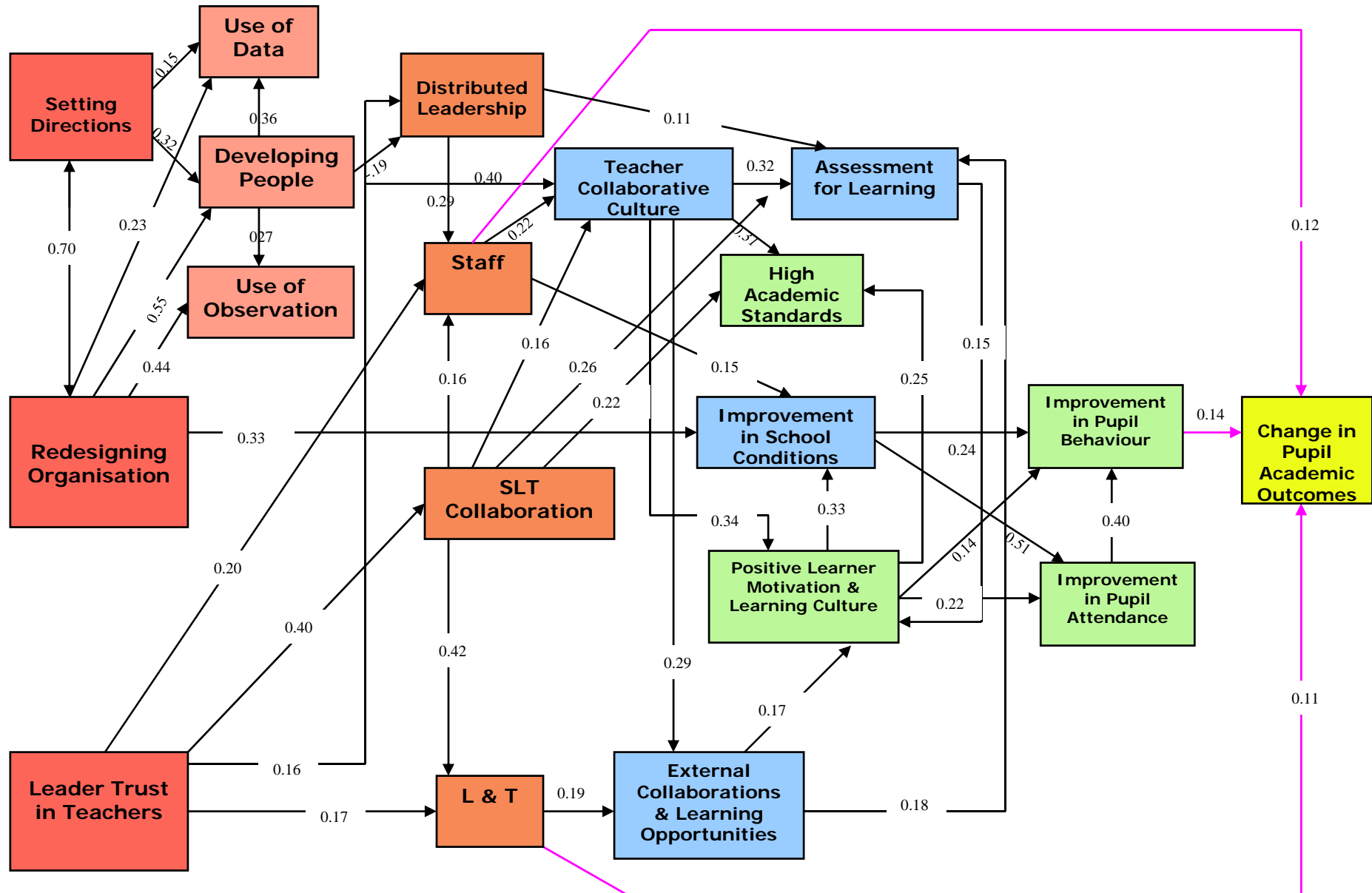
e.g. From 7 Claims Review

Almost successful leaders draw on the same basic repertoire of basic leadership practices

Leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly & most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation & working conditions

- **Setting Directions**
- **Developing People**
- **Redesigning the Organisation**
- **Managing the Learning & Teaching Programme**

These are common in their general form but adaptable and contingent in their enactment (Leithwood et al 2006).



N=309 Predicting change in pupil academic outcomes %GCSE 5A*-C: Secondary School Heads (standardised solution displayed LISREL SEM model)

Understanding Relationships in the SEM Models

Level 1: 5 Head teacher Leadership Dimensions

Level 2: 5 Dimensions of Leadership Distribution

Level 3: 4 Dimensions Related to Improved School and Classroom Processes

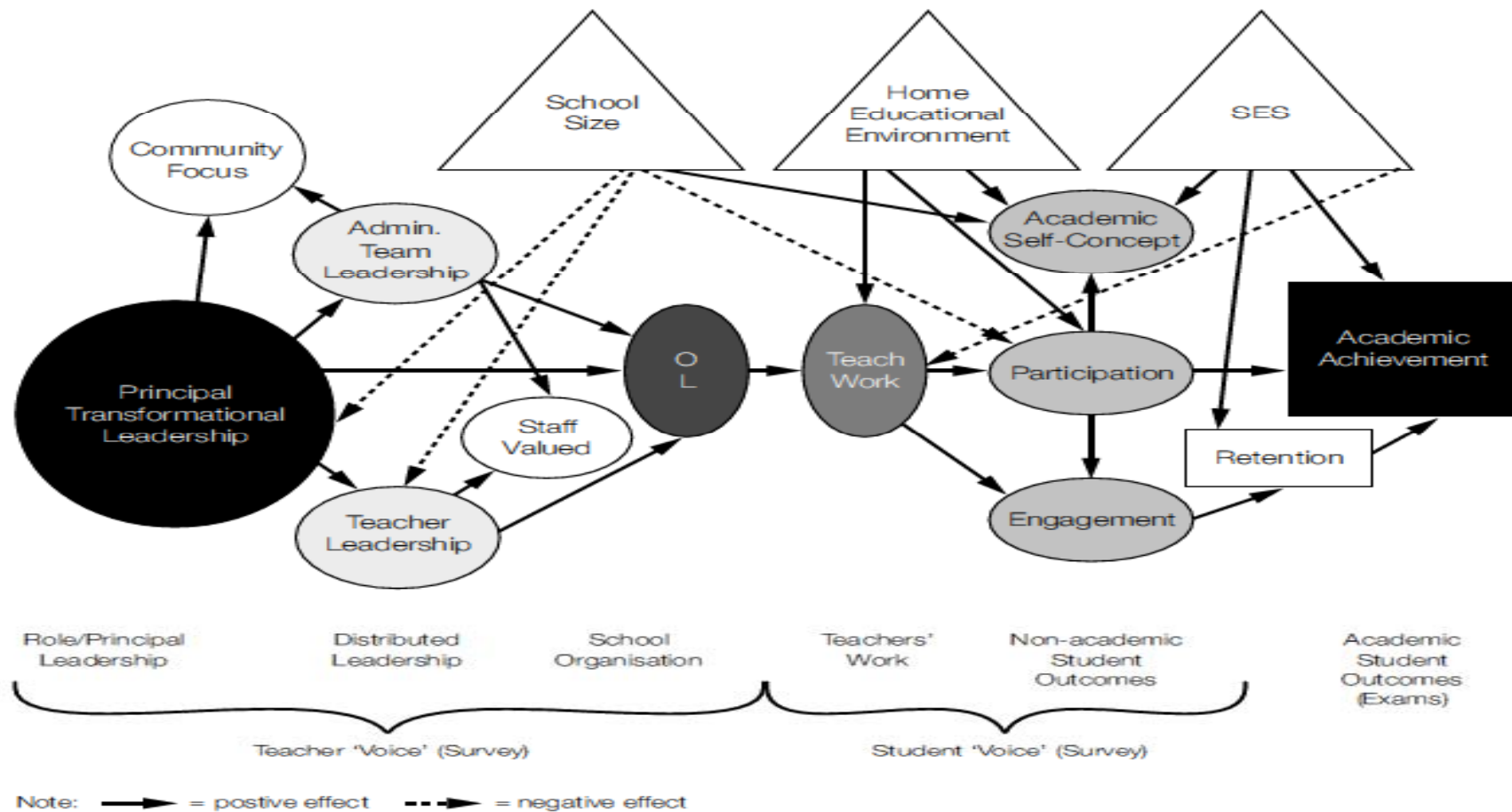
Level 4: 5 Dimensions related to improved Intermediate outcomes

Outcome: Measured change (improvement) in pupils' academic attainment over three years at the school level (% pupils achieving 5 A*-C GCSE grades at age 16 years)

Leadership for Organisational learning and Student Outcomes Project Model:

from Mulford 2008 Australian Educational Review - The Leadership Challenge Improving Learning in schools

Figure 16: The LOLSO model



Recent leadership research on primary schools in Cyprus identified:

- Small direct effects of principal's (human) leadership style on student achievement (progress) in Greek & Maths
- Two significant direct effects of principal's leadership style on Classroom culture
- Direct effects of Classroom culture on student achievement
- Direct effects of school Organizational culture on both student achievement & Classroom culture

Source: Kythreotis, Pashiardis & Kyriakides (2010) Journal of Educational Administration 18 (2) 218-240.

Most frequently cited specific Actions/Strategies taken leading to Improved pupil outcomes (survey)

Primary Heads

- Encouraging the use of data and research (28%)
- Improved assessment procedures (28%)
- Teaching policies and practices (26%)
- Changes to pupil target setting (20%)
- Strategic allocation of resources (20%)
- Providing and allocating resources (19%)
- Promoting Leadership Development and CPD (16%)

Secondary Heads

- Encouraging the use of data and research (34%)
- Teaching policies and practices (28%)
- Change school culture (21%)
- Providing and allocating resources (20%)
- Improved assessment procedures (19%)
- Monitoring of departments and teachers (16%)
- Promoting leadership development and CPD (15%)

Comments about specific priority actions:

Performance & assessment data and target setting

'Giving specific data to individuals and teams to help inform planning and target setting'.

'Pupil tracking, target setting and mentoring scheme'.

Curriculum change

'Improve / Change curriculum on offer at Key Stage 4'.

Source: survey written comments

Examples of staff development related strategies rated as priorities

'Managing some teachers learning'

'Building a learning network'

'Focus on the role of the middle Leader'

'Develop of a culture of research and innovation'

'Development of a learning toolkit for staff'

Examples of pupil behavioural policies and support systems rated as priorities

'Innovative pastoral structure'

'One to one student mentoring'

'Review of rewards and behaviour policy'

Source: survey written comments

Connecting behaviour with learning outcomes

'The whole school follows a strict behaviour policy so every child knows where they go what happens and the consequences. Because of that you can actually teach and that makes a big difference.'

'We have a rigorous system. At lunchtime dinner ladies are asked to report any issues that arise on the playground. So the children have a very low expectation of getting away with anything'.

'We use assertive discipline which is very helpful. It's firm and gives the pupils' boundaries. All staff have a consistent approach to behaviour.'

'There is a much more structured behaviour policy now and pupils are very much aware and value that and I think that can impact on them working '.

Source: interviews case studies

Continued

Changes in aspirations and expectations: responsibility with accountability

'They realise now that the evidence base is very sophisticated and you actually show you know the progress the individual departments have made. And that's created I think a very significant change in what people feel about the school and achievement, and they recognise that with the introduction of contextual value added that actually it's less easy to hide and suggest that actually the department is doing exceptionally well.'

' I think that now we're far more focussed on what we want and what we don't want, and we don't just go for everything, we go with what fits with us'.

Source: interviews case studies

The Primacy of the Head teacher

Head teachers are perceived as the main source of leadership by school key staff. Their leadership practice shapes the internal processes and pedagogic practices that foster improvement in school and classroom conditions and better pupil outcomes, especially for schools in challenging circumstances.

Leadership Qualities and Values

Head teachers are adaptable in their leadership and management strategies, within a core values framework governed by principles of care, equity and performance.

Expectations and Outcomes

Head teachers' expectations and aspirations emanated from a view of pupil achievement which incorporated improved behaviour, academic, personal and social and affective dimensions.

Leadership and Teaching and Learning

Head teachers' perceived involvement in pedagogy and assessment varied by school improvement group, school context and school sector. Most key staff indicated the headteacher uses data to plan for individual pupil needs and to make decisions about school improvement. There was more variation in reported involvement in the detail of curriculum development and pedagogy.

Leadership Distribution

All head teachers distributed leadership, but the forms, purposes and extent of distribution varied over time and in response to their perceptions/diagnosis of school conditions.

Leadership Differences by Heads' Experience

Effective headteachers employ different improvement strategies depending on their experience, time in post and their perceptions of the need for change in their school. During their early years in a school (0-3 years), headteachers are more active in initiating changes to effect improvement.

Leadership Differences by Socio-Economic Context

There are relationships between the extent of the disadvantaged context of schools (FSM band) and the amount of change in leadership practice reported by primary and secondary heads.

Trust with collegiality

'I think there is a level of staff now, very good practitioners, and they are quite willing to share that. We have a lot of pupils coming through the school, we have a lot of teachers who have gone and observe other teachers so we are all quite familiar with each other's practice.'

'I think there has also been a change and staff mentality in that we are a team and we talk about things in the staffroom that haven't worked, and people will say maybe try it this way. There is a lot of that, people are quite open. There is a lot of support'.

Source: interviews case studies

Leadership and Strategic Change

Head teachers used a range of strategies in building the effectiveness capacity of the school and promoting improvement.

e.g. addressing vision, raising expectations, staff development, distributing leadership, restructuring, enhancing pedagogy & promoting a positive, achievement focused culture.

Leadership Differences by Improvement Groupings

Schools which improved from a low point (i.e. from low to moderate/high) have made the most changes and laid more emphasis on raising expectations, use of data, assessment and staff development.

Other recent research on schools in challenging circumstances in England(1)

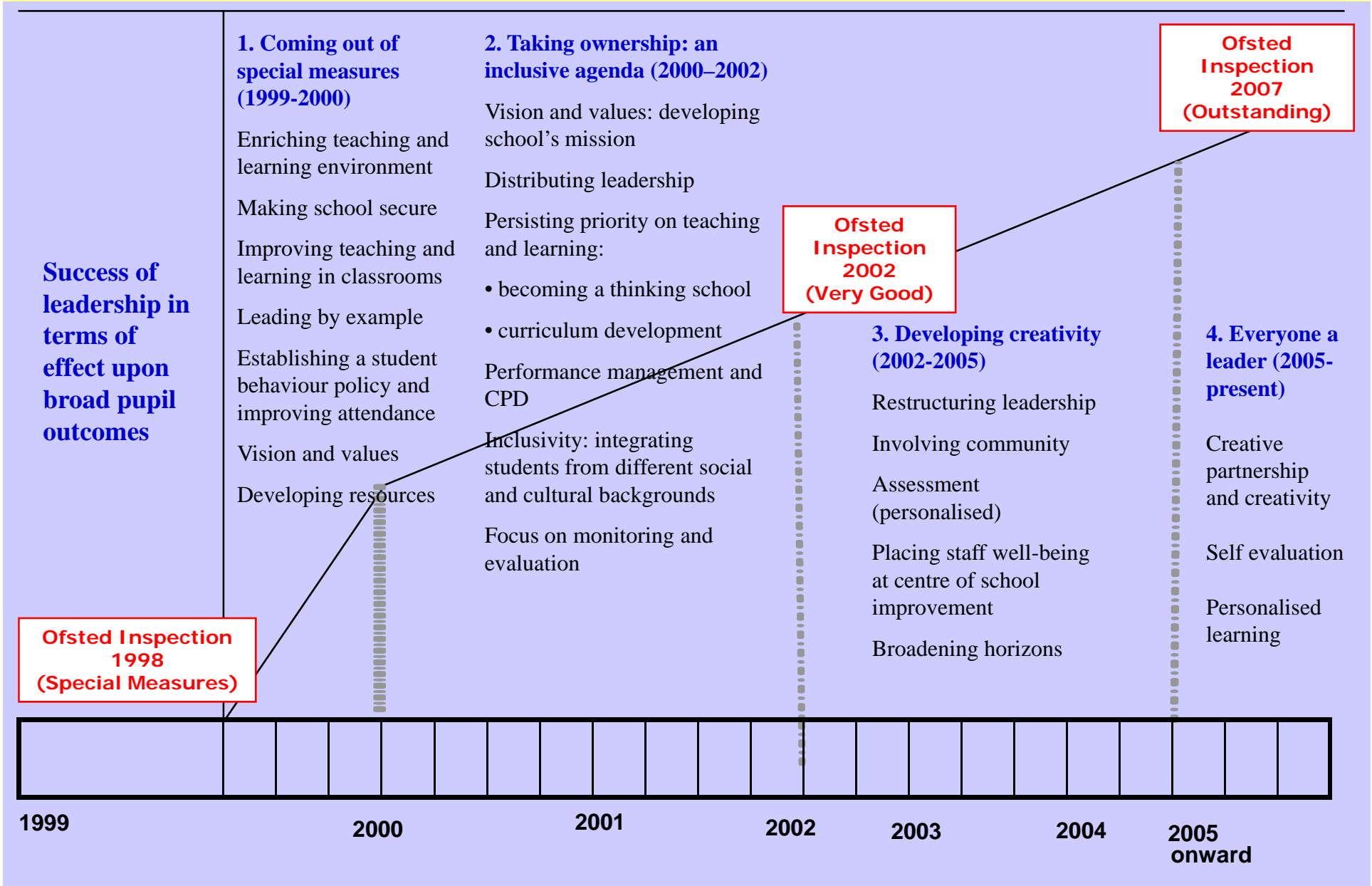
- They excel at what they do, not just occasionally but for a high proportion of the time.
- They prove constantly that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement, and that schools really can be learning communities.
- They put students first, invest in their staff and nurture their communities.
- They have strong values and high expectations that are applied consistently.
- They fulfil individual potential through 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 well-being 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 which 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.

Source 12 Outstanding Secondary Schools the odds
Ofsted (2009)

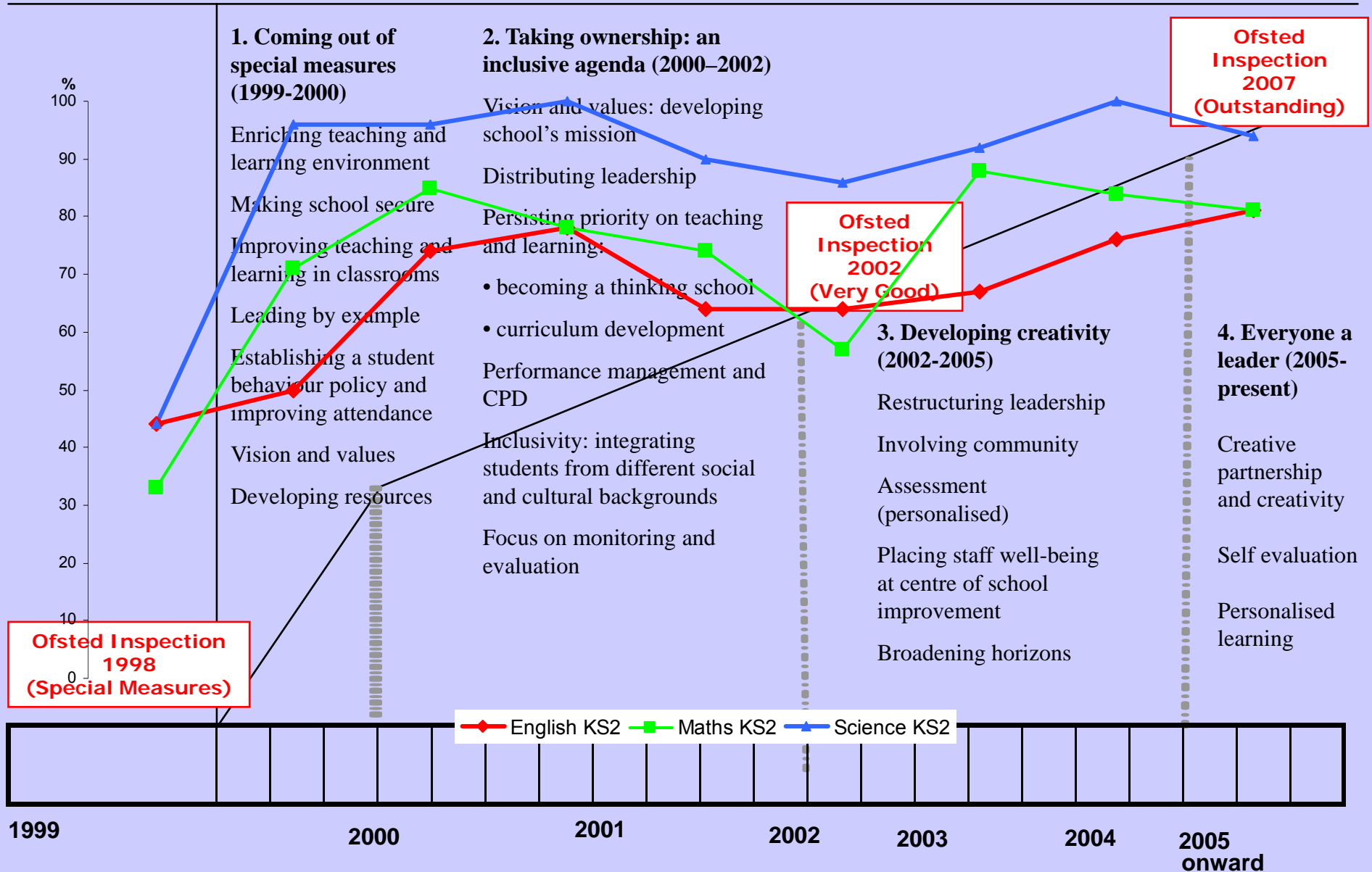
Other recent research on schools in challenging circumstances in England(2)

- It is not surprising that a number of themes emerged which were common to most or all of the schools. These included, for example, attention to the quality of teaching and learning; the assessment and tracking of students' progress; target-setting, support and intervention; attracting teachers and growing leaders.
- The success of these schools is due not simply to what they do but the fact that it is rigorously distilled and applied good practice, cleverly selected and modified to fit the needs of the school. The schools do not value innovation for its own sake, but only when it adds something extra. The practices described in this report are not 'off the peg' tricks; they mesh together and work synchronously.

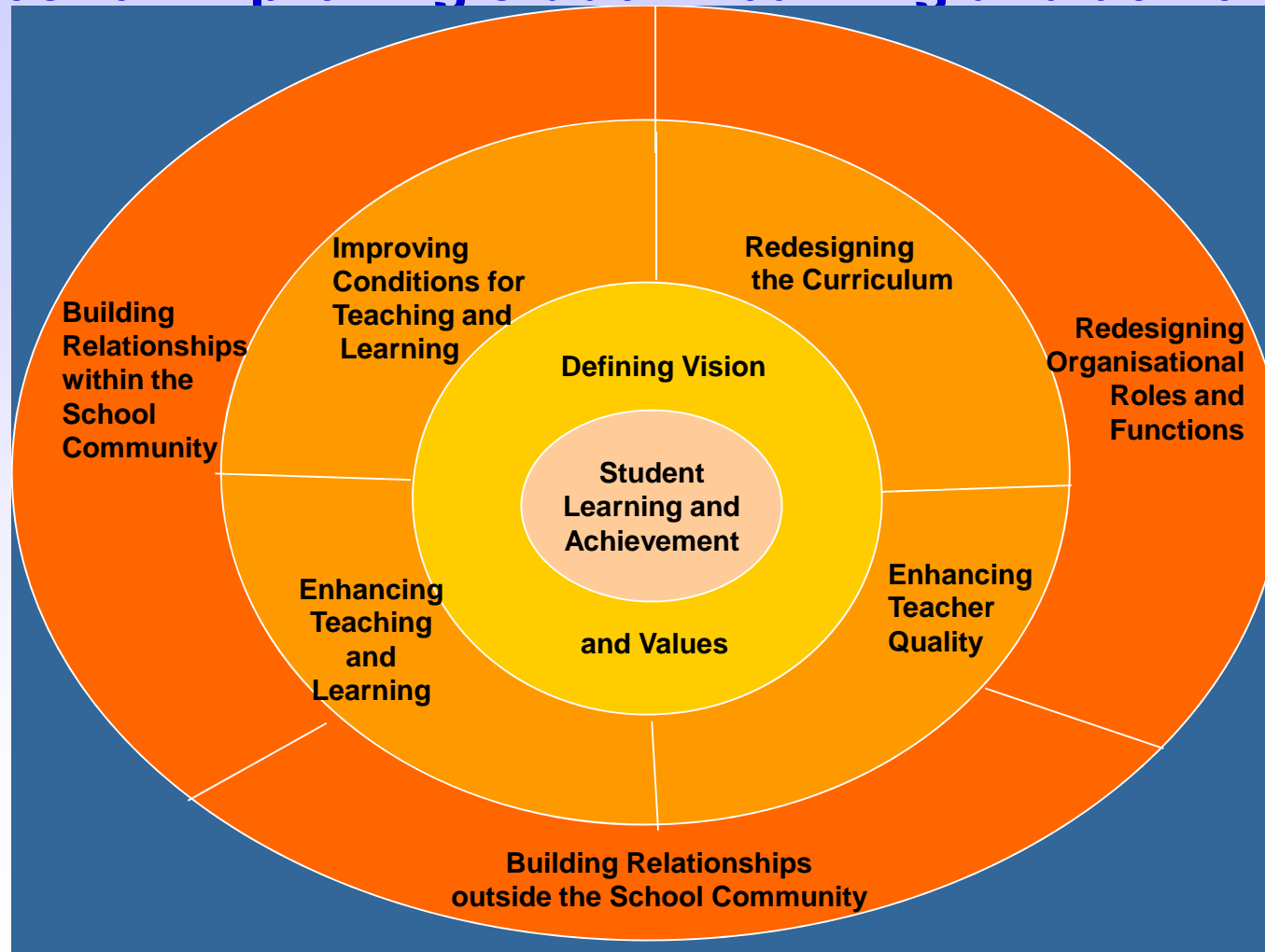
A Primary School's Line of Success



A Line of Success & changes in KS2 national assessment results



Strategies for improving student learning and achievement



Conclusions (1)

- **Headteachers can make a significant difference to pupil behaviour, engagement and attainment outcomes, regardless of experience, sector, size and socio economic status of school.**
- **Successful leaders show many similarities in both their values and what they do. How they act varies according to school context, organisational history, current performance & sector. (Claims 2 and 3)**
- **Social context and leadership judgments about organisational history affect their priorities and emphases. (Added knowledge)**
- **Headteacher values, predispositions, attributes and strategies make a difference to conditions, motivation, commitment and competences for teachers and pupils and their achievements. (Advances claims 4 and 7)**

Conclusions (cont)

- **Successful leaders are those who are able to diagnose, initiate and adapt. It is the 'layering' of combinations of 'fit for purpose' values-led strategies over time which make a difference to pupil outcomes. (New claim)**
- **The nature and form(s) of distributed leadership reflect the level of leadership and organisational trust. (Advances claims 5 and 6)**
- **Trust is both a value, predisposition, calculated process and consequence and is associated with distributed leadership. (Added knowledge)**
- **Building and sustaining person-centred trust is essential. (Added knowledge) School improvement groupings and sectors count. (Added knowledge)**

Further Information:

Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Harris, A., Leithwood, K., Gu, Q., Penlington, C. , Mehta, P., Brown, E. & Kington, A. (2009)
The Impact of Leadership on Pupil Outcomes: Final Report to DSCF,
Nottingham: Department of Children, Families & Schools.

ALSO

Special Issue: *School Leadership and Management*, 2008 28 (1)

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