

Publication

**Leading for change:
School Leadership
Standards and
Practices in a
Global Context**

Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, countries around the world have reflected on their progress towards creating high-quality, inclusive and equitable school systems¹ that support young people to develop the knowledge, skills and values they need to live and work in a globalised economy and to contribute responsibly both locally and globally. Inevitably this has thrown the spotlight on those who might play a part in influencing student outcomes: the education workforce.

Since John Hattie first published his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to attainment in 2008², it has been widely agreed that the quality of teaching within a setting is the greatest influence on student learning. But who influences those teachers and the quality of what they deliver? Certainly, initial teacher training, along with the academic background, values and motivation of the teacher will play their part, but the role of the school leader is also critically important. As Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins observe in their paper *Seven strong claims about school leadership* (2010³, revisited 2019⁴), ‘Successful school leaders improve teaching and learning and thus pupil outcomes ... most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, teaching practices and through developing teachers’ capacities for leadership.’ This publication therefore focuses on the critical role the school leader plays within an organisation and specifically how that might contribute to improved student outcomes.

The publication is divided into three sections offering insights into educational policy making related to school leadership as well as innovative case studies demonstrating the impact of these policies. The first section covers the multi-faceted role of the school leader with policy makers sharing their approaches to developing this role. Two pieces – one from Pakistan and the second from South Africa explore how governments build consistent expectations of their school leaders through the creation of national standards which can then be used to create robust recruitment procedures and performance management as well as to develop appropriate school leadership training.

The role of the school leader in supporting teacher professional development is also recognised in the important chapter by Dr Jane Doughty on instructional leadership on page 13. It recognises the importance of this part of the leader’s role given its potential impact on the quality of teaching in the classroom and therefore on pupil outcomes. As Leithwood and colleagues note, the kind of leadership that impacts most significantly on student outcomes; ‘focuses on ... developing teachers’ skills, providing instructional support [and] monitoring student learning.’⁵⁶ Therefore, the

¹ UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal 4

² Hattie, J. (2008). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. Abingdon: Routledge.

³ Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A. and Hopkins, D. (2010). *Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

⁴ Leithwood, K., Harris, A. and Hopkins, D. (2019). *Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership Revisited*. Abingdon: Routledge

⁵ Leithwood, K., Day, C., Sammons, P., Harris, A. and Hopkins, D. (2010). *Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership

⁶ Leithwood, K., Harris, A. and Hopkins, D. (2019). *Seven Strong Claims About Successful School Leadership Revisited*. Abingdon: Routledge.

school's ability to improve and sustain student outcomes is dependent on its approach to instructional leadership. Jane examines what this involves at a practitioner level whilst also reflecting on what this means for school leaders and policy makers in terms of its implementation at system level.

Finally, Dr Hilda Khoury from Lebanon and Dr Sam Marigat share very specific examples of how they are shaping the school leadership role for a particular purpose - to support the creation of more inclusive schools. Read more about Lebanon's innovative new hub model on page 25 and about the school leader's role as a 'vision carrier' for more inclusive schools in Kenya on page 22.

The second section of the publication focuses on how we can support the development of school leaders to ensure they can carry out their role effectively. Denise Barrows, acknowledging the complexity of educational environments, explores how one-to-one coaching can enable a tangible and sustained transformation in leaders' day-to-day practice providing highly versatile and impactful learning for school leaders. In his chapter, Dr Arran Hamilton challenges us to hold up a mirror to the school leadership profession so that they can systematically explore their individual and collective beliefs about teaching and learning. Learn more about his four identified noble pursuits and their implications for leaders on page 39. Finally, the importance of collaboration is highlighted by our other articles in this section. School leadership can be a lonely profession as Professor Toby Greany points out and there are significant dangers of operating in 'splendid isolation'. Networks, collaborations and partnerships between schools can take multiple forms and achieve multiple objectives but the underpinning principle is that school-to-school collaboration can offer huge potential for shared learning and expertise between school leaders, something that Marie-Claire Bretherton explores on a very practical level in her chapter on page 53.

Our final section offers several interesting and innovative case studies from a variety of diverse settings. Professor Josiah Olusegun Ajiboye, for example, outlines the series of steps the Nigerian government took to implementing a new set of standards for headteachers and the impact that these have had in terms of headteacher effectiveness. Once again, instructional leadership plays an important part in this section with Andy Buck offering the reader a personal reflection on what school leaders need to fulfil their role related to instructional leadership effectively. Whilst role-related leadership knowledge, skills and expertise are essential, he argues, these have to be supplemented with certain personal qualities and universal leadership skills which he groups into three domains - cognitive resources, social resources and psychological resources. Find out more about this and some of the practical strategies that Andy suggests to support headteachers on page 69. Building on Andy's chapter, Rebecca Picton and Inku Fasil share insights into the impact that one headteacher had when he introduced instructional leadership into his school in Jima in southern Ethiopia.

Other case studies from Egypt, Kenya and Uganda explore the role of the school leader in creating more inclusive classrooms – initially introduced in section 1 - whilst Mei Lim and Rebecca

Cramer offer a very practical example of the importance of community partnerships. Despite the diversity of geographies represented in this publication, it is clear that whilst there is no one answer – one single template for success – many policy makers are facing similar challenges and embracing similar approaches to strengthening school leadership across their respective countries.

The publication *Leading for Change: School Leadership Standards and Practices in a Global Context* offers a comprehensive exploration of the evolving role of school leaders in navigating the complexities of global education systems. It provides invaluable insights into how leadership practices can be adapted to meet the diverse and changing needs of schools worldwide, while emphasising the importance of context in shaping effective leadership strategies. By examining school leadership standards from a global perspective, the publication highlights the universal challenges faced by leaders, as well as the unique approaches that can be employed to address them.

This work contributes significantly to the field by encouraging a deeper understanding of the relationship between leadership practices and educational outcomes. It calls on school leaders, and the policy makers that guide them, to reflect critically on their roles and responsibilities, urging them to embrace a dynamic and inclusive approach to leadership that prioritises equity, innovation, and continuous improvement. Moreover, the publication challenges policymakers, educators, and leadership trainers to rethink and reshape leadership development frameworks, ensuring that they are responsive to the demands of the 21st-century educational landscape.

Ultimately, *Leading for Change* serves as both a guide and a call to action for policy makers and school leaders worldwide, fostering an environment where leadership is seen not only as a position of authority but as a catalyst for transformation and progress. It urges leaders to engage in ongoing self-reflection and collaborative dialogue to drive sustainable change, shaping the future of education in ways that empower students, teachers, and communities alike.