



LEAP Action Learning Report 2012

Topic area (The What) Local Schools Local Decisions. The importance of Principal collaboration to ensure successful schools and the importance of system accountability through a support culture.

Context (The Where and When) England: Essex, Education Authority - Standards and Excellence
September 2013

Research methods (The How) School and meeting observation; discussion; professional reading; attendance at local authority secondary and new Head (Principals) conferences; development of case studies.

Initial major findings (preferably in dot-point form) The English Education System is working towards a highly devolved model of school education. Increasing autonomy is matched with increasing accountability. Initiatives to develop Principal sharing include Sponsor Schools for 'failing schools' placed into the Special Measures accountability category and Teaching Schools to develop a professional learning culture across schools.

Autonomy

* Principals commented that they had the authority to make decisions in their school that could improve the impact of learning yet most commented on not necessarily knowing what initiatives would lead to the highest impact for learning.

Accountability

* Principals defined their schools by how they had last been judged through the OFSTED external accountability measure and when their next assessment would be.

* Principals of schools identified as Good, Requiring Improvement discussed a reluctance to be innovative through fear of failure and being placed in the category of Special Measures. This accountability category sees schools forced to become independent public school and Sponsored by a successful school.

General Observations

- Opportunities for systemic Principal collaboration is limited.

- Teaching Schools were seen by colleagues as successful but inflexible in strategies utilised.

Comments that "once you have been to a couple of courses at a teaching school you've seen it all."

- Principals commented very positively on the concept of Communities Of Schools, leading shared teacher professional learning and leadership

support.

- New Principals in sponsored, Special Measures schools described a feeling of support from their sponsor school Principal, however, commented that wider Principal collaboration would be beneficial. It was commented that the "Sponsor Principal demands my sole attention. Her/His reputation is on the line if I fail. There is no time for seeking other ideas from other school Heads (Principals).

- Where Principals had formed strong networks with surrounding schools there was a sense of vision for education beyond an awareness of their accountability performance ranking. Confidence in innovation, understanding of purpose, sense of support, and deep focus on teacher professional learning & capacity building were present. Principals commented that this culture was encouraged by the Essex Local Education Authority but unsupported and therefore rare.

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