

Raising Achievement in Our Schools:

***Models of Excellence
for Headteachers in Different Settings***

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1 Introduction

This document sets out the findings of Hay McBer's research into the characteristics of high performing headteachers in different settings.

Characteristics make a difference to performance

Personal characteristics are how the headteacher does the job, and the deeper-seated qualities he or she brings to the role. They have to do with self-image and values; traits or the way they habitually approach situations; and at the deepest level, the motivation that drives performance. These personal characteristics matter because when combined with the knowledge and skills described in the National Standards, they lead to excellent results in the job.

Supporting development

This detailed framework is intended to support potential and serving headteachers by painting a picture of what these characteristics look like in action. It can inform Continuous Professional Development and performance management. Heads will be able to refer to it to confirm their strengths as a professional, and to pinpoint areas for future development, and improve their performance.

The research underpinning the characteristics

The characteristics are drawn from research about what high-performing headteachers in different settings actually do in their schools and in their communities. In-depth interviews, panel discussions and questionnaires were used with a representative sample of headteachers from each phase and type of school in England, together with individual interviews with representatives of education bodies and other stakeholders, to identify the characteristics that drive performance. The resulting models are presented in the second section of this document.

Dynamic models

The research found that demonstrating one characteristic to a high level was insufficient to deliver performance - the characteristics needed to work together.

Different routes to success

The models are not 'one size fits all'. The research found through a thematic and statistical analysis that headteachers in different settings achieve results in a variety of ways. This means that in any one cluster or group of characteristics described in the models, a headteacher can be successful through their strengths in particular characteristics, rather than necessarily demonstrating excellence in all of them. They are individuals, and the models provide practical, down-to-earth tools to use in real situations. Hence 'models' of excellence.

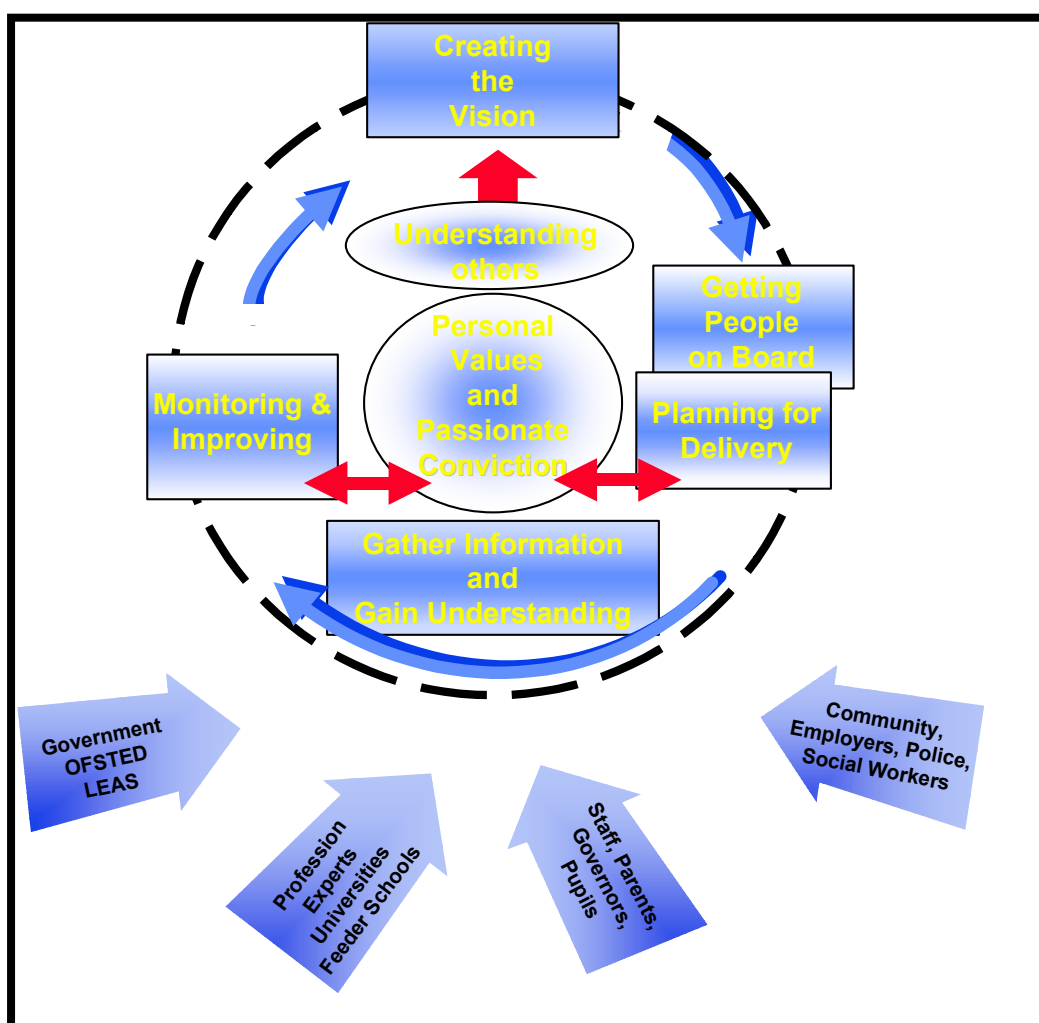
Progression to headship

This document links with the 'Models of Effective Teaching' and the 'Models of Excellence for Shared Leadership Roles', which describe the characteristics associated with achieving results in different levels of contribution in the profession, and the critical transitions between them.

2 How headteachers achieve excellence

The research identified 15 characteristics for excellence in headteacher roles. These are grouped into five clusters (as shown in the diagram below). An overview of how the characteristics combine is given in the following section.

In headteacher roles in small schools (under 150 pupils) and in special schools, these same characteristics combine in slightly different ways. These are also described in the following pages.



The clusters

Personal Values and Passionate Conviction

- Respect for Others
- Challenge and Support
- Personal Conviction

Creating the Vision

- Strategic Thinking
- Drive for Improvement
- Initiative

Planning for Delivery and Monitoring and Improving

- Analytical Thinking
- Initiative
- Transformational Leadership
- Teamworking
- Understanding Others
- Developing Potential

Getting People on Board

- Impact and Influence
- Holding People Accountable

Gathering Information and Gaining Understanding

- Understanding the Environment
- Information Seeking

Characteristics of excellence for headteachers

The characteristics in the models work together to deliver highly effective performance in the headteacher role, to bring about dramatic improvements and then sustain them.

These are models for transformational leadership; that is, they create a step change in improvement. At the heart of the models is a core of strongly-held and en-acted **VALUES**.

These relate to underlying **Respect for Others** which is expressed in a passionate concern that everyone should treat pupils and all members of the school community with respect. They relate to **Challenge and Support**: a preparedness to do everything to instil self-esteem, including challenging others and providing support so all pupils achieve their potential. And they relate to **Personal Conviction**: confidence in oneself, especially in challenging situations. These are rooted in unshakeable values about the importance of education, which may be broadly humanistic, deeply spiritual, or driven out of a desire to serve pupils, parents and the community.

Highly effective heads build a compelling **VISION** for their school. They do this by **Strategic Thinking**: constantly referring to and using best practice and the ideas of colleagues, being outward-facing, thinking creatively about what will work for their school, and reshaping the vision to take account of future needs, such as the increasingly important role of ICT. They have an intense and relentless **Drive for Improvement**: setting challenging targets that raise expectations and set uncompromisingly high standards for teaching, learning and achievement, with no room for complacency. Their vision reflects their own values and embraces the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils.

PLANNING FOR DELIVERY enables highly effective heads to think through what is needed to secure others' involvement, particularly senior colleagues and governors, to gain their ownership and enthusiastic support. **MONITORING AND IMPROVING** too is not only a way of tracking progress and identifying areas for improvement, it is a way of empowering others to take on responsibility and drive needed changes. Effective headteachers are constantly monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, personally or through others.

Planning and monitoring requires heads to use **Analytical Thinking**, to set and refine priorities for action in their drive for improvements to think through and test options, and to see implications. **Initiative** ensures that current and long-term opportunities and problems are dealt with proactively. Highly effective heads create space for themselves to think through future opportunities and plans.

Highly effective heads provide **Transformational Leadership**, working with their governing body, and with and through their leadership teams, generating **Teamworking** by seeking and valuing others' inputs. They have a high degree of **Understanding Others**, enabling them to effectively take advantage of the strengths of their staff teams, **Developing Potential** and deploying the totality of their resources to the best effect.

They build on their ability to 'read' others by **GETTING OTHERS ON BOARD** to believe that step change is possible and to achieve it. They use **Impact and Influence** to deliver the vision, and to gain resources from wherever they can. Above all, highly effective heads are always creating clarity about what needs to be done, by whom, and then unswervingly **Holding People Accountable** for doing it, challenging poor performance when necessary.

Supporting and informing each of the characteristics is **GATHERING INFORMATION AND GAINING UNDERSTANDING** which involves ongoing **Information Seeking and Understanding the Environment**. Highly effective heads use a wide range of contacts and networks in their schools and communities, and are vividly and personally in touch with every aspect of school life. They actively seek information about the quality of teaching and learning from children, teachers, support staff, parents, governors, and members of the wider school community, and seek to make the school accessible and accountable to them. Their understanding of the environment and their understanding of organisations means they can use the dynamics within and outside the school to deliver the vision.

At its heart, the models are animated by the head's energy and values. The models have a toughness to them because they target all effort on whatever it takes to create results for pupils. They also require a versatility and flexibility of approach which enable the head to deploy whatever characteristics are required in a particular situation and context.

Finally the mix of characteristics for transformational leadership is unique to each individual. Different combinations of these key characteristics will be played out in order to deliver outstanding performance in a variety of ways, all of them distinctive.

How headteachers in small schools achieve excellence

The clusters

Personal Values and Passionate Conviction

- Respect for Others
- Challenge and Support
- Personal Conviction

Creating the Vision

- Strategic Thinking
- Drive for Improvement
- Initiative

Planning for Delivery and Monitoring and Improving

- Analytical Thinking
- Transformational Leadership
- Holding People Accountable
- Understanding Others
- Developing Potential

Getting People on Board

- Teamworking
- Impact and Influence

Gathering Information and Gaining Understanding

- Understanding the Environment
- Information Seeking

Characteristics of excellence for headteachers in small schools

The characteristics in the model work together to deliver highly effective performance in small schools, to bring about dramatic improvements and then sustain them. The models are powerfully driven by a core of strongly-held and enacted **VALUES**.

These relate to underlying **Respect for Others** which is expressed in a passionate concern that everyone should treat pupils and all members of the school community with respect. They relate to **Challenge and Support**: a preparedness to do everything to instil self-esteem including challenging others, and providing support to all pupils to achieve their potential. And they relate to **Personal Conviction**: confidence in oneself, especially in challenging situations. These are rooted in unshakeable values about the importance of education, which may be broadly humanistic, deeply spiritual, or driven out of a desire to serve pupils, parents and the community.

Highly effective heads in small schools are driven by their values to **CREATING A VISION** for the school that is ambitious and makes no concessions to limited resources. Their **Drive for Improvement** and their aspirations and targets for their pupils are as far-reaching and stretching as any in larger schools. They may be highly entrepreneurial in creating partnerships and creating resource. The **Strategic Thinking** they do is to find a vision that really caters for *their* pupils, in *their* community, and that is 'right'. Outstanding small school heads have an eye on the future but both feet very firmly on the ground, and use their **Initiative** to start from where the school is to anticipate and plan into the future and to create and seize opportunities.

PLANNING FOR DELIVERY and **MONITORING AND IMPROVING** for heads in small schools involves a raft of characteristics.

Analytical Thinking is needed to break up the ambitious programme for change so that it is manageable given the balancing act heads in small schools do every day between teaching, leading and managing the school, and handling all the day-to-day events and crises which larger schools would have more staff to deal with. A lot of thinking is done at high speed, working out and mentally rehearsing knock-on effects of various courses of action when resources are constrained. High performing heads in small schools need to get behind performance data because the small numbers of pupils and sometimes, fluctuating rolls make patterns difficult to detect. They need to understand progression data so they can target effort appropriately to raise achievement beyond the comfort zone - their own and that of others. **Transformational Leadership** is about creating energy and involvement and setting an inspiring personal example - being an outstanding teacher and professional as well as the 'lead learner'. The best headteachers of small schools have an extraordinary ability of getting people working together and securing every possible source of help, not only to enrich the curriculum but to improve the site and facilities.

There is a toughness and strength about this unique ability to create close working relationships. High performing heads in small schools clearly assign responsibility and make roles clear, especially when working with others from outside the school, and are good at **Holding People Accountable** and making sure others deliver for the pupils. This is difficult to achieve because of the closeness of personal relationships. But the effective heads maintain a "professional distance". They tackle under-performance, even if this is uncomfortable.

In implementing the strategy in their schools, highly effective heads, even with limited resources, are **Developing Potential**, coaching their staff and creating capability for the future by sharing leadership and managing to provide development opportunities. **Understanding Others** to a very marked degree, they are able to gauge the correct pace of change by assessing others' capability, their readiness and their stamina.

This quality also helps with **GETTING PEOPLE ON BOARD**. The capacity to **Impact and Influence** others depends on the head's insight about what motivates others and will appeal to them. Heads in small schools have a vivid presence in their schools and communities, and they 'walk the talk', showing high levels of integrity - part of the personal conviction at the heart of the model. This, combined with their energy and warmth, and a willingness to be an active member of the team, creates the high level of **Teamworking** in their schools.

Finally, what sets outstanding heads in small schools apart, is their drive for **GATHERING INFORMATION AND GAINING UNDERSTANDING**. They are adept at **Information Seeking**, and use a wide range of contacts and networks in their schools and communities, talking to pupils and parents, asking questions, finding out what people really think and feel, and generally taking the temperature of the school and the local community, and in this way they can form an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. They always know who to ask about what, and who are the key influencers. They are tireless in keeping abreast of developments and best practice elsewhere, and the extensive and varied data they gather enables them to shape the direction and priorities of the school, and to draw on very best practice from elsewhere so the school is truly part of the wider community - and has as good or better provision than any other school.

The model is a dynamic one, with heads in small schools achieving excellence through different combinations of these characteristics. The characteristics that have to be present at all times are Understanding Others, Teamworking, and Impact and Influence.

What is also clear from the research is that Personal Conviction and Analytical Thinking work together to enable outstanding heads in small schools to prioritise and juggle, and retain a buoyancy and optimism throughout - they know they and their schools are going to get there, but that there are only so many hours in the day and on some days progress will be faster than others. They know and make mature judgements about what is 'good enough' and have the emotional resilience for the long haul. They recover from setbacks and have extraordinarily high levels of energy.

How Headteachers in Special Schools achieve excellence

The clusters

Personal Values and Passionate Conviction

- Respect for Others
- Challenge and Support
- Personal Conviction
- Understanding Others

Creating the Vision

- Strategic Thinking
- Drive for Improvement

Planning for Delivery and Monitoring and Improving

- Transformational Leadership
- Initiative
- Analytical Thinking
- Teamworking
- Developing Potential

Getting People on Board

- Impact and Influence
- Holding People Accountable
- Understanding the Environment

Gathering Information and Gaining Understanding

- Information Seeking

Characteristics of excellence for headteachers in special schools

The characteristics in the models work together to deliver highly effective performance in special schools, to bring about dramatic improvements and then to sustain them. The model is powerfully driven by a core of strongly-held and enacted **VALUES**.

These relate to underlying **Respect for Others** which is expressed in a passionate concern that everyone should treat pupils and all members of the school community with respect. They relate to **Challenge and Support**: a preparedness to do everything to instil self-esteem including challenging others and providing support to all pupils to achieve their potential. And they relate to **Personal Conviction**: confidence in oneself, especially in challenging situations. These are rooted in unshakeable values about the importance of education, which may be broadly humanistic, deeply spiritual, or driven out of a desire to serve pupils, parents and the community.

The beliefs at the centre of the model are to be deeply held and amount to a strong sense of identity for the head, who is completely clear about the value of special needs provision and how specialist expertise will benefit pupils both inside and outside mainstream education. Their conviction about this means they can withstand challenge and have the resilience to work for the long haul in the face of day-to-day pressures, which may often be heightened emotionally and physically, and in the face of often negative preconceptions about their client group from those outside.

This sense of focus and identity derives from a deep understanding of individuals with special needs, and usually long experience of working professionally with the client group. High performing special school heads have 'been there' as practitioners, and have the emotional range to recognise, acknowledge and work with others who may have multiple and profound disabilities or special needs. They have strong self-control and self-awareness and are not thrown by others' behaviour or by complexity of need or setbacks.

What enables this is their 'emotional intelligence'. Not only are they highly intuitive and reflective about the reasons for people's behaviour, they are able to construct and test hypotheses about it, and work with them to move them on. They have this flair for **Understanding Others** because they have worked on their own personal development, have a knowledge of their own emotional terrain, and are able to use their self awareness to manage their own and others' feelings.

The model is suffused with this capability and animates every part of it, providing a guide to action and mitigating the strains of the job. It allows the head of the special school to absorb, contain and move through day-to-day challenges and remain dispassionate and calm.

CREATING THE VISION depends on an individual knowledge of each pupil and the nature of his or her special needs, together with a **Strategic Thinking** capability to determine the identity of the school and to decide direction, taking into account a complex series of variables including demand, the availability of funding, and relationships with a wide range of agencies.

The other agencies with which the school needs to deal are likely to be undergoing continuous change, to be under scrutiny for added value, and are resource constrained. The task of creating vision is therefore highly contingent and mediated, and the maturity at the centre of the model helps the head to deal with this ambiguity. What distinguishes the best special school heads is their **Drive for Improvement** in building the vision. They are ambitious for their pupils, often against others' expectations, and set the bar for achievement higher than others might have thought possible, continually pushing for improvements. They are emphatically focused not only on their duty of care, but on making a real difference to educational outcomes for their pupils, and the quality of their future lives.

PLANNING FOR DELIVERY and **MONITORING AND IMPROVING** for special school heads involves several characteristics.

Transformational Leadership is central. Special school heads are lead professionals, orchestrating an extended range of other professionals, support workers and external agencies to provide integrated provision for pupils. They focus on **Developing Potential**, coaching these professionals to increase the capability of the team members to work in a complex, changing environment. They model best practice and add value to the team by ensuring collaborative and cohesive working, focused on the key actions that will deliver most benefit to the pupil.

The complexity of the special school environment means that planning, monitoring and improving are highly focused activities, requiring considerable **Analytical Thinking** and creativity, to develop, test and rework different approaches to achieve progress. This is where **Initiative** comes in - the head needs to work with others to take persistent action to implement the vision that also takes account of medium and longer-term scenarios. Fostering **Teamworking** is critical, and this is very much about getting others' inputs in a multidisciplinary and multi-agency setting.

GETTING PEOPLE ON BOARD takes on particular significance in the special school head model, because of the range of people who must be involved. The head's ability in **Understanding the Environment** enables them to detect the feelings and concerns of individuals and agencies. Because of the nature of the client group, and shifting ground nationally and locally in negotiating the complementary roles of special and mainstream provision, the head requires a sureness of touch in knowing the politics and key influencers, and working with them. Their **Impact and Influence** is critical in orchestrating others and getting them on side. This is especially the case with parents, who may be geographically scattered over an extended catchment area, and who may be particularly anxious about their children and their education. **Holding People Accountable** is key to ensure others deliver what they have undertaken to do, and actions are followed through to the benefit of pupils.

Finally, **Information Seeking** skills are needed by the special school head to **GATHER INFORMATION AND GAIN UNDERSTANDING**. Multiple perspectives are key to developing an understanding of the underlying needs of special needs pupils, and wider developments and research from mainstream education and beyond need to be drawn on in the challenging task of raising achievement.

The model is unusual in the extent to which it has 'must have' combinations of characteristics which have to be demonstrated to deliver high performance. But there are a number of ways in which excellence is achieved and the research showed wide variations of styles and approaches around this core set of characteristics which are relentlessly deployed.