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National College
for Leadership of Schools
and Children's Services

Schools and academies

The changing role and influence of senior support staff in schools

Companion case study report

Resource

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Introduction

The case-study summaries that follow are based on interviews with 18 non-qualified teacher status (non-QTS) staff on school senior leadership teams (SLTs) and their colleagues in 16 different schools or partnerships (comprising 7 secondary schools, 4 primary schools, 3 federations/clusters, and 2 special schools).

The case studies were conducted as part of a research study designed to explore the range and roles of non-QTS staff in schools who are members of their school's SLT. The full report can be found under separate cover.

The interviews were conducted between January and March 2010. For each school, face-to-face or telephone interviews were conducted with some or all of the following:

- non-QTS staff on the SLT
- headteachers
- governors
- other staff who worked closely with the non-QTS staff member

For each case study, interviewees were asked about:

- roles and background of non-QTS staff
- benefits and impact of the role
- issues and challenges
- professional development and career progression

These themes form the structure of the write-ups.

The case studies have been grouped by role type into three broad categories: business and finance roles; community and extended services roles; and inclusion roles.

Business and finance roles

Ashington Central First School: school business manager and assistant headteacher

Ashington Central First School is a large, urban first school situated in the North East. It has a three-form entry, with around 480 pupils on roll. It is situated in an area of high deprivation, with a high proportion of children receiving free school meals. It is an ex-mining town, with difficulties of second-generation unemployment. The school is part of a federation of five schools. These schools also form a trust.

Brian, the school business manager (SBM), has worked at the school for over eight years. He started as the bursar before moving on to the senior leadership team (SLT) about six years ago. Brian explained: 'It was a very forward-thinking chair of governors at the time who saw how much pressure the head was under and decided that something needed to be done about it.' He became the assistant head around six months ago, in a temporary role.

Before joining the school as an SBM, Brian worked in banking. He saw the job advertised, and decided to apply. Banking provided him with relevant experience, as his previous job mirrored his new role, not only in terms of financial management, but also in that he had responsibility for premises, human resources and line management, and understood strategic planning for organisations. It was an 'exact fit although in a completely different context,' he says. He went on the pilot course for the National College's Certificate of School Business Management (CSBM) in 2003, which he found 'extremely useful, because it gave me the context I was looking for.'

In his role as SBM/assistant head Brian has a wide remit for school development matters, and he carries out many operational roles. He manages and monitors the school's budget, oversees a three-year budget; deals with performance development systems; develops the school improvement plan; analyses school performance data; manages health and safety on the site; deputises when the headteacher is away; involves parents in the school; helps with ICT and is a member of the governing body. He directly line manages around 8 members of support staff, and is the overall line manager for all 40 support staff in the school. The headteacher said he thought Brian's role was 'probably wider than [that of] most business managers', and attributed this to his assistant headteacher co-role. The headteacher explained:

He's going out of business management, not totally, but into other issues... I think he has developed from being brought in to manage the budget, to being of vital importance as a strategic partner within the school.

Joining the SLT was seen as a logical, natural progression of the role, as Brian explained:

A business manager basically is involved in everything that happens in the school, so it makes perfect sense to be on the senior leadership team. You've got a lot of input into the strategic decision-making, so it makes sense to be there when these decisions are made.

Benefits and impact of the role

The role of SBM brings many benefits, and Brian is viewed by the headteacher as 'a prime example of where you don't need a teaching background to be effective.' The impact of the SBM role was thought to be enhanced by being on the SLT, as Brian explained: 'You have to be on the senior leadership team to do an effective job; if you're remote from these decisions, you can't play a part in them.'

The SBM role brings a different, non-teaching perspective to members of the leadership team, as Brian has strong skills in finance and human resources, and questions their thinking. The school leadership team is also now more aware of the budget as there is someone in the school who knows the budget inside out,

knows about sources of funding, and is able to help them to make any improvements that they need. The headteacher explained: 'He is able to deal a lot with what the core issues are for the school at the moment, but brings into it the pragmatic, strategic and financial implications [of] what we're trying to do.' The role of SBM was also said to reduce the pressure that the headteacher is under, enabling him to focus on his expertise in leading teaching and learning, and developing standards in the school.

Brian is respected by school staff, and viewed as an approachable member of the management team. He is well-versed in management techniques, and helps with the smooth running of the school. He is a good role model, and was said to be very good at problem-solving. He also eases the burden on staff since he deals with performance management and line management of support staff.

Pupils benefit indirectly from the role of the SBM because the headteacher and the senior leadership team have time to concentrate fully on teaching and learning, 'so that leads to a better educational experience for the children, better outcomes.' Brian also does a lot of organisational work in the school and project management as part of the senior leadership team, which the headteacher hopes will have an impact on pupils. Also, as the SBM has a tight handle on the finances, when resources for pupils are needed, he is able to source them at a good price.

A big challenge for the school is engaging parents more, and Brian has time available to help the school do this. He has set up a parent community room; a parent council; online courses for adults which he runs; and is working with a company to help the school offer national vocational qualification (NVQ) provision for parents. He is approachable as the assistant head, and available when the headteacher is not around. He has knowledge of the school so is able to help parents, and deals with them well. Parents trust him, and feel confident about going to see him.

Another benefit of the role of SBM is cost savings, because Brian has the time and expertise to renegotiate contracts, including those for caretaking, cleaning and catering, and can also run these services in-house. He makes bids for funding, and helps the school to get the best deals.

Issues and challenges

Staff explained that there was some initial resistance from teaching staff to the development of the role, largely because they were not sure what it would involve. However, they very quickly accepted Brian's role because they saw how it helped them, and their workload decreased, enabling them to concentrate on teaching.

Interviewees commented that the SBM was initially on a lower salary than his colleagues on the SLT although this situation has now improved.

Professional development and career progression

Brian has received training on continuing professional development (CPD) and health and safety and fire regulations, all run by the local authority. However, he has not yet had an opportunity to undertake training specifically related to business management. He undertakes self-initiated learning with the National College's online materials. Within the school, he tends to run training sessions rather than attending them. He does attend training sessions for school staff that are run once a week, as he finds it useful to know what is going on in the school. He does not have any formal support network, but there is a small support network among the five schools in the trust.

Brian is applying to do the Advanced Diploma of School Business Management (ADSBM) to enable him to get a degree in the subject. The headteacher would also like him to pursue some of the National College's professional qualifications for senior leaders, including the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH).

A benefit of being part of a trust was said to be that it is easier to plan the career progression for individuals in office-based roles, who might otherwise not have a clearly defined career path. The trust is currently trying to map career plans and training opportunities for non-teaching staff. Newly appointed staff do not take on a contract with one school, but with all five schools, and have the freedom to move between the organisations, which makes internal promotions easier.

The trust is currently being restructured, so potentially there may be one SBM overseeing the primary schools in the trust, and another overseeing the secondary schools, or one SBM overseeing all five schools. Therefore, the role of the SBM in the trust will change, with a new title and responsibilities, although the exact nature of the new role was not known at the time of interview. If Brian stays in his current school, the headteacher would like him to become the permanent assistant head.

Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School: head of support

Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School is a voluntary-controlled school for 11 to 18 year olds. It has around 1,100 pupils on roll. The school has specialist status for music and ICT, and a gold ArtsMark award. The majority of girls are White British but the number from minority ethnic groups is growing and is currently at around 17 per cent. Few pupils come from disadvantaged backgrounds, are entitled to free school meals, or have learning difficulties or disabilities.

The non-QTS staff member on the SLT is the head of support. Coming from a background in personnel management, Sue has worked in the school for 13 years, and been on the SLT since 2005. She came to the school as the head's PA, and took her place on the SLT as resources and administration manager. This was recently reclassified as head of support. The post was created in-house. There is general consensus that the role in school has gradually evolved. As the head's PA, Sue began contributing ideas for development, and took over responsibility for office and premises management. Sue told us that workforce remodelling had played a significant part in her role development:

It came about without any particular intention. Gradually, the longer I was here and the more I got involved in things I became a support staff representative. With workforce remodelling I started to have ideas about where we should be going and what we should be targeting.

There was also recognition that her personnel input and experience was needed on the SLT. Sue says that there is agreement that if she were to move on, her role on the SLT would still exist:

I don't think there is any question now as it is established and is regarded as a crucial part of leadership and management. The job may change if I left, but it would still exist as part of the leadership group.

The head of support has a broad role in school, with overall responsibility for support staff (around 35 staff members). Sue oversees their terms and conditions and works with their immediate line managers. She directly manages the catering manager, administration manager, site manager and office manager. Her main areas of responsibility are catering, premises, administration and personnel. She does not currently oversee finance as this was previously managed by the headteacher. When the new headteacher came into post, an accountant was employed by the school as the non-QTS staff member could not accommodate this task within her current roles and responsibilities.

Benefits and impact of the role

The main impact of Sue's role on the wider leadership team is that she is able to bring a different perspective to the leadership group. As the assistant headteacher said:

It has given us a more balanced view. With all of us coming from a teaching background I don't think that we can always think of the impact that we are having in the rest of the school, and also, what admin support and stuff we would need. On our own we may not have been able to make some decisions; at a strategic level we have needed her input.

Sue brings an understanding of how the school works in areas other than those affecting teaching staff, and having been in the school for a number of years, has a good grasp of how everything works. She has also been able to bring a business perspective to the SLT. Coming from a non-teaching background is thought to be beneficial as it provides her with a 'much wider remit of thought.'

Sue influences the wider school staff as she is seen as approachable and able to affect matters related to personnel issues. She is valued for providing support to the wider staff and she is often approached for information or advice, or with concerns. There is also a feeling that she is perceived as more approachable than other members of the SLT. Having a member of the support staff on the SLT has also been an encouragement to the support staff in the school – she acts as their advocate and reinforces to all staff the importance of support staff.

Benefits for pupils, their families and the community are more indirect – she describes herself as having a more ‘behind the scenes role’ in this respect. It is widely acknowledged that as head of support Sue is instrumental in school improvement: ‘she is a lynchpin to school improvement.’ She relieves other members of the SLT and takes care of a number of areas that were previously covered by teaching staff. For example, she put in place systems needed to support school improvement:

If we don’t have good systems, particularly administratively, and information management systems, then teachers can’t be effective and we are not supporting teaching and learning. It is all so data driven, if we didn’t have good systems then we are really just not doing the job.

There was agreement that by being on the SLT, the head of support has a greater impact than she would otherwise have. She has a strategic overview and would not have this if she were not part of the SLT. She is also able to have more influence over teaching staff, and not just support staff.

Issues and challenges

There had been some initial issues of acceptance by other members of the SLT in the earlier days of her role. The SLT has since changed and Sue no longer experiences any resistance to her being in post. She also felt the need to develop wider staff confidence in her and to demonstrate that she could have an influence on a range of school issues. Indeed, it is recognised that some school staff were sceptical about how someone had developed from a secretarial role to a senior position in school. Establishing herself in role was therefore a key challenge, but one that has been successfully overcome.

Again, when new into post, there were some issues around pay and conditions. There was a discrepancy between the pay of the non-QTS staff member and that of her colleagues on the SLT. This was rectified when the subsequent head came into post:

There is still an issue with non-QTS staff on leadership teams not being paid an equitable rate. This year all support staff got a 0 per cent raise whilst teachers got 2.3 per cent. How do you rationalise that when you are talking about equal opportunities?

Generally, any issues and challenges that were experienced after the transition to the SLT have now largely been successfully addressed.

Professional development and career progression

Sue feels happy with the support and professional development she has been offered by the school. She has been on personnel and administration training, and the head has looked into her completing one of the suite of National College SBM programmes. As she does not take responsibility for finance, Sue feels that this excludes her from a lot of traditional bursar training. She has not been involved in leadership and management training.

It is acknowledged that the school is constantly developing, being under the leadership of a new head. The leadership team is evolving too and there is a lot of strategic thinking and action taking place. Sue is currently comfortable with her role, but she would like to further develop the support staff system in the school. The roles of the SLT are under constant review and Sue feels that this provides room for development and growth. It is recognised that she would benefit from additional administrative support to enable her to fulfil her strategic role. The assistant head commented:

There is far more day-to-day stuff with her job than with any of the rest of us. If we could take some of that away then I think the skills that she has got could be put to more use.

There is a general agreement that the role of support staff will be increasingly important in school.

Conyers School: school business manager

Conyers School is a larger than average secondary school situated in the North East. The socio-economic profile of the area the school serves is favourable but there are some parts experiencing social deprivation. The school has approximately 1,350 pupils on roll and the proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals or have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Most pupils are of White British heritage but a small number have Asian backgrounds. The school has mathematics and computing specialist status. At the time of the visit, the headteacher was seconded to the Association of School and College Leaders.

The school business manager's role covers a range of responsibilities, including finance, human resources and line management responsibility for other senior support staff within the school. According to the acting headteacher, the SBM 'basically runs the school.' The SBM reports directly to the acting headteacher and the governing body.

Carol, the SBM, has worked at the school in one capacity or another for 15 years. Prior to taking up her current role, she was the finance clerk at the school. When the office manager left, the role was split in two, at which point Carol became finance and personnel officer. The role eventually evolved into its current one, which she has been doing for some six years. Carol explained: 'The role developed in response to the school's increasing business needs, which have gradually been delegated down from the headteacher.' The acting headteacher explained that Carol had been appointed to the SLT because of her 'skill and growing expertise.' Being on the SLT was said to have several benefits, including having the confidence of other senior leaders within the school, as the acting headteacher explained:

It's partly to do with confidentiality. There are things you may discuss around the table with your senior leadership team that you may not be comfortable in discussing with someone from outside that group.

The acting headteacher also said that another benefit of having Carol on the SLT was having the overview of why key decisions were being made:

[Carol] contributes to strategic decision-making within the school, and so when she is asked to go away and make a saving, she knows the chain of thought that has led to that decision.

While the SBM post had been created in-house, it had become such an essential role that the acting headteacher felt sure that the school would need to appoint 'a graduate with high-level skills' in Carol's place if she moved on.

Benefits and impact of the role

Carol felt that she brought a range of benefits to the headteacher, acting headteacher and SLT by allowing them to focus on their key responsibilities of leading teaching and learning. The acting headteacher agreed, commenting that she particularly valued the financial and organisational expertise that Carol brought to the role:

She is an expert on finance. She is an expert on all those aspects of a headteacher's role that aren't directly related to students and classroom performance. She knows a lot about human resources and leadership issues, and how to run a school site.

A governor said that the SBM was 'playing an important role in staff development' and was 'a very good role model for all support staff.' She added that Carol had helped to 'knit together the different strands of the workforce':

Since the introduction of workforce remodelling we have had many more support staff appointed in admin, in learning support and in classroom assistance, and she has helped mould it together.

The acting headteacher agreed, adding that Carol was a 'champion of support staff':

She makes [the SLT] feel at times what it must be like to be a member of the support staff, and this ensures that they are never overlooked. She gives us a perspective that we would otherwise have lacked.

To develop the SBM's role still further, the acting headteacher had suggested Carol mentor a group of Year 11 pupils: 'This was my take on her role to make sure she has a full picture of school life.' Carol had found this to be 'a steep learning curve' but was finding the experience very useful and rewarding:

I felt it was important to have the teaching and learning angle because it helps me to know how much staffing we need for different subjects. I understand the reasoning behind why we do certain things.

Together with a member of the teaching staff, Carol also led the sustainability agenda within the school. This involved leading an eco-club, tree-planting, and leading activity days on sustainability.

All of the interviewees agreed that the SBM role contributed significantly to improving overall school effectiveness, as one governor explained:

I am totally convinced that we have gone down the right route and that [the SBM's appointment] has led to greater efficiency within the school. I can see the impact on the staff in letting an expert in business management take on this role rather than expecting staff to do it. I think this has made a tremendous difference.

The acting headteacher agreed, commenting that the SBM role had reduced her own workload and that of the SLT by removing responsibility for running the school's finances from them. This meant that the school could 'do the things we want to do':

Every aspect of the school development plan is discussed with the SBM and she feeds directly into the school's self-evaluation form. She runs the business in a sensible way to make sure we can do the things we want to do.

Asked whether she had any evidence of the impact of the SBM role, the acting headteacher highlighted the fact that the school had achieved the DfE (then DCSF) Financial Management Standard in Schools (FMSiS), and also cited Carol's role in leading a pilot leadership programme for support staff on behalf of the National College:

I would point to the fact the school has FMSiS, which she pretty much did by herself, the distinctive performance management system and chain of command for support staff, and her involvement in a national pilot which looks to develop the leadership skills of support staff.

Issues and challenges

There was a suggestion that, at least in the early days of the SBM taking up the post, some staff felt that because the SBM was not a teacher they could get a better answer from the headteacher in matters related to funding. The acting head recalled:

At times there may have been issues with more long-standing members of staff. For example, they would have gone to the SBM and asked for money, and when she said 'no' they would go and see the head. But the head would only go and see the SBM and the answer would be the same.

The acting headteacher explained that this had largely been overcome with time and experience: 'It only takes a few occasions for me to back the SBM for people to get the message.'

Pay was also identified as an issue. As employees of a community school, all the staff were bound by local authority job evaluations, and while the school was willing to explore increasing the SBM's pay to better match her responsibilities, they felt constrained by the local authority's guidelines. The SBM acknowledged that this was an issue facing many SBMs: 'It is a big bone of contention with a lot of business managers.'

The acting headteacher acknowledged that the SBM was probably not being properly remunerated for her contribution and role. This was an issue that the school hoped to address in the near future.

Professional development and career progression

The acting headteacher described Carol as a life-long learner, having been 'professionally developed for the last 10 years.' Carol had completed the CSBM and Diploma of School Business Management (DSBM) and was in the process of studying for a degree in school business management. The acting headteacher said her latest challenge had been leading the pilot leadership programme for support staff on behalf of the National College. The pilot started 18 months ago, and involved all of the school's senior support staff, including the senior principal teaching assistant, the senior science technician and year-group managers. As part of the programme, Carol developed a course structure and a series of training materials. She was proud of what had been achieved by the programme and had found leading it a valuable professional development opportunity:

The growth and change in [programme participants] has been fantastic. We're a pilot school and we plan to roll it out to two other schools next month. It has been a fascinating experience. There has been a lot of interest and we're waiting to hear from the National College to see how we can develop it further.

Carol was part of a bursars' forum which met every six weeks. She felt the forum provided a useful opportunity to network with staff in similar roles: 'Some of us are on the SLT and some aren't, but we are all more or less looking after the same things.'

Carol saw the future development of her role as one of consolidation with a renewed focus on developing the staff around her: 'The demonstration project has really helped me to build the confidence of middle leaders. I'd love to be able to further develop them and for their roles to become more strategic.'

Dyson Perrins C of E Sports College: school business director

Dyson Perrins is a Church of England sports college which became a specialist sports college in 2008. It is an average-sized secondary school with some 900 pupils on roll and a small sixth form. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is close to the average. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN) is above average because the school has a unit for students with autism and moderate learning difficulties. The vast majority of students are White British.

The school business director (SBD) role within the school covers a wide range of responsibilities: finance, facilities, health and safety, personnel and recruitment of all associate staff and their performance management, IT and office systems, extended services and sustainability. According to Kerry, the SBD, it includes 'anything that isn't teaching and learning.' Her team also looks after business management for seven other primary schools.

Prior to taking up this position, Kerry was an SBM in another school, and she had been a finance officer in a primary school before that. The previous high school, in a different local authority, appointed her because she had business acumen (she had run her own business), as well as knowledge of school finances. She completed the CSBM and was on the pilot for the DSBM with the National College so she had relevant qualifications. In addition, she had developed her previous role at the primary school to include finance and facilities: 'That was the combination really. It was that I had business acumen, that I had the relevant qualifications and I had experience in the school situation.'

Kerry has been in post, which had been advertised, for two and a half years. The role of SBD did not exist before she arrived, but she was certain the school would appoint someone in her place if she moved on. Previously, finance and facilities had been the responsibility of two assistant heads. One of these was promoted to a deputy head post elsewhere and this gave the school the opportunity of re-evaluating the make-up of the SLT. The Chair of the Finance Committee had been pushing for a business manager to sit on the SLT for some time: 'It was something which was discussed and agreed amongst the governors and they pushed for this position. The current head was more than happy to go with this as well.'

Kerry had recently taken on an even wider remit as a result of the school being in special measures. Three months before its Ofsted inspection, she was asked to take responsibility for school performance data. This was a steep learning curve but she now has a team of trained data managers and has put in place a system that is robust and reliable: 'The last time we had an HMI visit the inspector said that most schools would die for our data system.' When asked about the wider factors that had contributed to the development of her role, Kerry referred specifically to workforce reform:

Workforce remodelling without a shadow of a doubt... because I led that within the school and it has given people like myself a real career structure there which didn't necessarily exist before to the extent that it is now because the amount of associate staff I now line manage is far greater... You find that a lot of teaching staff now don't have the knowledge they used to have in certain aspects of running a school because we have taken over that responsibility I suppose.

Benefits and impact of the role

Kerry felt that she brought a 'non-pedagogical perspective' to discussions on the SLT and that she was able to question existing practice, unlike some staff members:

I am not afraid to say that I don't understand that... whereas sometimes teacher colleagues... they do not want to raise their head above the parapet by being the one that doesn't know... they did realise quite quickly what seemed like innocent questions were more challenging than they thought... I'm almost a catalyst for change.

Through her involvement in discussions within the SLT, Kerry is able to deploy resources more effectively:

The decisions are always informed by budgets; the budget is always informed by school priorities so it goes hand in hand really. Inevitably the whole school would benefit from that because we don't suddenly find that we haven't got enough money to finance the science resources.

Pupils were said to have benefited because the curriculum had been radically changed and achievement had gone up last year by 11 per cent and were expected to go up this year by another 15 per cent. Kerry acknowledged that this was not solely attributable to her role: 'this is not just me, this is "we" but I am very much part of that.' She also noted her contribution to the introduction of free classes for parents and the community.

In terms of school improvement, in addition to the rise in attainment noted earlier, Kerry spoke of enabling headteachers to spend their time more effectively. She gave the example of managing a building project for a headteacher in another school during the school holidays: '[The headteacher] said it was brilliant and said we were better qualified to project manage than her anyway.' Her own headteacher had also told Kerry that he no longer has sleepless nights about the budget because she understands the budget and they are able to plan for the future.

According to Kerry, being on the SLT and having the ability to make decisions was a critical factor: 'I have quite a lot of autonomy with large areas within my role... because of that people know that they can come to me and they can get a decision.' She also said she was able to represent other staff on the SLT: 'They also know that, if there is something that they want taking to leadership and they come to me, I will take it to leadership.'

Issues and challenges

There had been no issues with colleagues within the school, but Kerry recognised this was because she came into the role from outside:

Because you don't have QTS, those three letters, you really have to prove yourself. I am very fortunate here because they saw me as the expert as I came in. They were in financial difficulty. I was the expert. I have not necessarily had that everywhere I have been. I certainly have that now and they value what I do and what I say.

Kerry works in a voluntary-aided school which means that the governors, who are her employers, are not bound by local authority job evaluations, and she is paid a salary equivalent to that awarded to her colleagues on the SLT. However, she recognised that this was not the case in most schools: 'For many colleagues there is a huge issue around local authorities recognising the responsibilities of the post and the remuneration that should go alongside.'

Professional development and career progression

Kerry has completed the National College suite of programmes for SBMs, is just coming to the end of a Master's in education business leadership and has started a doctorate. The National College courses were said to be 'invaluable' because they are 'bespoke and specific for our profession.' She added, however, if they had not been free, she would not have had the opportunity of taking them: 'Quality, relevance and the fact that they are free makes them hugely popular.' She stated that she had never been prohibited from undertaking any form of professional development that was relevant and appropriate. When asked about further training for leadership and management, Kerry referred to the importance of coaching and mentoring skills:

Those type of skills are really important for a leader nowadays because you have got to be a people person because they have got quite a lot of say... managing change and being able to communicate that in an effective manner is very important. You can see that those that don't get results [is] because invariably they don't manage their staff very well.

A support network of SBMs in the local authority has recently formed. There is also a finance forum, which Kerry feels is inappropriate for her because her role is broader than just finance: 'It is at a different level.'

Kerry stated that she had reached her potential and described herself as 'at the top of my own game at the moment.' She noted that furthering her career would mean 'leading my own school or going out and doing consultancy work.' The headteacher and the governors of the school are encouraging her to take the NPQH. Whilst recognising that it might not be easy for a business manager to meet the criteria for acceptance onto the programme, Kerry was quite determined: 'By hook or by crook I'll get on it.'

Fishburn Primary School: advanced school business manager

Fishburn Primary School is a primary school in a semi-rural location in the North East. The school is about average size, with some 210 pupils on roll in the primary school, an additional 26 full-time equivalent places in the nursery, and 39 places in the children's centre. It is part of a cluster of five primary schools.

Michelle, the advanced school business manager (ASBM) works across the cluster of schools. Her role involves management of school finance, facilities, human resources and personnel including line management of support staff. The aim of the role is to take non-teaching elements away from leaders in order to enable them to focus on their core expertise of leading teaching and learning. The headteacher of Michelle's host school explained that the ASBM role had allowed him to focus more on teaching and learning issues rather than financial and organisational management:

You've got headteachers wasting an awful lot of time and effectively public money looking at asset management, procurement, buildings management, buildings regulations, health and safety checks. Our impact has been reduced significantly on teaching and learning – we've been moved away from our core tasks, and core teaching and learning role. [The ASBM role] allows me to be more hands on, helping direct teaching and learning across school and to use my expertise. My expertise certainly isn't ordering sinks and looking at drainage. It has redirected my workload; I feel more like an educator now rather than a manager at Butlin's.

The ASBM post had been advertised nationally after the headteacher had secured a government grant for an initial 18-month contract. The role of ASBM did not exist before Michelle came into post, but she felt certain that the school would appoint someone in her place if she moved on, subject to the agreement of other schools in the cluster.

Working across a cluster of schools enables the cost of the ASBM role to be shared between the schools. Michelle is based in the case-study school, but work that she does within the school (eg writing a generic policy) is often on behalf of the cluster.

Michelle originally worked in accountancy. She then moved into education; she was employed as a school secretary in another school, and then became a bursar before being promoted to the SLT. She has now completed three of the National College programmes for school business managers: CSBM, DSBM and ADSBM.

Benefits and impact of the role

A main benefit of the ASBM role for the leadership team was said to be the expertise she brought to headteachers in the cluster. The headteacher explained that having an ASBM 'is what is keeping me in the job; it makes me feel more positive about what I'm doing, more confident because I know my governors are getting first-class information, and it's easy to lead the school.' The headteacher added that the ASBM also brings a different, business perspective to the SLT, and particularly valued her practical thinking: 'Teachers can be fantastic thinkers, but they need detail attached to what they're doing - the fine detail comes through the practicalities of the business manager.'

The role of the ASBM was also said to benefit school staff because the headteacher is more readily available, and has more time to spend on their professional development. For example, a young nursery nurse at the school wants to become a teacher, and the headteacher now has time to help her plan her route into teaching. The capacity of the SLT has increased throughout the cluster, so there is similar workforce remodelling across the other schools too.

Michelle said that pupils benefited through 'better directed resources, and a nicer environment because I've got time to spend searching for bids and funding externally from the government.' There have been physical improvements in each of the five schools, such as enhanced play areas. Results were also said to be improving across the cluster of schools which was at least partially attributed to the ASBM being able to focus on organisational and financial issues, leaving headteachers with more time to focus on teaching and learning issues. Last year, for example, two of the schools had their best Key Stage 2 SATs results.

Results in weaker areas in the school, such as mathematics, were also said to be improving rapidly.

Parents were said to benefit too because their voice was being heard more frequently in the school. There had also been a lot of physical improvements to the school grounds, which Michelle had helped to make possible, as the headteacher explained:

[The parents] can see practically and physically the things they've been suggesting are happening. They have said, 'Could we make the eating environment better, and what about the toilets?' They came back in September and there are three brand spanking new toilet blocks. There is a bigger kitchen; the children are getting better quality food; there are new tables and chairs. They've been listened to; it's important because it's a public service at the end of the day.

Michelle had negotiated a good deal for the school refurbishments, and was able to respond quickly to parents' suggestions. This improves the marketing of the school. More pupils are now enrolling at the school because parents see investment and interest in the school.

Another main way the school benefits from the role of the ASBM is through efficiency savings. The SLT was said to have much more accurate information about the school budget than it was previously receiving from the local authority. Michelle had also put in place a core strategic plan for planning the budgets over the next three years, something the SLT never had before. The headteacher cited the recent refurbishments of the school's toilet blocks as an example of efficiency savings. The ASBM had been able to negotiate a lower price for an additional set of toilet blocks than the headteacher had spent the previous year. Efficiency savings are also made as the ASBM works across the cluster of schools, allowing her to work with the same suppliers across the schools, which the head considered to be a better use of her time and of the schools' money. The schools have been able to save thousands of pounds from their capital budgets, and service level agreements related to the revenue budget have been renegotiated after the ASBM discovered the schools were paying for the same service several times through different service level agreements. Michelle has also brought revenue in by applying for grants.

Issues and challenges

There were some initial challenges when the role was created. The headteacher explained that the role was 'heavily questioned and potentially criticised, because it was new thinking at the time; but I knew what I wanted, and what we wanted as a cluster of heads.' Interviewees said the local authority was not initially keen for the ASBM to be paid on the leadership scale, which the headteacher, SLT, and governors were keen to do. The ASBM explained:

Whilst [the local authority] had reservations, I think they are now beginning to understand the impact it has on schools, and that it is required to be at that level to have the status to be seen as an equal with the rest of the leadership team.

Finding money to pay the ASBM is an issue, but she is now generating her own income, so her role is self-sustaining. One governor told us 'We wanted someone in place who was able to generate her own income.'

Professional development and career progression

Michelle recently completed the ADSBM with the National College, which she found 'unbelievably useful,' particularly as it covered working across more than one school. The headteacher commented on how Michelle had developed in the role, and was now a confident public speaker:

She's been all over speaking, she spoke at the national conference, and she has spoken at the International Business School conference. She is a different person now – more confident and sure in what she is doing.

Michelle has felt incredibly well supported by all the members of the SLT especially by the headteachers and governors, who are aware of her training needs. Working across a cluster of schools has not presented any difficulties for her, because all the headteachers work well together.

Although there was not initially a local support network of professionals in similar roles in the primary sector, Michelle has established a primary, special and nursery group, with around 30 business managers involved across the local authority. There is a wider network of people she knows who have the same or similar roles in neighbouring authorities.

In terms of future plans, Michelle intends to undertake the National College's School Business Director Programme (SBDP), and finish her degree and Master's. She thought her role would probably become even more strategic in the future.

Community and extended services roles

Canterbury Campus Federation: vice-principal community engagement

Canterbury Campus is an example of co-location of facilities and includes a pre-school and nursery, adult education centre, performing arts and sports facilities and a federation which includes a high school and a nearby primary school. Canterbury High School has approximately 1,100 pupils on roll, of which 21 per cent qualify for free school meals and 40 per cent have a statement of SEN. The school roll is typically White British working class. The intake of pupils has a low level of attainment and a high level of need. Canterbury Primary School has 140 pupils on roll and is running at 60 per cent capacity. According to the headteacher, it had a satisfactory Ofsted inspection, but its attainment and achievement need to be driven up. They are working to improve its outcomes.

Dominic, the vice-principal for youth and community engagement, oversees the informal curriculum, PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic education) and community cohesion, as well as having a key role in extended services. All the staff he line manages are in the wider workforce, including the extended services team of non-teaching staff and the campus youth team. His role in relation to the primary school falls within extended services but there are plans to introduce a wellbeing programme and his role will gradually evolve.

Dominic's post was created as a pilot between Kent County Council and the school to bring together informal and formal education and has evolved from this. In 2004 the local authority located youth workers in schools. Dominic and the headteacher (then a curriculum head) identified a cohort of young people for whom a formal and traditional model of school was inappropriate and whom some teaching staff found difficult to reach. They developed a programme for these young people which involved informal youth worker delivery. This was so successful that, over a period of time, as teachers left, they were replaced with youth workers and Dominic became head of the youth and community team. As he has moved to the SLT, his role as the head of the youth team had now been filled by a member of the team. The headteacher's vision and the 'ambition, drive and open-mindedness' of colleagues on the SLT was said to be very instrumental in the development of his role:

The headteacher very much sees... the need for relevant professionals and relevant roles and the way community cohesion, extended services and health have become key and appointed me to fulfil those strategic needs for the school... recognising and acknowledging the contribution that I have made thus far but nevertheless, and more importantly, recognising there is a role for a non-teacher to contribute to the leadership of the school.

In addition to the location of the school at the centre of the community, the headteacher stated that the need for flexibility was also influential:

The other rationale for his existence is that he is not on a teacher contract so he is available to the campus for 48 weeks a year and he does things with children in term-time and non-term-time, and not just with children, but also with the community.

During the course of his six years at the school, Dominic reported that his values and beliefs as an informal educator had evolved and were more aligned with the needs and ethos of a formal educational institution. He thought this had been a key factor in his appointment to the SLT:

I think, because I have been through that process the principal has recognised the need for me to make a contribution to the leadership of the school. If, however, you were to take the youth workers from a number of other schools who would simply be looking at the practice of youth work alone and not being so open-minded to the needs of the institution, without that extra dimension to their skill base, that youth worker would not be relevant or it would take a long time to develop.

Dominic's personality and the headteacher's determination to develop an integrated children's workforce were strong influences, as were the school's status as a national challenge school and its offer of extended services.

The deputy headteacher, a close colleague, emphasised the importance of the school's ethos of valuing all staff and providing opportunities to progress:

There has been a bit of restructuring and changing things to give him a role that was a whole-school role that would have impact... we would always try and greenhouse our own staff... we will pick people that we have got a good working relationship with and then try and make a role that allows them to fly.

Benefits and impact of the role

In his role as vice-principal youth and community engagement, Dominic has broadened the knowledge and experiences of staff by 'slightly changing the ethos of the round-the-table discussion' so that it is not purely about teaching, learning and attainment. The headteacher endorsed this view:

The school, the staff, the children and the parents see a different dimension to the institution... what he brings is visible evidence of the fact that good-quality education is principally based on the quality of relationships that you establish with the student body.

Another key benefit, according to the headteacher, was that of providing wraparound services: 'The whole thrust is to provide a comprehensive service for pupils and their families, 52 weeks a year, 7 days a week and you can't do that with teachers.' As well as expanding the learning opportunities for pupils, Dominic and the headteacher agreed that he contributed to creative thinking and the professional development of staff:

Many teachers within the school have started to open their minds to alternative methods of working with young people... many more teachers have been involved in learning outside the classroom experiences and [in] residential work as a consequence of my leadership on a whole-school basis.

As well as introducing interventions for dealing with behaviour, Dominic was also planning services to positively engage hard-to-reach families.

In terms of school improvement, the headteacher described Dominic's contribution as 'massive', particularly in terms of 'the vision and aspiration to genuinely be a centre for the community.' Examples were given of groups of young people whose attainment had improved as a result of programmes Dominic had implemented. His impact in terms of extended services and community cohesion was reported to be more difficult to demonstrate. He did however think that he reduced the workload of others by alleviating behaviour problems.

When asked about the importance of being on the SLT, Dominic said that this made it easier for him to implement and secure support for projects. This was reiterated by the headteacher, who stressed the importance of work within the community:

The mere fact that he carries the title vice-principal gives him gravitas and seniority and kudos that he wouldn't carry as a youth and community worker based in the school. It is less true within the institution and more true as he interacts with people outside it, but it is still true.

Dominic reported that out-of-classroom activities had been developed more widely and therefore had a greater impact.

Issues and challenges

Having been in the school a number of years before being located on the SLT, Dominic worked through the issues of being a non-QTS member of staff over a long period of time: 'If someone came from outside it would be a different ball game.' According to the headteacher:

Some staff question whether it is appropriate for a youth and community worker to go round classrooms making comments on what happens as he is not a qualified teacher... It is a challenge to conventional thinking. It is a challenge to people's preservation, to the concept of their professionalism as a teacher.

With regard to pay and conditions, it took Dominic over 12 months to finalise his contract and he was paid nothing for doing the extra role for a year because 'no one could see how he could be paid.' This has been overcome by his salary from the local authority being topped up by the school. Teachers and youth workers received a pay rise this year, whilst those in the local authority scheme did not: 'I am stubborn otherwise it would have been easy for me to walk away.' He is paid less than some of his SLT colleagues. He feels this will have to change. This view was supported by the headteacher:

We couldn't call him a deputy headteacher as he is not a teacher. We can't put him on a teaching contract... there are complications for payment, for pension, for holiday entitlement... There are problems with comparability... how do you compare his role as a member of a youth service with other people in the youth service that he now earns more than who are technically his superiors. The way we got round it was to pay him on the scale that the local authority agreed as that met their benchmarking and comparability standards and gave him an additional payment as a consultant. It is ridiculous really.

Professional development and career progression

Dominic is studying for a degree and then a Master's. He chose a leadership and management module because he knew he was going to become a member of the SLT. There is no national framework for non-QTS career progression: 'The school has been making it up as [it has] gone along.' He has ambitions to move on to school headship and those in his school are very supportive. The head has proposed that he attends the National College's Leadership Pathways programme later this year. Dominic thinks that this will give him a wider understanding of school leadership and a better understanding of teaching and learning, which he sees as a current area of weakness. He feels that people have gone out of their way to support and encourage him, especially the headteacher: 'For the first time ever there is a longer term vision of what could be achieved for me.'

Testwood Sports College: director of specialism

Testwood Sports College is a mixed comprehensive school for 11 to 16 year olds. There are currently just over 900 pupils on roll. The school achieved sports college status in 2004. The majority of students are White British and very few students are learning English as an additional language. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below average. Although the percentage of students with statements of SEN is low, the overall percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The college has achieved Healthy Schools status and the Partnership Mark.

Peter, the non-QTS staff member on the SLT, has the job title director of specialism. He had been on the SLT for just over a year at the time of interview (since September 2008). Prior to this, Peter had been director of specialism for a year, but had not been part of the SLT. This had been a deliberate progression route, and eased his transition onto the SLT. Prior to taking up the post of director of specialism, Peter had worked with the school as the local area's partnership development manager for two and a half years. Before this he had been the sports development officer with the local council. The post was created in-house. A key driver for moving him onto the SLT was recognition of the quality of his work, his management skills, and his wider recognition by the Youth Sport Trust. Workforce remodelling had already taken place in the school but was still going on when he came into post.

His role in school is commensurate with that of other members of the SLT. He oversees a year group, line manages the staff of the PE and dance department, and has whole-school responsibility for the school's sports college status. He tracks the impact of the specialism on the rest of the school, and is responsible for community use of the facilities, including lettings and links with partners. He is responsible for the school's role in the community and community perceptions of the school, as well as fundraising and publicity events. He is also responsible for key whole-school events, such as parents' evenings or prize-giving ceremonies, and also runs a successful parents' forum. His role carries line-management responsibilities, including overseeing the work of the PE department, a community officer, the partnership development manager, the healthy schools co-ordinator, and the head of the year group that he oversees. There was a consensus that if Peter were to move on, his post would need to be filled.

Benefits and impact of the role

Peter has brought about a wealth of improvements. For the wider leadership team, it is felt that he brings a 'fresh angle', and the headteacher considers this different perspective to be very beneficial:

He has brought a whole new pair of eyes and a whole new approach to how we do things. It has been like a breath of fresh air really. Someone coming in from outside with a different set of skills and a different set of perspectives, and just looking at things in a different way has really helped us.

Others agree that his experience in different settings means that he brings valuable skills to the leadership team. His line-management skills and ability to work well with adults have been particularly valuable; indeed, the headteacher noted that Peter had 'sharpened the focus' on line management. His business experience has also been valued in developing the sports specialism in the school, as have his links with other local schools and service providers.

It is felt that he benefits the wider school staff through the improvements to line management, but also, according to the headteacher, as a positive role model: 'People can see that if you are good enough, you can make it, and it is worth having a go, and you don't have to be stuck in stereotypical roles.' He is respected by the wider staff and they have welcomed his fresh perspective.

Benefits for pupils have included his contribution to the BTEC sport course. He has been able to bring in background and practitioner knowledge about sports and leisure, and the grades of students taking the BTEC have increased since he came into post. He also has good relationships with pupils and is able to support them pastorally as well as academically. He is very popular among the pupils and can use this to help them to achieve their full potential.

Interviewees also spoke of benefits to families and the local community. Peter has been instrumental in setting up the parents' forum and has drawn on materials produced by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust on engaging parents and raising achievement. The forum has been an arena for parents to have their say: the headteacher told us that the forum 'has made parents, think, well actually, they do listen. This guy is worth investing in as he has brought about change and listened to what we want to do.' Because Peter comes from a non-teaching background, some parents are more willing to engage with him. He has also worked on community issues, and as he knows others schools well from his previous roles, he is felt to be breaking down barriers between schools in the local area.

It is agreed that he is able to have more impact by being part of the SLT. This enhances how effective he can be. Although it is considered that he would always carry clout, being on the SLT has allowed Peter to have influence across a broader range of areas and to have contact with and a positive influence over more members of staff.

Issues and challenges

As with the arrival of many other non-QTS staff on SLTs, in the early days of his coming into post, the wider school staff needed to be reassured of his effectiveness, and his ability to contribute to the leadership team. Questions were raised as to how someone without qualified teacher status was able to be on the SLT. As director of specialism Peter therefore felt that he needed to 'prove himself' or to 'win staff over.' He also found the challenge of moving into a pastoral oversight role very daunting, as was the need to liaise with and understand the protocols associated with external agencies such as social services. Observing and evaluating PE lessons was also a difficult area because he lacked teaching experience, but with time this, along with other issues, was overcome. To surmount these issues, he was afforded a lot of support from other members of the SLT. He was able to learn from other senior leaders, develop new skills and benefited from their direction and the tools that they gave him to deal with new issues. After some groundwork by the headteacher, there were no issues with his pay and conditions, despite being on a different pay scale from his SLT colleagues. The school has been able to achieve parity in pay, and also in his contracted hours.

Professional development and career development

At the start of his promotion to the SLT, Peter was given a lot of school-based support; indeed, there was a one-year transition period where he took on the director of specialism role, but was not part of the SLT. During this time he was based in an office with an SLT member, carried out supported lesson observations, and took up the offer of external CPD. He has engaged in the local authority's leadership challenge workshops, leadership conferences and has external support through school sports associations. He also benefits from support networks outside school, both locally and nationally. For example, he is a member of a forum for directors of specialisms in his local area, and accesses support and CPD from the Youth Sport Trust.

As he is relatively new in post (in his second year as part of the SLT), it is hoped that the next year will be spent embedding skills and consolidating his experience. Discussions have taken place around the possibility of Peter pursuing qualified teacher status, as well as the National College's NPQH. It is felt that long-term plans for progressing in a school setting might depend on whether or not he pursues these formal qualifications. Currently, he is playing an extremely effective role in the school and no immediate changes to his role are envisaged.

New Charter Academy: community and regeneration director

New Charter Academy opened in 2008 and currently operates on two sites in Ashton-under-Lyme. The school will move to new premises in September 2010. The academy specialises in enterprise and sport. It serves a deprived community, with a deprivation indicator of 0.34 compared to a national average of 0.22. Just over 28 per cent of the pupils qualify for free school meals, compared to 14.5 per cent nationally, and the academy also has high rates of pupils on the SEN register (just over 30 per cent). The school takes the majority of asylum seekers and refugee students within the secondary sector in the local authority. It is currently an 11-16 academy but a sixth form will open in September 2010.

Arati, the non-QTS staff member on the SLT, has the job title of community and regeneration director. She is on the executive team of the academy, and reports to the chief executive. The academy had only been running for little over 12 months at the time of interview, and she had been in post for a year before the academy opened. During this time Arati was project managing the implementation of the academy, and was responsible for recruiting the executive team and developing a staffing structure. Her background is in post-16 education, and employment and training opportunities for young people. However, she had been working in economic development before getting involved in the academy. Her role had evolved – it was not an advertised post. She was initially seconded by New Charter to manage the development of the academy, and then offered the post of community and regeneration director once the academy was launched. She had therefore been involved in the project for two years before it went live.

Key drivers behind her position were the development of the academy, the focus on community cohesion, the provision of extended services, the cultural mix in the community, and a commitment to basing community regeneration in the academy. The academy's sponsor, New Charter, is committed to developing great neighbourhoods and is keen that the academy can put together structures to offer 360-degree support for the families and young people it serves.

The role is varied, but has had a heavy focus on change management. Arati deals with community issues in the academy, and so liaises with parents, students, staff and the surrounding community. She also deals with partner agencies, including the police, social services and health trusts, as well as regeneration partners. She does not get involved with the curriculum, but her role covers other factors that indirectly affect teaching and learning in the school. She is involved in dinner and break duties, celebrations, PR, marketing and human resources. The academy's executive director explained her role:

It is not about teaching [or] pedagogy, it is about relationships... She doesn't stray into teaching and learning – she is very clear that she is there to support raised standards of attainment, but not through the classroom.

Benefits and impact of the role

A key benefit of the non-QTS role for the SLT has been encouragement and support: in Arati's words, 'it is about understanding that leadership is about making people feel empowered. I have been supporting the SLT and the whole staff and helping to make it work'. The executive director also noted that:

She is not sucked into the ebb and flow of the academy. The role gives her the freedom to interface and establish new systems and structures that hitherto we have not enjoyed. There is a new architecture that we need to put in place, and she has the freedom to actually make the contacts, do the networking and to establish the new framework that we are trying to operate in. She makes sure that we are looking at the big picture, and not just trying to hit short-term objectives.

There have also been benefits for the school staff more broadly. Arati is key to managing the expectations of governors and the academy sponsor, which impacts positively on staff as realistic expectations for delivery are subsequently in place. She also alerts the sponsor to the pressures that schools are dealing with. The positive links that have been made with community groups are felt to be beneficial for all members of the school staff.

Benefits for the pupils include the establishment of local business links that have subsequently provided work experience opportunities, reward schemes that Arati has set up, and wraparound services. Families and the community have also benefited. For example, her work in community regeneration and cohesion is having an impact, and there is greater parental engagement with the academy. She is comfortable doing home visits, and has grown up in the local community; indeed, she still lives there with her family. The executive director explained:

She is entrenched within the community, her children attend the local primary school, and she is an ex-student of one of the schools that was merged. She enables us to get a feel from the local community.

It is agreed that Arati makes positive contributions to school improvement. She is key to improving community links with the school, helps to manage budgets, builds partnerships, manages PR and community perceptions of the school, as well as alleviating other senior leaders of some tasks and freeing them up to focus on school development. It was strongly felt that she is able to have a greater impact by being on the SLT, particularly given the strategic role that she has.

Issues and challenges

Arati felt that she had been on a learning curve since coming into post, with regard to understanding the education system and how schools operate. This has been surmounted by asking a lot of questions and through the support of the SLT. It was also noted that early on in her deployment there was some suspicion over her role: she says 'It was about gaining people's respect. In the early days, people saw me as a sponsor spy, all kinds of daft things. It was about gaining respect and supporting staff.' The executive director agreed that this was no longer a problem in the academy:

[Her] being present is really a natural thing that my colleagues would expect given the agenda that we have for community cohesion and community development. Through private witness, and people seeing the value of her work, she worked through this.

Balancing the different cultures of the education system and the academy sponsor (where she worked previously) had also been a challenge – Arati felt that she previously failed to appreciate what teachers do and the pressure that academies have to deal with. There have been no problems regarding pay and conditions – the executive group is not on teachers' pay and conditions and so all members of the SLT are expected to work outside normal hours.

Professional development and career progression

Arati is happy with the opportunities for professional development provided to her by the school. She has received CPD focused on community cohesion, and has attended leadership and management training along with the rest of the SLT, including weekends away focused on coaching and mentoring. Before she joined the academy's sponsor, she asked to do a leadership and management qualification in recognition of her competence in the job. She has also completed courses on safeguarding, school finances and child protection as part of her role as governor of a local primary school. Before she took up the job in the academy, she did her own research into how schools function: 'I felt that I couldn't manage the project without knowing the sector I was to be working in.' She has also received extensive in-house and on-the-job training by working closely with her colleagues in the SLT.

Plans for career progression are in development. She has so far focused on establishing the academy and ensuring its smooth implementation and development. The executive team will have responsibility for a large budget and it is intended that as community and regeneration director Arati will ensure that the systems and structures are in place in the school to be of maximum benefit to the community. More long term, however, it is less clear how the role will develop.

Guildford Grove Primary School: children's centre manager

Guildford Grove Primary School is a large primary school catering for approximately 420 pupils. There is a Sure Start children's centre on site, The Spinney, which provides services for parents with children under five and childcare provision for children aged three to seven. The school also provides a resource for pupils with profound hearing and multi-sensory impairment, called The Lighthouse. The school lies within one of the most deprived wards in the county and is surrounded by areas of considerable affluence.

Anne, the children's centre manager, has been in post for two years. Prior to joining the children's centre, she worked in the computer industry and was a practice manager of a physiotherapy clinic. She had also been an active governor of another school prior to taking up the post. She has line-management responsibilities for a wide range of staff, including a childcare manager and a qualified teacher within the childcare team. These line-management responsibilities are shared with other members of staff, who are able to take responsibility for the teaching aspects of these roles. Interviewees described her role on the SLT as 'logical', because the children's centre and the school work very closely together. Anne noted that:

The children's centre and the school are very closely linked and work extremely closely together... a lot of other schools with children's centres on their sites are quite separate entities so they don't always work in such harmony and such unison as happens here.

Benefits and impact of the role

Interviewees valued the contribution that the children's centre manager makes to the wider leadership team. The community focus of her role means that she has a clear understanding of the issues concerning families, and is often able to offer a unique perspective on this in meetings of the SLT: 'they can use [my] knowledge along with their own knowledge to make sure that we are doing the best for the local community.' The wider school staff have also benefited from the children's centre manager's role because staff across the children's centre and the school work closely together. This has helped to facilitate joined-up thinking and communication across the school.

Anne's role has also been important in building links with families living in the local community, often among those families with children who are yet to start school. Due to the wide range of services that the children's centre offers, expectant mothers often use the site to access maternity services and many access support when their children are newborn. This means that families are both familiar and comfortable with the school setting before their children join the school. Pupils also stand to benefit from Anne's role because any issues or concerns can be identified earlier, and supporting measures put in place before the children move on to the main school. Anne emphasises the importance of this in tailoring provision for children that is consistent across the whole school.

Issues and challenges

Anne has not experienced any issues or challenges associated with her role, and is well supported by school leaders. Interviewees attributed this to clarity of discussion and open communication between school staff. Anne also felt that having been a governor helped her to settle into the role because she has a good understanding of school procedures, such as school improvement plans and the performance management of headteachers.

Professional development and career progression

School leaders are very supportive of Anne's professional development and career progression. Interviewees felt that this is reflected in the ethos of the school, which is generally very supportive of staff pursuing training and career development opportunities.

Anne is currently studying for the National College's National Professional Qualification in Integrated Centre Leadership (NPQICL), which she is finding very rewarding. Most of the leadership and management training she receives is part of this programme, but she also attends conferences which are important for her professional development. When Anne completes the NPQICL, she plans to continue developing in her role and seeks to continue to improve the provision offered by the children's centre.

Kingsley School: extended services lead and parent support adviser co-ordinator

Kingsley School is a community special school, which caters for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These include severe and complex learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders, communication, speech and language difficulties and physical and medical difficulties. The school also has a neighbourhood nursery for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) children with a full range of abilities. The school has capacity for 104 pupils, and currently has 90 pupils on roll.

Ali is the extended services lead and parent support adviser (PSA) co-ordinator within the school. As a qualified and experienced nursery nurse, she spends half the working week in the nursery. Her parent support work is primarily focused on behaviour and attendance. She manages relations with parents, and runs parental engagement groups. The headteacher describes Ali's role as a challenging one, because offering after-school provision in a special needs environment presents its own unique difficulties. Ali has been in post for two years, and comments that her role is still evolving:

I still don't feel as confident as the others, because they are used to being in charge. When you've worked as a support member for so long, you're working for people and you're being told what to do the majority of the time. That's quite a big transition, to then have people looking to you to make decisions.

Ali's position on the SLT was previously occupied by a teacher in a different role, but as the school is providing extended services, it was considered appropriate to have a fair representation of people who work on school development on the leadership team. Ali's role was created in-house. Although the job function would still exist if she moved on, this would not necessarily be an SLT position. Ali remarked:

[The headteacher is] quite forward thinking, and there was a position going free... they were looking to expand and a different way of thinking... we've got such a large amount of support staff within the school it's the right thing to do to get someone other than a teacher onto the management team.

As a special school, there is a high number of support staff at Kingsley. Ali is a champion for support staff within the school, and has shared responsibility for looking after the professional development of support staff and liaising with the SLT about this. Her colleague told us that Ali:

is in touch with people, she is a high-profile person around the school. People know that she isn't a teacher so she has really been able to represent the support staff. They come to her with concerns. We're a large school, every class has at least a teacher and two support staff and in some cases three or four. She has really been able to represent them very well and see things from their point of view.

Benefits and impact of the role

Ali, the headteacher and the deputy head agree that her role has been beneficial in constructively challenging the views of other SLT members and enabling them to become more transparent in how they communicate decisions to the school. Her role as a champion of support staff has also given the SLT a better understanding of the perspectives of support staff. This has increased the willingness of all staff on the SLT to properly engage with support staff across the school.

Both Ali and the deputy head feel that they are able to champion the views of support staff within the SLT. Having worked as a member of support staff for a number of years, Ali has a clear sense of how they think and feel. Despite initial concerns around the transition, the staff now share her view that there should be representation on the SLT from people in roles other than teachers because such a large number of employees in the school are non-teachers. Support staff feel more comfortable talking to Ali than they would managers in teaching positions.

The headteacher points out that her appointment sent a clear message to the school staff that there is no ceiling to their development within the school, and with the right skills and acumen the SLT is open to everybody:

We are thrilled with [her] appointment. It has sent a really positive and empowering message to staff that we do support [non-QTS] staff on to the senior leadership team.

Because of the important role she plays in support, Ali's role is benefiting the children greatly. When parents are experiencing difficulties she visits them at home and supports them in trying different strategies to cope with their children's problems. The headteacher supports this view, commenting that her extended services role has had a significant impact on pupils. As a result of her leadership of extended services, the school is now able to offer approximately twice what it used to offer pupils.

Issues and challenges

Ali has not experienced any challenges associated with her role on the SLT. The headteacher has been very supportive in ensuring that her pay and conditions match those of other SLT members, and has been flexible to reflect the unique nature of her role. For example, Ali is able to receive time off in lieu in acknowledgment of the additional hours worked as a result of extended services provision. However, the headteacher would like greater flexibility to offer even more to students.

The role of extended services lead and PSA co-ordinator has been widely accepted by other staff, although Ali herself felt that this was an unusual transition. At first, some of the support staff who work most closely with her were concerned by the transition as they felt that they had been overlooked for promotion. However, most staff have welcomed her new role and relationships are continuing to improve as they see the benefits of her position. The deputy head remarked that:

Initially [she] was worried... that being on the [SLT] might distance her from people. But she's such a down-to-earth, fair person that I don't think that's been a problem...She's still very, very approachable, she is still good at speaking up for other people, she's very good at championing people if they have any concerns in class. Rather than going to their line manager, they do tend to talk to [her] quite a lot.

Professional development and career progression

When Ali started in her role she participated in a course run by the local authority aimed specifically at support staff going into leadership positions. This course was at introductory level, and Ali would welcome a more advanced course in this area. However, the courses currently available are aimed at teachers rather than support staff:

I don't want to sit in a room full of teachers because I would feel out of my depth... there seems to be a missing link for support staff who want to do some sort of [intermediate] course.

Ali has received internal training as part of senior leadership training days, and has been given a high level of individual support by the headteacher, who points her to resources and sources of reading. She is offered provision on a needs-led basis, guided by her performance management reviews. She has also undertaken the National College's Leading from the Middle programme, and has an external mentor for her role as PSA co-ordinator, an educational psychologist who is linked to the school. Ali is very keen to engage with CPD opportunities in relation to her parent support work, but her additional leadership responsibilities mean that most external training is often rather narrow for her role.

All the interviewees commented that they would like to see the extended services lead and PSA co-ordinator role become more strategic, which would require Ali to become more practised at delegating to others. This is particularly the case for her extended services responsibilities, which compared with her parent support work is less hands-on. Interviewees feel this is of particular importance, given that her role as an extended services lead is likely to continue to expand.

The deputy head said:

She's very conscious that she's had this opportunity to be part of management, and she gives terrific value for money... but she needs to have a break really. I don't think people would let her down. She's trained them well [and] they know what the expectations are, she doesn't have to do it all herself. I would like to see her delegating a little bit more.

Kings Oak Primary Learning Centre: integrated services manager

Kings Oak Primary Learning Centre is both a children's centre providing services for children from birth to age 5, as well as a primary school for children aged 3 to 11. The school caters for approximately 340 pupils. It is situated in a relatively deprived area.

Hope is the integrated services manager at Kings Oak Primary Learning Centre and is responsible for managing the children's centre, and for ensuring that the children's centre and the school work effectively together. She has line-management responsibility for 18 members of staff within the children's centre, and shares line-management responsibilities for 7 staff working in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

The nature of the integrated service manager's role was decided by the governing body before she came to post. The post is unusual within the borough, as most similar roles are children's centre managers, which do not have the integrated services aspect to the work. As the school is a governor-led establishment and quite forward thinking, it decided a children's centre manager's role would not be sufficient to meet the needs of the learning centre. The governors wanted to make sure that the school and children's centre worked closely together to ensure a seamless transition for children moving into EYFS. The role was not specifically aimed at non-QTS candidates, just someone with the necessary skills and experience to fulfil the demands of the role.

Hope was externally appointed, and was the first person to hold the post. She holds the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) qualification in early years, and has worked in early years since qualifying in 1993. Most of her career has been spent in family centres working with children in need. More recently, she set up and managed a nursery, but missed the support aspects of her previous role. She sees her current role as a bridge between her experience in early years and family support.

Benefits and impact of the role

The integrated services manager's role is of benefit to families. Because the school is situated in a relatively deprived area, Hope's role has been important in promoting the school in a positive way. Because the children's centre is situated on the school site, families know how to access support and are able to access a consistent service.

Hope reports that it is quite different for this school to have a staff member in a non-QTS role who can make decisions about changes within the school. Leaders and managers have benefited from a 'fresh pair of eyes' in planning future long-term goals for the school. Her role on the SLT has helped to develop a better understanding of the needs of under-fives within the school. Her role has also had a small impact on the workloads of other managers and leaders, as she line manages EYFS. However, one of the assistant heads oversees the education aspects of this.

The wider school workforce has also benefited from the integrated services manager's role. Because the children's centre and the school are now integrated via her role, staff have had more opportunities to change their career paths. For example, some staff joined the children's centre in the first instance, but then moved to a support role within the school.

Hope's role has helped to ensure that pupils' needs (for example, speech and language concerns) are identified at a much earlier point in time. Developmental delays are picked up much earlier and interventions can be put in place. The benefit of this is clearly demonstrable: as the children's centre has now been open for three years, the youngest children are now moving to the school. The baseline assessments as children join the school are far stronger than they have been in the past.

Issues and challenges

The integrated services manager felt that it had taken some time to establish where her responsibilities lie within the school because the role is so new. There can also be challenges in understanding assessment frameworks and other education issues. There are also challenges because the children's centre is open all year round, which can make it difficult catch up on activities such as planning.

Professional development

Hope is presently studying for a foundation degree in early years, and in September is due to start the NPQICL. She also attends ad hoc short courses to meet specific development needs. Most of the training she receives is from external providers.

Hope feels that other staff are supportive of her professional development, and she also has a network of support through local children's centre manager meetings. She receives study leave days for her foundation degree. It is helpful that the course provider offers to cover the costs for this so that the school does not need to fund study leave.

In the future, Hope sees her role developing through the NPQICL. Her role will be increasingly focused on long-term strategic planning as the action plans for the children's centre and EYFS are reviewed.

Oakfield Community Primary School: extended services manager

Oakfield Community Primary School is a brand-new school, amalgamated from infant and junior schools. It has approximately 460 pupils on roll. The pupils are of mixed ability, and the catchment area is also mixed with a deprived estate on one side of the area, and an affluent estate on the other. The large majority of pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The school offers a range of extended services to families, including breakfast and after-school clubs. The school shares the site with a separately managed children's centre.

The new headteacher had extended services very high on his agenda, and was keen to have someone in an extended services manager role. With the provision of extended services, the headteacher views schools as being no longer just about learning, but also about care, families and the community. He explained the importance of creating a role that gave a voice to parents and the local community: 'if the leadership of the school didn't have a voice for parents and the community, then I don't think we would be fulfilling our role'.

Prior to taking up the role of extended services manager, Mary had been working as the family liaison officer (FLO) since September 2007. In her role as FLO Mary developed experience of working with families and the local community and so when the school went through restructuring, the headteacher saw an opportunity to enhance Mary's role and responsibilities:

[Mary] was originally the FLO, and she showed great personal potential to have a more significant or strategic role in the school. She had great vision in what she wanted to do, and articulated that vision really well, and so the opportunity was made for her when the school went through a significant restructure.

The role of extended services manager was advertised in October 2008, and the headteacher encouraged Mary to apply. Following a competitive interview process, she took up the post in January 2009. While the role of extended services manager did not exist prior to her taking up the post, the headteacher said he would appoint someone in her place if she moved on.

The role involved leading each of the core offers for extended services and encompassed:

- organising all the school clubs including their management, implementation (including tendering to external providers where applicable), delivery and monitoring. Clubs include: the breakfast club, lunchtime clubs, and after-school clubs including those run by teachers and those run by external providers
- organising adult/family learning, including setting up a facility for unemployed parents to train for an NVQ at Level 2 with a placement in school
- organising special events for families including a popular Christingle event at Christmas, the harvest festival, and a curriculum art project enabling parents to buy their children's art for charity
- arranging extras that other people would not have time to do, such as arranging for an oral health visitor to come into school during a healthy living week, and negotiating extra money for each child to have a toothbrush, toothpaste and brushing chart
- organising parent consultation, including distributing a questionnaire to gather parents' views on the school, and setting up a parent advisory group
- supporting children with social and behavioural difficulties by attending regular meetings and guiding them towards various organisations or appropriate support within the school
- line managing the FLO, a librarian and a learning mentor

Impact and benefits of the role

The headteacher described the impact of the extended services manager role as 'extremely significant [with] an impact on a daily basis, whether on an operational level or on a strategic level.' He added that Mary is viewed as having a greater impact by being on the SLT:

She has more status now, people are showing her more respect, and people definitely see her as a leader within the school. She has demanded that respect.

The role of the extended services manager was said to benefit the SLT by providing a different perspective on issues that teachers, with their focus on curriculum, would not always have. She 'provides a very useful non-educationalist viewpoint on some of our initiatives or issues,' says Mary's headteacher, and she was described as 'the voice of parents and the local community on the SLT.'

By taking tasks from teachers that they had previously been expected to do, Mary has eased their workload. Roles she has taken on from colleagues included: organising after-school clubs (eg registration, room bookings, monitoring) and making arrangements for external visitors to the school (eg organising their resources and timetable). She offers valuable advice to teachers (eg researching who could provide a certain service they are interested in) and governors (eg on which after-school clubs should be provided). She effectively fills the gap between administrative roles and teaching.

Having someone specifically allocated to extended services allows the school to offer many more clubs and activities, which is beneficial for pupils. In her role as extended services manager, Mary has been able to capitalise on links she has made with the community. For example, through these links children are now able to attend a street-dancing club, Saturday morning cookery classes with a community chef, and a knitting club with ladies from the local church.

The school does a lot of work within the community. Mary lives locally, and unlike teaching staff, she has time to network with the community, and to attend external meetings relating to various projects. Examples include the school allotment project in which children grow seedlings in school and give them to members of the local allotment, and the provision of food to the elderly during the harvest festival. As part of her community liaison work, the extended services manager also sits on the children's centre steering group committee.

Parents benefit through provision of the NVQ, which Mary feels gives them motivation, helps their self-esteem, and helps them at home with their children. She sits on the parent advisory group, and has been involved in a local petition parents set up to raise concerns about a dangerous road that runs close to the school.

Mary felt that it was difficult to evidence any impact that was specifically due to her role, as extended services now play a huge role in the whole school's ethos. However, she suggested there was evidence of the impact of her role in relation to involving parents. Parents now have a voice in the school, and early findings from a parent questionnaire indicate that all parents 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they felt confident coming into the school and approaching a member of staff; something Mary had been encouraging parents to do.

The school is, with the role of the extended services manager, delivering a lot to parents and the community, and is able to get parents in. Data collected at the events Mary has organised show that attendance at community events is good and growing. For example, the school had planned for 200 people (adults and children) in total to attend the 2008 Christingle event but over 400 adults with their children attended. In 2009, four Christingle sessions were held, with full attendance at each.

There is also anecdotal data, in terms of many thank-you letters from parents, and from external providers such as the oral health visitor, who wrote to say that they found their visits to be better organised and co-ordinated than when visiting schools without an extended services manager.

Issues and challenges

In the early days of the extended services manager role, teachers did not view extended services as part of their role but as part of Mary's role, but this is said to have changed and now they work in partnership. In addition, when Mary took up the role, she felt slightly out of her depth, as she was not a teacher. However, this was only her personal perception, and 'not the message coming from the leadership team, or myself, or my deputy at all,' says the headteacher. This was also only initially an issue and Mary says, 'now that I am doing it, I understand that I can do it'.

The deputy headteacher and headteacher reported challenges around pay and contracted hours, although Mary did not regard her pay as an issue. All the other members of the SLT are paid for the whole year, but the extended services manager is paid for 39 weeks a year, for 37 hours a week, despite working many more hours than this, including school holidays. Senior leaders acknowledged that she was paid significantly less than the other members of the SLT, and the deputy headteacher suggested this needed to be addressed:

I don't think she gets paid anywhere near enough for the responsibilities she has got, the number of hours she works, and how hard she works... I think that if we want to keep somebody of her calibre, then we need to be paying the right sort of money.

Professional development and career progression

Any normal training offered in the school is also offered to the extended services manager (eg performance management, safeguarding training). She can also access training through the FLO service (eg common assessment framework training), and through an extended services development manager in her area. She was unaware of anyone else in her local area doing her role full time, but she meets with teachers in other schools who take responsibility for extended services.

Mary has found her headteacher to be very supportive in terms of being aware of her training needs, helping her to establish herself in her role and challenging her to take on new things.

In the future, Mary would like to study for a new undergraduate qualification in extended services by distance learning. The headteacher is also considering the possibility of her doing an NVQ in leadership and management at Level 4 or 5, but only if there is take-up among other staff, as he feels that it would be isolating for her to undertake the training alone.

Both the headteacher and deputy headteacher felt that the teaching staff would not require additional support to develop their working relationship with the extended services manager, as they already do that well. The headteacher raised awareness of the role in various ways including through staff meetings, parent communication, the school website and the local newspaper. He emphasises the importance of her role to both staff and the local community, which he feels is important because extended services have really changed the culture of schools, and the role of the extended services manager is just as significant as other roles.

The headteacher feels that the next steps in the role of extended services manager within the school would be up to Mary to determine, but could include increasing her hours to 52 weeks a year, and for her to identify priorities within extended services over the next year. Mary herself would like to see the holiday club up and running, ensure that the clubs are what the children want and are of a good standard, and do more in the community.

Darlington Education Village: vice-principal community

Darlington Education Village is a federation which brings together a primary school, a secondary school and a special school onto one purpose-built site. It opened in April 2006, and caters for 1,400 pupils between the ages of 3 and 19.

Kevin, the vice-principal community, is responsible for leading on all aspects of community engagement, involvement and cohesion. His role encompasses 'any activity that will add benefit to and support the development of the young people who attend the school', and this includes working with local community organisations, the police, the health service, as well as local employers and training providers. Kevin line manages a small community team, which is due to expand in the near future.

Kevin has been in post since January 2007. Prior to joining Darlington Education Village, he worked for 20 years at what is now the Department for Education (DfE) and then as a project manager within the local authority, supervising the build of the school. Whilst he was externally appointed to the school, his involvement from the early stages of its development meant that Kevin already had well-established relationships with staff, parents and the local community. He and his colleague (the vice-principal inclusion) agree, however, that if he were to move on, the school would seek to reappoint somebody to his post: 'it's embedded now, it's in school life, because [community and school life] are inseparable,' he says.

Community engagement has been very important to the school since it was founded. Kevin's colleague comments that the federation had always been designed to offer a high level of provision outside normal school hours and that such a role on the SLT would be 'central to the culture and ethos of the school.' The role of vice-principal community did not necessarily require qualified teacher status since it was recognised that the ideal candidate might bring a distinct set of knowledge and skills to the post. His colleague also comments that there were practical reasons for choosing a non-QTS member of staff: the nature of the vice-principal community role requires him to work more flexible hours than a teacher's terms and conditions would accommodate. Kevin added:

When the vacancy arose, there was a view that if the role didn't have QTS I would be a great candidate to apply... it was about the best person for the job rather than the best teacher for the job.

Benefits and impact of the role

The vice-principal community role has been integral in bringing together the community and school. When Darlington Education Village was formed there was some apprehension about the size and scale of the school, particularly among parents of primary school pupils and pupils with special needs. Community members were also concerned by potential issues around anti-social behaviour. The work of the vice-principal community has been of great importance in creating a school that is part of its community by working with agencies such as the health authority, social services, local employers and community organisations.

For example, the residents' association now sponsors the school's student of the year award, which has helped to build relations between the school and local residents: 'the residents now feel that they are part of school life, and the students have got an aspiration to get their name on the honours board in school and be the student of the year,' explained Kevin. Students at Darlington Education Village visit local care homes, which has helped to change elderly people's perceptions of the school. The school has been successful in linking activities such as these to the curriculum, for example by incorporating elderly people's first-hand experience into history lesson plans.

Kevin's colleague also comments that historically there had been poor attendance at parents' evenings, and that the SLT had worked hard to engage parents with the school and demonstrate to them that they can achieve good results. Kevin has been very important in building relationships with parents, who respond well to him because they feel they are being listened to by a senior figure within the school.

Kevin feels he has had an impact on school staff, both by constructively challenging the decisions made by the SLT and encouraging its members to reflect on their practice, as well as supporting the wider school workforce in working with pupils. He is also involved in mentoring students, which he expects to be of benefit in the longer term. Kevin's colleague also comments that the role has been very important in helping other SLT members to manage their workload: because Kevin takes on responsibility for the outward-facing aspects of school life, other members of the SLT are able concentrate wholly on their own roles which relate more specifically to leading teaching and learning.

Issues and challenges

Kevin does not feel there have been any problems with school staff accepting him in his role. His colleague supports this view, and says that he has effectively assimilated himself into the workforce.

They just think of [Kevin] as one of the leaders. He has assimilated himself into the workforce. People know him, he gets around the school, he does the student council, so I don't think there have been any difficulties.

Kevin feels that this smooth transition may be because he was known to the school before taking up his post, and therefore has had ample opportunity to demonstrate his skills and credibility before joining the school. His colleague adds that staff were likely to respond well to the vice-principal community because they were already accustomed to having a wide variety of roles within the school workforce. Such roles include other non-QTS leaders, corporate partners who use the site outside normal school hours, and over 80 support staff who work within the school: 'non-QTS staff are a massive part of the school workforce, a very varied workforce.'

Kevin feels he has been readily accepted because he maintains a clear distinction between his role and the roles of teaching and learning staff within the school. He recognises that at times parents and external visitors are confused by this distinction, but feels that within the school there is clarity about the extent and remit of his role: 'there is a blurring of the lines in terms of people's understanding, but there is no blurring of the lines in terms of the jobs that I am given to do,' he says, adding that:

Staff would view me as someone on [the] SLT who can help them deal with particular issues. If it's teaching and learning it's not me, but if it's about other aspects of the youngsters they are working with... if it's about working with local employers, working with health, then I am the conduit who can help.

The only area where challenges have been identified is around the size and scope of the vice-principal community role. Kevin's colleague comments that his role is already very large and has the potential to expand further. She says it will be important to provide him with a large enough team of staff to ensure he is well supported when his role expands:

[Kevin's] role is massive, and there is a risk that it could grow out of all proportion... he is very busy, and a weakness is that we haven't given him a big enough team.

Professional development and career progression

Kevin joined the school with extensive professional and leadership experience, and is currently undertaking a Master's in school leadership, alongside other SLT members in the school.

He felt that a key area for development on starting his role was to build an understanding of how the school operates, and to become familiar with the school curriculum. Kevin has developed this knowledge through informal, self-directed training. He feels well supported, and comments that 'there are masses of opportunities to develop within the school.' This view is echoed by his colleague, who adds that the school is happy to devote time and resources to staff development. She also notes that the school's federated status has opened up additional development opportunities: for example, the vice-principal community regularly attends conferences as Darlington Education Village is of national interest as a federation. Kevin has also had opportunities to represent the SLT at school forums and events.

Inclusion roles

Featherstone High School: assistant headteacher for access and inclusion

Featherstone High School is an 11–19 comprehensive school with a recently established sixth form. It has specialist status for sports and vocational education, and shares its extensive sports facilities with the local community. The school was designated a Leading Edge school in 2003. The 1,470 pupils come from a wide range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, and are predominantly of Indian, Pakistani and African heritage. The school serves a deprived catchment area with significant social disadvantage. Around 35 per cent of pupils qualify for free school meals; 72 per cent have English as an additional language (EAL), and 40 per cent have SEN statements. The school is in the top two per cent in the country for its contextual value-added (CVA) score.

The non-QTS staff member on the SLT is the assistant headteacher for access and inclusion, John. He has been on the SLT for five years, but worked in the school for three years prior to this. His professional background is in youth work, where he worked successfully alongside local schools. John holds a DipHe in informal education and also has a Master's in youth studies.

John joined the school and took on the post of lead learning mentor in 2001, after which he successfully developed the learning mentor team in the school and established the social inclusion department. The work that he has done in school has received wider recognition from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, which he worked with as a lead practitioner helping schools to improve inclusion. An opportunity arose to bring him onto the SLT as a transition manager and he was promoted in 2004. A key driver was the view of the headteacher in school at the time:

[John] comes from a youth work background and in many ways, the type of pastoral work that he does is an advantage, rather than him being a teacher first. The [previous] head was very prepared to do things differently and had out-of-the-box thinking, and I think she felt that with the type of children and challenges that this type of intake brings, he was ideally placed to set [up] the inclusion department.

The access and inclusion role involves overseeing transition from Year 6 to Year 7, including handling admissions and appeals. John is responsible for student voice, school publicity, parental engagement and extended services. As part of this latter responsibility he chairs the local authority inner-schools partnership, which is made up of seven schools and a children's centre. He is on the management committee of a local pupil referral unit where he represents local headteachers. John also chairs the multi-agency panel at Featherstone High School which works for vulnerable students and families that need extra support in relation to complex social needs. The panel consists of social services, youth and Connexions services, the youth offending team, an educational psychologist, the safer schools police officer, representatives of the local authority's adolescent service, and learning mentors. He is responsible for community cohesion, SEN, behaviour, attendance, child protection and school policies.

As part of his role John also line manages non-teaching staff, including the extended schools co-ordinator, the lead learning mentor and head of the inclusion department, six learning mentors, a parent support adviser, a counsellor, an attendance officer, the publicity manager and an activities co-ordinator. The deputy head believed that his role would be maintained if he were to leave:

I don't think the school would want to be without him. If he moved on, then I think people would see that his role needed to be filled by someone with very similar skills.

Benefits and impact of the role

Benefits for the SLT included John's experience of social education (eg drug education and sex education), experience of school governance (he is a governor of a local comprehensive) and his knowledge of what makes an outstanding school from his work with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. Other members of the SLT felt that John provides a moderated view on behaviour and ensure that behavioural problems are dealt with and monitored consistently in the SLT and by year heads.

Benefits for the wider school staff include support in dealing with low-level anti-social or disruptive behaviour in lessons. He also works closely with year heads, giving advice on how to manage the behaviour of students or on appropriate sanctions and support strategies.

In his role as assistant headteacher for access and inclusion, John brings many benefits for pupils. As well as being on hand to withdraw disruptive pupils from lessons, he supports pupils in the learning and behaviour support centre that he heads. Here, pupils receive mentoring as well as academic support. School data demonstrates that these pupils do not drop behind the progress of their peers and that their academic progress is not hindered whilst in the centre. The deputy head noted that the exceptionally high contextual value-added score for the school is affected by the access and inclusion role. The pupils who make the most progress in school are children whom his work directly affects:

They've gone on and far, far exceeded what was expected of them, not just by a little bit, and a lot of his work is directed at those students.

John's work has led to benefits for the community. Because young people who might otherwise be excluded from school are supported to remain in education, the community experiences fewer problems with young people being out of school and engaging in anti-social behaviour. The learning mentor team also works closely with families to enhance parenting skills and support families in difficulty.

Given these impacts, it is felt that John's role is integral to school improvement. He plays a key role in developing teaching and learning outcomes, enforces and informs the school's behaviour code, influences the community and liaises with other local schools (eg feeder primaries). He is also seen to have a major influence on attendance in the school, which shows very high levels, and is responsible for lowering the exclusion figures.

All interviewees in the school agreed that John is able to have greater influence and impact by being on the SLT. John himself says:

If I was a middle leader, I wouldn't have the impact that I have now. There is no way. To effect significant change in the school you need to be on the [SLT].

Being on the SLT is thought to have raised the profile of the work of the inclusion team.

Issues and challenges

There were initial issues around the postholder being on the SLT; some staff felt that as he was not a teacher, he should not have this status. However, with time, this has dissipated and there is now acceptance of his position, and staff are able to see that what he is doing is in line with his skills and the needs of the pupils. The school staff have developed confidence in him and know that he will deliver to a high standard.

When he first stepped into post, pay was an issue. However, although this has now been addressed, there are shared concerns that other SMT members have more points on their pay scale to work towards, whilst he is limited in terms of pay progression due to being on a non-QTS pay scale.

Professional development and career progression

John feels that the support and professional development offered to him have been sufficient, and that nothing has been denied him. He is currently completing the national leaders in behaviour and attendance (NLBA) course and has considered completing NPQH if a pathway for non-QTS staff is created. He has had no training specifically for leadership and management, but brought these skills to the post from his previous professional roles. He is also taking a more prominent role in community cohesion and is due to be working with the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust once again.

Nunsthorpe Community School: lead learning mentor and child protection co-ordinator

Nunsthorpe Community School is a larger than average primary school with some 550 pupils aged between 3 and 11. Approximately 100 children are in the nursery. The school serves some of the most deprived communities in North Lincolnshire. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average. The majority of pupils are White British.

The lead learning mentor and child protection co-ordinator, Shanie, has several roles, including those of deputy child protection co-ordinator, attendance co-ordinator and lunchtime manager. Her role involves liaising with a number of different agencies, and she has line-management responsibility for midday staff and canteen staff. The headteacher explained that he saw her role as: 'supporting us in developing strategies to better support our most vulnerable children.' A governor agreed, adding: 'Her key areas of work are integrating with the children and co-ordinating... the kids can talk freely to her and she is excellent at deactivating situations.'

Shanie talked about the background to her original mentoring role, but explained that her current role had developed since then:

I am the senior learning mentor on a team of six, but my role has developed away from that. Originally, the learning mentor role was about things like breaking down barriers to learning, raising self-esteem, home issues and personal hygiene. I was part of the original learning mentor team in North Lincolnshire about six years ago.

Shanie has been in her current post for 2 years, but she has worked in the school in one capacity or another for 14 years. After successfully applying for a temporary classroom support assistant post, she was given a full-time contract. She worked in this role for a few years before becoming a teaching assistant, where she took on a role managing behaviour and exclusions. It was then suggested by a previous headteacher at the school that she applied to become a learning mentor.

The role did not exist before she came into post, but the headteacher said he would appoint someone in her place if she moved on. Shanie explained that the role had been given a new lease of life when the current headteacher joined the school some 18 months previously: 'When the head came in he upped the pace and gave me more responsibility.'

Shanie said the main reason she was appointed to the SLT was because 'attendance was identified as an issue and the role escalated in importance.' The headteacher said: 'I rely on her a lot to tell me about these children. It just made sense for her to be part of the [senior leadership] team.' Shanie said domestic violence was identified as a concern within the school, and because 'child protection and attendance go hand in hand', it was decided that it made sense to keep the roles together. The headteacher added that he had high expectations for the role, and that Shanie's background and experience made her ideally suited to the post:

In terms of attendance, in terms of liaising with hard-to-reach families, and in terms of developing some of the practices we have got in school, her sheer knowledge of the children and the families puts her in a very good position to assist in the key areas that we are trying to develop in school.

Benefits and impact of the role

The role of lead learning mentor and child protection co-ordinator was said to bring a range of benefits to the SLT, headteacher and local community, but perhaps the greatest impact was on the children in the school by way of the postholder's 'vast knowledge of the pupils.' The headteacher explained:

We have vulnerable children and she is very good with them. She comes up with strategies for them. She will take responsibility for the children, for their development, and for their educational prospects.

Shanie explained that her special relationship with the children was what made her role so effective:

I have a totally different relationship with the children to other members of the SLT, because they see me as a learning mentor. It allows them to feel they can come and talk things through with me. It is a way in for them, and they are more accepting when you say 'don't you think you should have done this or that?'

While Shanie did not attend every meeting of the SLT, she had regular meetings with the headteacher and the pastoral team. The headteacher explained: 'She uses her knowledge to inform those decisions. Everything I do is informed by her.'

The role also benefited local families and the wider community. Shanie grew up in the catchment of the school and went to the school as child herself, so she knew local families well. The headteacher spoke of her close relationship with the local community and the benefits this brought to the school:

She is invaluable as a link to the families. Parents will listen to her. She knows how to talk to them, how she can get through to different individuals. She knows which families are going to be difficult, which families are going to be on drugs when they come through the door and how to deal with that.

A governor agreed, adding that Shanie was particularly good at making parents feel at ease:

She is always being approached by parents because she is easy to talk to and will listen. It is a talent in itself to be that approachable and the fact that parents feel at ease with her makes the job easier.

More generally, the headteacher said that having a member of support staff in a senior management role had helped break down the barriers between teaching and non-teaching staff and had highlighted the value and importance of support staff:

Having a management role hopefully breaks down that psychological barrier and lets [the wider body of] support staff feel that they are part of the school team.

In terms of contributing to overall school improvement, Shanie said that by helping children in the classroom she was helping to ensure that would-be absentees attended school, while also ensuring children's safety: 'It is a continual cycle of keeping things going and a key part of the overall holistic support we provide.' Indeed, since she took over the role, attendance was said to have increased from the low 80s to some 94 or 95 per cent.

Issues and challenges

Shanie said that while she had not experienced any challenges associated with not holding qualified teacher status, her pay had not been commensurate with the amount of responsibility she had when she first moved into the role. She said the headteacher now paid her for the hours she worked, which had made 'quite a difference' to her monthly pay. The headteacher said he had been obstructed by the local authority's position on the pay awarded to the role:

The difficulty is that [the local authority] don't have a very clear concept [of how schools are remodelling their workforces]. I wanted to develop her role much more on safeguarding because of her knowledge and what she is able to offer and they couldn't understand why somebody who wasn't a teacher would be doing that.

The headteacher admitted feeling frustrated about this: 'Rather than supporting us, they actually got in the way of the rapid development of some of our workforce.' The headteacher added he was going to bring in a private consultant to advise on the matter.

Professional development and career progression

Shanie said she had taken an NVQ in child protection at Level 2 and had undertaken other related development opportunities, such as training on the common assessment framework. While she said she had experienced few opportunities for training in leadership or management, the headteacher was supportive of her, and had booked her onto a relevant course. Unfortunately this had been cancelled due to bad weather. Shanie was very appreciative of the support offered by the headteacher:

When the opportunities are there, the head makes sure support staff are given the opportunities to see if they want to do things. He fully recognises that people need to develop.

While very pleased with her work, the headteacher recognised that Shanie had reached the summit of her current role and title, and was keen to find opportunities to progress her further:

What I am hoping to look at are ways we can do something else which will give her some progression because at the moment she is at the top of the scale for learning mentors so there is no [further] progression, and I need to change that.

For her part, Shanie was very happy with her current role, and was thankful for having been given the opportunity to develop: 'I am just a mum off the estate who has worked her way up.'

St Vincent's Special School: pastoral and independence skills manager

St Vincent's School is a non-maintained special school for children with sensory impairment and other needs which is run by a charity. It caters for children and young people aged 4 to 19 with a wide range of ability and need. There are 41 pupils currently on roll, from 18 different local authorities, 17 of whom access the residential facilities.

Bernadette is the pastoral and independence skills manager and she runs the residential side of the school and line manages three senior and seven care staff. She also has responsibility for mobility and independence training and line manages two mobility officers and the independence skills tutor. She provides an outreach service for other local authorities and is part of a team running a regional training course for mobility officers. She states that her role is 'quite diverse ... I think it is using all the skills I have and putting them all together.'

Bernadette has been working at the school for 32 years. She began her career by undertaking an NNEB qualification enabling her to work in the care or school sector as a nursery nurse. By secondment, she did a national certificate to teach mobility and independence skills to the visually impaired. During the course of her career in the school she began in childcare, then went into mobility, and then returned to childcare. She has since undertaken an NVQ in management within the care setting.

Before taking up her current post Bernadette was the acting head of care, and also on the SLT. Her role was recently broadened to include the independence and mobility aspect. She has been in post for three years and fulfilled the role in a temporary capacity before that. The school undertook a major restructuring and she had to apply for the post, which was advertised internally: 'I did not automatically get it because I was head of care. It was open to others,' she explained. The principal stated that, when the school was restructured, this was one of the posts created to reflect more accurately the services that were delivered within the school: 'We are offering universal services now... we have got to have people who can deliver that and it is not always teachers... it is about deliverability.' There are three non-QTS staff on the SLT. According to the principal:

[The three non-QTS staff] have been here a long time but they have all grown... They have had to step outside themselves and what they thought was St Vincent's way to create the St Vincent's way.

Bernadette and the principal agreed, if she moved on, the school would reappoint to the post.

Benefits and impact of the role

Talking about the benefits for the SLT of the three non-QTS staff roles, the principal stated that 'a whole new perspective comes to the meetings and they become uncluttered.' He is keen for staff to challenge his thinking: '[The three non-QTS staff] are the ones getting to be more comfortable at doing that than the teaching staff... you want that challenge within a team.'

The main benefit for the wider school staff was said to be the raised profile of support workers. The principal recognised the work that needed to be done in this respect: 'It's about changing hearts and minds.' The pastoral manager stated that care, mobility and independence staff know they have a voice at a senior level. Another key benefit was improved communication within the school. As Bernadette explained: 'Everybody knows what is happening within the school and on the residential side... So it's not just that teachers go home at four o'clock and don't know what happens then.' Commensurate with this, staff were more aware of the range of services the school offered and there was greater consistency within annual reviews across local authorities.

There was general agreement that the main benefits for pupils and parents centred on the recognition of the holistic needs of pupils, the provision of wraparound services and the support received by parents. The development of community links was also cited by Bernadette: 'We do get our children out into the community and bring the community into school as much as possible as part of helping the school to develop.'

In terms of school improvement, the school was judged 'outstanding' at its latest care inspection. Mobility and independence training was said to contribute to the school's contextual value-added score and, as an additional service that children received, was considered to be a major strength of the school. This service was felt to help children and young people take responsibility and to help them cope with the school day. In addition, care staff ensured that children did their homework. According to Bernadette, 'I think that all helps towards the school's effectiveness and getting the best results for the pupil.' The principal said that services had been honed and that there were now clearer lines of accountability.

When asked about the importance of being on the SLT for impact, the principal talked about what this meant in terms of the non-QTS staff's responsibility and accountability, and the fact that this had made them more focused. According to Bernadette, being on the SLT enabled her to speak on behalf of others at the most senior level:

The staff and the pupils know my position and know if they go through the channels... there is someone at a higher level who will take it on and will speak out on their behalf at the highest level within the school and they know they will be listened to.

Issues and challenges

Bernadette stated that she had never had a problem with colleagues not respecting her. She attributed this to her length of service within the school, her personality and her respect for the teaching staff:

My numbers of years of service here have helped me in my status... I am approachable and I do appreciate the role that teachers play and have not had any problems personally working with all the teaching staff.

However, the principal referred to 'some discomfort' initially about the elevation of the profile of non-teaching staff, as well as the personal challenges associated with staff taking up these new posts.

Whilst acknowledging that she was paid the same as others in equivalent posts within the care sector, Bernadette stated that her salary was quite different from that paid to teachers: 'It would be nice if it was all equal but in the great scheme of things it isn't.' She felt that being within the care sector rather than education was a further obstacle, even though her role was school-wide:

Mobility officers sometimes work full time in schools but they don't get the same pay and conditions as teaching members of staff, which is hard at times as they have the timetable... care staff do contribute to the annual reviews... to monitoring evenings... they are involved in all the things that the teachers are involved in.

The principal reiterated concerns about this disparity, noting in particular that teachers had received a pay rise this year and non-teachers had not: 'It's wrong and I let the trustees and governors know what I think about that and hopefully we'll get beyond that.'

Professional development and career progression

The school had ensured that Bernadette had received the required training for the post. There is a focus on good access to CPD opportunities for all staff within the school: 'We are developing them constantly so they are better prepared when opportunities come along [and] we recognise that this may mean that we may lose them. That is the chance that you have to take if you want to develop people,' said the principal. Mutual support is provided through links with the head of care of another special school, which was organised by the principal. Bernadette appreciated the support she had received:

If you look at me as a prime example, I started here as a nursery nurse, classroom assistant and assistant house mum... that is the good thing about St Vincent's, they will progress the staff from within and train you up to the level you can reach.

She stated that the role had been widened to fit her needs, but she had now reached her full potential within the school. She explained how the principal and other senior leaders had been key to her development:

We are all equal and everyone's say is important no matter what your job role. Everybody is listened to.

St Vincent's Special School: family liaison officer

St Vincent's School is a non-maintained special school for children with sensory impairment and other needs which is run by a charity. It caters for children and young people aged 4 to 19 with a wide range of ability and need. There are 41 pupils currently on roll, from 18 different local authorities, 17 of whom access the residential facilities.

The family liaison officer (FLO) role is primarily about liaison between parents and school staff, but the postholder, Julie, also liaises with external agencies that support families and pupils, and with several different local authorities. According to the principal:

The FLO role was about consistency in talking to 18 different local authorities, 40 lots of parents... it's making sure we get a single and consistent message out to parents. The FLO is very much that point of contact with parents and information into the school about parental needs which shapes what we should be doing in terms of parents but also making sure we get information out to parents properly.

Julie ensures the school can cater for pupils' needs and attends pupils' annual reviews to ensure that targets and recommendations are met. She also has responsibility for safeguarding and child protection within the school.

Julie has been at the school for 23 years. This is a new role and it is her third year in post. She was a nursery nurse and worked in the early years base previously. She stated that, before she was appointed 'links [between parents and staff] were quite tenuous... and some people knew information and others didn't.' She stated that the creation of the post was driven mainly by the needs of the children. The school works with a large number of different local authorities and different agencies and it was considered important to have one point of contact. At the same time there was also a big push from the DfE (then DCSF) in relation to child-centred agendas and parent partnerships. Julie's post is partly funded through the specialist school bid. It is recognised as a centre of excellence for sensory impairment.

The principal introduced a whole new way of looking at the school and, as part of the restructuring, three non-QTS staff were appointed to the SLT. All the posts were advertised. According to the principal, it was about 'changing hearts and minds':

The imbalance in the structure of the school and the services that the school delivered was one of the prime reasons... We needed to reflect more accurately the services that were delivered within the school and that's why the posts [including that of FLO] were created.

Benefits and impact of the role

Both the FLO and the principal stated that she is able to bring a different perspective to the SLT. According to Julie:

For the SLT it means... we are not just talking about results and children, we are talking about the impact the school can have on a child and their family. So in the SLT meetings I look at it as a bit bigger than just classroom teaching, the residential, the 24-hour curriculum and families in general... I think that makes the school a lot wider, we are not just nine to three, we are totally responsible.

According to the principal, the appointment of the three non-QTS posts to the SLT raised the profile of other non-QTS staff in the school:

They have got their champion and their champion sits in that meeting... They've made a fantastic contribution to the school, all are now more aware of the services we offer. It's now a school that provides a service where education and care are of equal value... there is a greater awareness across the school about the different roles that staff play.

Julie said that staff now have a point of contact and they get information about children promptly. If there are any concerns about a child, she can liaise with the family and with the staff: 'It is just joining everybody together.'

Julie is able to advise pupils of their entitlements and makes sure legal information about SEN statements is passed on to parents. Parents contact her if they have any problems. She gives advice and family support and can contact other agencies for them. According to the principal, the parents and the pupils receive a more balanced service and there is a greater sensitivity to pupil need as a result of the three non-QTS roles.

Being part of the SLT enables Julie to bring a different perspective and a wider and more balanced view of what is going on in the school. She thinks that being on the SLT gives her recognition and status in the eyes of her colleagues and that it makes a difference when she is talking to people outside the school, such as heads of other services, and this in turn gives her confidence. Ensuring all the children get all their entitlements contributes to school effectiveness. Because she is a non-teacher it is a lot easier for her to go on courses and to ensure child protection procedures are in place. According to the principal, the non-QTS staff in each of the three roles had a greater impact and were more focused as a result of being on the SLT:

As individuals they had impact but they had the chance for greater potential and greater impact because they have got it within a role now and it's a way to take the school forward and it is recognised. And equally it has made them focused.

There is anecdotal evidence of the impact of the FLO role in letters from parents and pupils. Julie believes that the way the job has evolved and the relationships she has forged with different organisations and local authorities are evidence of impact. She led on the recent inspection for safeguarding and the school 'did really well.'

Issues and challenges

Julie feels that she is accepted within school, but is uncertain whether she is fully recognised and valued by external partners. According to the principal, Julie's success in getting the FLO post created a challenge for some school staff:

That is where it presented some very healthy challenges within the school because it has been a very hierarchical structure [with] teaching... at the top and after that you didn't really count, you had a job to do.

The principal stated that the school had changed the process of annual review. Whereas the class teacher and class support assistant used to take part, because it is one of the most important parts of their business, the deputy principal or the learning manager now lead the review and the teaching support manager, the pastoral manager and the FLO, as the key outward-facing people of the school, also attend. He reported that, at first, some staff had been uncomfortable with this.

Julie sometimes thinks that her pay is not commensurate with the amount of responsibility she has, which includes managing staff and the extra responsibilities of child protection and safeguarding. This was reiterated by the principal, who stated, whilst the school paid non-QTS staff comparatively well, teachers received a pay rise this year and non-teachers did not. The principal admitted feeling uncomfortable about this:

I have a great discomfort with that, especially when you are trying to raise their status: it's wrong and I let the trustees and governors know what I felt about that.

Professional development and career progression

Julie has received a lot of training in the area of safeguarding. In other aspects of the role she works closely with the assistant principal and has had ongoing training. She completed a foundation degree before she took on the role and, as part of this, looked at management within schools. She thinks that training in leadership development would be very useful. Without the support she has received from the school she felt could not meet the needs of the role.

She contacted the RNIB and the National Blind Children's Society and asked for a family welfare officer to come in to talk to her about partnership working. She said this was helpful but thinks it would be more helpful to have contact with other schools: 'I don't know any other schools [that] have [an] FLO, but they must have something similar.'

Personally, Julie cannot see where she is going to go after this and, if she did want to progress, it would have to be outside the school, for example in a children's centre. She sees herself as being at the pinnacle of her career in St Vincent's: 'I cannot see it going any further because I have not got a teaching qualification. It is not a barrier because I am not a teacher and never chose to be a teacher.'

St Vincent's Special School: teaching support manager

St Vincent's School is a non-maintained special school for children with sensory impairment and other needs which is run by a charity. It caters for children and young people aged 4 to 19 with a wide range of ability and need. There are 41 pupils currently on roll, from 18 different local authorities, 17 of whom access the residential facilities.

Nora, the teaching support manager, has responsibility for managing the 10 learning support staff within the school. This involves making sure that learning support staff are attached to each key stage group, covering the breaks and the dinner rotas, and conducting learning support assistants' performance management reviews. Nora explained: 'I spend a lot of time working alongside the learning manager helping to run the school in general. We work closely together to deal with any problems as they occur.'

Nora has worked in the school in a learning support capacity for 31 years. Her current role was created following a staff restructure three years ago. She explained how she came to be in the post:

The principal wanted to have someone responsible for the learning support staff because they represented quite a heavy body of staff. Five learning support staff applied for the role and I was lucky enough to get it.

Nora said she thought the role had been created in response to a need, identified by the principal, to formally recognise the value and contribution that learning support staff were making to school life. She explained:

[The principal] created the role because he felt there was a need to bring us all together. Some learning support staff felt undervalued at that time. It was a problem that the principal inherited but never created. He was always telling us how important we were, and I think by creating this role we could see that we were valued members of the team.

The principal agreed that the role of teaching support manager had raised the profile of learning support staff within the school:

They've made a fantastic contribution to the school, all are more aware of the services we offer. It's now a school, I would argue, that provides a service whether education or care of equal value... there is a greater awareness across the school about the different roles that staff play, with teaching staff now more aware what care workers do and what [learning support assistants] do.

Nora said she valued the role because it allowed her to see 'both the managers' side and the view of people on the ground.' She tried to represent both viewpoints in her discussions with the SLT and the learning support staff but admitted: 'it's sometimes hard trying to get the balance right.'

The teaching support manager post had been created in-house and was a mutual fit with Nora's skills and personality, as the principal explained: 'It's the post not the person but the person makes the post.' It had become such an essential role that the principal said he thought the school would need to appoint someone in her place if Nora moved on.

Benefits and impact of the role

Nora felt that she brought a unique insight and perspective to meetings of the SLT:

I can come in at different angles. I can look at the whole child because of my background in pastoral work. I think learning support staff see a lot more than teachers on a day-to-day basis; when kids are struggling with things they often know why. When we are talking about pupils I can put a different light on it.

The creation of the teaching support manager post had also given learning support staff a voice and formal representation on the SLT. Nora said that learning support staff felt comfortable coming to her; they knew that they could rely on her to pass any comments or issues they had up the management chain, and that she would fight their corner when needed. The respect for and value of the learning support staff were all the greater for the fact that the teaching support manager was on the SLT. It was suggested that the role would not have been as effective had she not been on the SLT.

Nora said that pupils in the school had always benefited from the role played by learning support staff, but suggested that her role added more strategic control over how learning support staff were deployed: 'I always place the right person with the right group. I can do [that] with a heart as well as a head because I know them as individuals.'

Another benefit of the role was that it had created a career structure for support staff to work towards, as the principal explained:

There is a career structure now, there is somewhere to go. One person goes and people think that is a job they could get. It has again raised the status of the non-teaching staff.

Issues and challenges

One of the challenges the teaching support manager had found was moving from the position of a co-worker to a manager of the learning support staff:

The transition has been challenging. They were all my friends, especially those who have worked here a long time. Although I'm their boss, we all work together.

There had been a period of adjustment for both Nora and the learning support staff, but both were said to enjoy excellent working relationships and new learning support staff coming into the school had accepted her role without question.

When the teaching support manager role was first created, Nora encountered some problems with a minority of teaching staff:

There were problems around recognising my role and accepting it. This was particularly difficult at the time we were restructuring, as teachers were being made redundant and a learning support assistant was being put on the management team.

However, as the role became more established, and the staff restructure was completed, this no longer became an issue. Indeed, Nora now enjoys good working relationships with teachers within the school.

Nora sometimes thinks that her pay is not commensurate with the amount of responsibility she has. This was reiterated by the principal, who stated that whilst the school paid non-QTS staff comparatively well, teachers received a pay rise this year and non-teachers did not.

Professional development and career progression

Nora has an NVQ in care at Level 3 and had undertaken an in-house training course which was accredited by a university. She had also been on a creative education course aimed at non-QTS staff who were leaders of teams. The course was said to be 'excellent' and 'very useful.' She had also received training in conducting performance reviews which had been very helpful in supporting her current role: 'It was about leading a team and how to get the best out of people... The training really helped with something that I had found difficult at first.'

Nora said she would like more training especially designed for non-QTS staff in management roles:

I've got some excellent learning support assistants and it would be helpful to know what more I could do to develop them further.

However, despite searching the internet for courses, Nora couldn't find anything suitable, and so any future course on this theme may need to be provided internally.

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Triumph Road,
Nottingham NG8 1DH
T 0845 609 0009
F 0115 872 2001
E enquiries@nationalcollege.org.uk
www.nationalcollege.org.uk

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