



---

# From islands to archipelagos: developing secondary school leadership

## 1 Introduction

Leadership matters. Education policy-makers and researchers agree that educational leadership can make a positive difference to teaching practices, school cultures, and learning outcomes for students. There is also increasing agreement that the type of leadership needed for successful student outcomes requires more than any one school teacher or principal can deliver. Hence, there is an increasing focus on the need for 'distributed leadership' in schools.<sup>1</sup> But what does this really mean in relation to current policy and practice?

## 2 Leadership under Tomorrow's Schools

Thanks to Tomorrow's Schools, New Zealand has the most devolved education system in the world. This has brought an apparent raft of opportunities for local communities to shape the direction of their schools: boards of trustees select principals and (usually) other senior staff; boards are charged, along with the principal, with setting and monitoring the school's strategic direction; and they are also responsible for ensuring that the school's physical plant and infrastructures remain suitable for supporting the school's teaching and learning programmes.

School hierarchies are increasingly described in business terms rather than those of teaching. Deputy and assistant principals are commonly referred to as senior managers. Heads of departments, faculties, or learning areas – along with deans – are middle managers. Principals are expected to report to their board of trustees about matters of finance and property, along with human resource management and, perhaps, teaching and learning. According to the State Sector Act, a principal is the chief executive of their school.<sup>2</sup>

One of the unresolved issues around Tomorrow's Schools is how to ensure that school boards, made up of non-specialist parent and community representatives, have sufficient knowledge and expertise to make sound decisions in relation to school planning and employment. Decisions around principal appointments are critical to the effective functioning of a school, so the combination of inexperienced boards and a small recruitment pool increases the risk that unsuitable applicants will be appointed.

Local autonomy and the ability of some schools to operate enrolment schemes have created a quasi-market in which perceptions of better (even best) schools have emerged – sometimes (though not always) linked to deciles and often based on public perceptions that are shaped by ephemera, such as student appearance (uniform) and the annual league tables published by the news media.

---

<sup>1</sup> Also referred to as 'shared leadership'

<sup>2</sup> Section 76(1) of the State Sector Act states that: "A school's principal is the board's chief executive in relation to the school's control and management."

There are constant and significant tensions between meeting community demand and following educational best practice, and in leading complex change processes while maintaining a stable school environment. Schools too often compete with each other rather than collaborate to provide the best learning opportunities for all.

The average New Zealand secondary school has about 600 students – hardly the size at which economies of scale can operate. It would make sense for smaller and mid-sized schools to be able to collaborate in a range of ways – from shared subject options in Years 11–13, to field trips, community projects, and transition programmes. Although it does happen, this kind of collaboration tends to be the exception rather than the norm and is difficult to sustain.

### 3 Leadership support

When problems in school management and governance emerge, the Tomorrow's Schools focus on self-management can make it difficult for central agencies to intervene. There has been a tendency instead to redefine the problem as one of leadership.

Consequently, the New Zealand education sector is drenched in the rhetoric of educational leadership. Following the *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* (2008) document,<sup>3</sup> the Ministry of Education developed a 'Professional Leadership Plan 2009–2010' (PLP) which has the goal of achieving '*strong educational leadership in every school*'.<sup>4</sup>

Significantly, the PLP does not address the need for system leadership, which has been identified in recent OECD research as important for improving educational outcomes: '*System leaders... care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own*'.<sup>5</sup>

The Ministry provides the following programmes as part of its Professional Leadership Plan:

- Newly-appointed principals are invited to participate in the First-time Principals' programme (FTP), a combination of block courses and mentoring.
- Aspiring principals can apply for a limited-entry course, the National Aspiring Principals Programme (NAPP), which has run twice to date – in 2008 and 2010.
- Experienced principals were offered a pilot programme, the Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) in 2010 – but with differing availability around the country. For example, only primary principals were offered EPDP in Wellington.
- He Kākano is the most recent leadership development programme to fall out of the PLP. It '*focuses on growing culturally responsive pedagogical school leadership – leadership that actively takes account of the culture of Māori*

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.educationalladers.govt.nz/Leadership-development/Kiwi-leadership-for-principals>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.educationalladers.govt.nz/Leadership-development/Professional-Leadership-Plan>

<sup>5</sup> Beatriz Pont, Deborah Nusche, and David Hopkins (eds) (2008). *Improving School Leadership: Volume 2: Case studies on system leadership*. OECD. Retrieved from: [www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership](http://www.oecd.org/edu/schoolleadership)

*learners to build relationships that result in achievement success*'.<sup>6</sup> He Kākano targets school leadership teams and is supposed to run for three years, beginning in term three, 2010. Early signs (based on the application, notification and information procedures) are that the project is not well organised, that staff have not been recruited and trained in time to meet projected roll-out dates, and that principals are already frustrated at the mixed (and missing) messages they have received. Participating schools are required to co-fund He Kākano with the Ministry, although to what extent is currently unknown.

There are opportunities and challenges arising from these programmes. On the one hand, they offer aspects of good practice (coaching and mentoring form part of the FTP, EPDP, and NAPP programmes); and the courses encourage participants to form loose networks. On the other hand, the FTP and NAPP take a one-size approach to block courses, putting primary and secondary participants together and offering only limited opportunities for participants to work with sector colleagues. This is particularly problematic for the secondary sector, because courses are inevitably dominated by participants from primary schools.

Limited as this support is, there is even less help for 'middle and senior leaders'. Aside from the NAPP, no actual support exists for middle and senior leaders beyond the educational leaders' website and the possibility that the local School Support Services provider's leadership and management adviser/s (or one of the few remaining curriculum advisers) may have been in touch.

#### **4 Ministry failure**

The Ministry of Education claims that professional development has been provided for 2800 middle and senior leaders 'in literacy, numeracy and assessment', but this is code for the national standards rollout. This shows that scarce professional learning and development (PLD) staffing and resources are being taken from other curriculum areas to prop up the national standards.<sup>7</sup> It is also further evidence that the Ministry often fails to disaggregate the primary and secondary sectors in its planning and provision.<sup>8</sup>

New Zealand is widely regarded as being fortunate to have the various Best Evidence Syntheses (BES) – not least the PLD BES and the Leadership BES.<sup>9</sup> However, the Ministry does not seem to understand that these publications bring together current research – the 'best evidence' – and are policy drivers, rather than professional learning and development in themselves. It is mistaken to assume that directing teachers to websites and BES resources constitutes active support, or professional development, for school leadership.

---

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Leadership-development/He-Kakano>

<sup>7</sup> 'Around 45% (\$10 million) of the school support service budget is now allocated to support literacy, numeracy and National Standards. This has been achieved through a reduction in the support services that the Ministry purchases for other curriculum areas such as science, technology and the arts. Previously about 28% (\$6.3 million) of the school support service funding was directed to literacy and numeracy.'

Ministry of Education (2009). '2010 Budget: Detailed Examination of Vote Education'. Retrieved from: <http://www.ppta.org.nz/index.php/resources/viewpoints/1246-treasury-hi097?start=1>

<sup>8</sup> See the PLP, and also: <http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Middle-and-senior-leaders>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/themes/BES>

## **5 Only 'failing' schools get help**

Interestingly, once a school is deemed to be 'failing' (or near critical breakdown) assistance may be provided. At that point, the Ministry may step in with a commissioner or a limited statutory manager (LSM). These people offer a wealth of educational and financial experience and work alongside school boards and leaders in a 'failing' school. It is a pity that this kind of sustained advice and guidance is offered (or required) only after a school has been diagnosed as failing. Why can't first-time principals and new boards have ongoing access to good practice coaching and advice instead? Wouldn't this be a wiser investment than that required to try and fix a broken school?

Some school leaders and boards have reported a genuine feeling of relief and gratitude to have the expertise of a commissioner or LSM to draw on. If this is the case, why wait until the situation is almost irretrievable? The culture of learning by doing, on the job and just in time, will not suffice in an environment as complex and important as that of secondary schooling.

## **6 System leadership?**

There is a raft of leadership roles within the education sector, but schools cannot always readily access this expertise in proactive ways. School Support Services offer a limited pool of leadership and management advisers; ERO has the potential to offer more proactive advice and guidance than it is currently able to give; former principals have much to offer and are sometimes contracted to work alongside boards and principals – although there is more potential to utilise this valuable resource than is currently the case.

ERO and some School Support Services providers use secondments to offer further development and 'system leadership' opportunities to experienced school leaders. These types of arrangements – or the development of renewable contracts for senior managers – have the potential to enable more system-level knowledge sharing and support.

## **7 Time**

When asked what might make the greatest positive difference to their working lives, teachers will answer: time. Teachers are time poor; teachers with curriculum and pastoral responsibilities even more so. Teachers want to offer the best opportunities to the students they teach, but to carry out every aspect of the job to its fullest is neither manageable nor sustainable.

There is little doubt that middle managers drive the day-to-day teaching and learning in secondary schools; and that their work is critical to shaping outcomes for students. Yet, middle managers seem to constitute an afterthought in the PLP. There are no development courses offered on a regular basis, and there are only small fragments of time offered to the people responsible for leading the bulk of curriculum and pastoral programmes in secondary schools.

PPTA members, through the STCA claim, have sought an extension of the one-hour-per-week time allowance for HODs (or their nominee) to work with first-year teachers



in the second PRT year. Ministry negotiators remain uninterested in this small step towards enabling more proactive middle leadership in schools.

The Specialist Classroom Teacher (SCT) role is highly valued by teachers and principals and could be extended. The SCT offers an excellent model of middle leadership that can be developed in conjunction with both the particular skills and interests of the incumbent and a school's priorities for teaching and learning. Another middle- and system-leadership role which was positively evaluated, and which teachers would like to see reinstated, is that of the Senior Subject Adviser (SSA). Like the SCT, the SSA uses a practice-based philosophy, and coaching, to work alongside teachers within and across schools.

## **8 Senior managers**

Deputy and assistant principals do not have specified non-contact provisions in the STCA beyond the three hours for their first three units. This means that, although many schools support their senior managers' workloads with reduced teaching hours, these are not protected and can change from year to year – or even term by term.

Yet increasingly it is the deputy and assistant principals who are responsible for the bulk of the appraisals done in secondary schools, and for co-ordinating and leading much of a school's PLD programme. Many senior and middle leaders pursue ongoing professional learning in their own time, at their own cost (such as M Ed, M Ed Admin, etc) because there is little else available to them, either through School Support Services or Teachers Refresher Course Committee courses.

Unlike New Zealand principals, who have the right to a term's sabbatical every five years, opportunities for middle and senior leaders to take sabbaticals are the same as for every other secondary teacher: few and far between. And some, such as long service leave, are unpaid.

The PPTA claim for the new STCA asks for 10 new sabbaticals tagged to senior managers, and for the provision of mentoring for senior managers. The Ministry has so far refused to engage in any discussion of PLD support for teachers at any level, claiming that the industrial and professional are – perhaps like politics and sport – supposedly unrelated.

## **9 Reduced effectiveness**

Given that teachers' working conditions are time-poor and PLD-deprived, what gets left off? Often, it's the daily or weekly non-essentials, which means items like PLD reading, planning, and participation, or appraisal-related tasks. Without guaranteed time to conduct regular classroom observations and follow-up discussions – combined with the requirement to set relief lessons (and deal with the consequent disruptions caused by not being in one's own classroom) when observations must be done – these tasks are less likely to be done to a high level, if at all.

This doesn't mean that all middle and senior leaders fail to meet appraisal tasks, timelines, and requirements, but it does mean that many have to accept a less than comprehensive approach at times. These restrictions and challenges are not conducive to ongoing job satisfaction; in fact, they are significant contributors to workplace stress and burnout.

Increasingly, younger teachers look at the workload, time allowances, and management units offered to middle managers and ask: 'Why bother?' This observation is replicated from middle to senior management; and again from deputy and assistant principals to principals. If these roles comprise an impossible combination of tasks, for relatively meagre rewards, why not stay in the classroom where the workload issues (though significant) are more predictable and more manageable.<sup>10</sup>

## 10 What might work?

The need for broader networking and support for schools is recognised in Victoria, Australia, where the state government has appointed 70 regional network leaders across its nine regions. Part of their role is to create '*a culture of collaboration and collective accountability within the network [of schools] and across the region*' and to '*facilitate partnerships with community, business and other agencies*'.<sup>11</sup>

This means that schools are clustered and are actively encouraged and supported to collaborate. It also means that the time and planning required to support this are the responsibility of the network leader, rather than of each school principal. The luxury of finding the time and space to pop your head over the parapets and develop a wider view is not always readily available to overloaded school leaders. The state of Victoria is prepared to back its education priorities with staffing and resourcing – far beyond publishing a plan and references to some print and online publications.

Some strategic planning and investment in opening up further career pathways for school leaders might result in strengthened system leadership – of mutual benefit to schools and experienced leaders.

Alas, the current pathway for experienced principals and senior staff is more likely to involve taking their knowledge and skills to better-paid jobs overseas.

## 11 Ways forward

The OECD policy levers for improving school leadership include:

- (re)defining school leadership responsibilities;
- distributing school leadership;
- developing skills for effective school leadership; and
- making school leadership an attractive profession.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> The Minister of Education's report on a 'vision for the education workforce' completely fails to address distributed leadership – and the accompanying staffing and resourcing implications. The document signals a worrying failure to consider the wealth of evidence pertaining to educational leadership and best practice.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/region/western/about/regionalnetwork.htm>

<sup>12</sup> OECD (2009). *Improving School Leadership: The Toolkit*. OECD. Retrieved from: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/63/37/44339174.pdf>



### **11.1 Redefining school leadership responsibilities**

It is clear that Ministry rhetoric exhorting leaders to focus more on pedagogical (or educational) leadership cannot be achieved by 'working smarter'. Some of the load needs to be taken from schools – and many of the administration and property-related tasks could be moved to regional managers or hubs.

### **11.2 Distributing school leadership**

Again, saying this is one thing; doing it is quite another. Serious investment in training, coaching, and support for middle and senior school leaders is needed. Ideally, the Ministry would lead and co-ordinate this investment. There are already patches of policy development and work that are informed by evidence. It would be heartening to see these models developed into overarching frameworks that will replace the current preference for competitive entry, piecemeal pilots and contestably-funded projects.

### **11.3 Developing skills for effective school leadership**

The existing NAPP, FTP, and EPDP programmes offer models for evidence-based reflective practice, ongoing coaching, and collegial networks. More thought needs to be given to intra-sector differences or, bluntly, to stop pretending that ECE centres, primary, and secondary schools are basically the same and whose staff can be trained en masse. This undifferentiated approach no longer has a place in classrooms, nor should it be tolerated in professional learning and development.

If schools are to continue running effective professional learning and appraisal systems, adequate training and support must be provided so that middle and senior leaders are not forced to learn by doing and by what not to do!

School Support Services providers need to be funded and staffed (including secondments) so that they can offer ongoing support to schools and school leaders. The current funding gaps mean that schools are forced to purchase services and support of varying quality – often at extortionate prices. Public schools shouldn't have to go private for quality PLD and support.

### **11.4 Making school leadership an attractive profession**

Time to do the job properly would be the first step towards making career advancement a worthwhile option for secondary teachers at every stage of their career. As middle and senior management roles become more complex, time must be invested in allowing them to take on the type of leadership the Professional Leadership Plan claims to want.

Distributed leadership can happen across schools and across the sector, not only within individual schools. For this to happen in a sustained way, thought must be given to opening up pathways between schools and education organisations so that experienced school leaders and advisers can take their knowledge and skills across the sector. Contract positions and/or secondments may help to increase these opportunities. The development of lead principal or network advisory positions may also contribute to improved system leadership on the one hand and, on the other, improved career pathways.

## Recommendations

1. That the report be received.
2. That PPTA endorse the OECD levers for effective school leadership and lobby the Ministry of Education for their effective implementation. In particular:
  - i. centralising of administrative tasks in order to enable leaders to focus on pedagogical, educational and pastoral leadership;
  - ii. making a serious investment in training, coaching, and support for middle and senior school leaders;
  - iii. that existing National Aspiring Principals (NAPP), First Time Principals (FTP), and Experienced Principals Development (EPDP) programmes be extended and streamlined to meet specific sector needs;
  - iv. that government address the urgent need to recruit and retain effective leaders by the provision of sufficient time for them to do the job;
  - v. establishing processes and pathways between schools and education organisations so that experienced school leaders and advisers can share knowledge and skills across the sector.

