Leading Together
Why supporting school leadership matters
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ABOU T TEACH FIRST

Teach First was founded as a charity in 2002. Since then, with the generous backing of countless supporters, we have been challenging the deep-rooted reality that a child’s socio-economic background is the biggest determining factor in their chances of fulfilling their potential.

We believe that disadvantage should never determine destiny. We work towards this by:

- Finding and developing talented people to teach in schools where the need is greatest.
- Supporting schools to access innovations and partnerships that accelerate their pupils’ progress.
- Providing professional development opportunities to teachers, leaders and schools so they can increase their impact on pupils.
- Building a movement of teachers, school leaders, social entrepreneurs, policymakers and business people committed to ending education inequality across all areas of society.

Since 2003, Teach First has recruited, trained and placed 11,000 teachers in schools serving low-income communities, reaching over one million young people. We currently partner with hundreds of schools across all regions of England and Wales.
The UK education system isn’t fair. Where a child lives and their family background are still the biggest factors determining their future success. That doesn’t seem right. It also seems stubbornly intractable at a national level. The attainment gap between the poorest pupils and their wealthier peers has barely budged over the last decade.

Despite this, there are countless examples of schools serving low-income communities that support young people to excel against the odds. These schools come in all shapes and sizes, in all parts of the country. There are many factors in their success, but one thing they have in common is great leadership.

At Teach First we aim to improve educational outcomes for children in the most disadvantaged parts of the country by training talented and motivated people to become great teachers.

And we want to see teachers flourish, grow and develop into leaders – whether that’s in the classroom or in senior leadership roles – so they can broaden their impact still further and nurture the next generation of teachers.

The success of a school depends on great leadership. But it’s an unfortunate truth that leaders in thousands of schools – disproportionately those in poorer areas – do not get the support and development they need to help them thrive.

This doesn’t mean there aren’t great leaders in these schools – we know from experience there are plenty – but they face greater challenge, scrutiny and fragility than other leaders and consequently need even better preparation and more ongoing support.

I have visited hundreds of schools and worked with thousands of leaders during my career. Many of them are doing incredible, inspirational work despite the most challenging circumstances. But none of them can sustain those incredible things on their own.

Headteachers and principals need to have the support and backing of a great leadership team - a team that can set out a shared vision for a school, focus energy on overcoming barriers, make difficult choices and set priorities, and which presents a coherent face to the world.

Too often, the debate on school improvement has focused on individual leaders – the so-called ‘super heads’ – to come in and turn around the future of a school overnight. And the results don’t always last much longer. After the super head moves on, we sometimes discover that the structures, systems, skills and culture needed to sustain success are lacking.
The top job matters greatly, of course, and sets the tone, but focusing solely on an individual leader at the top is neither realistic nor fair. It narrows the field and limits impact and sustainability.

It also misses an opportunity to keep talented people in teaching. Offering development opportunities to whole teams of potential leaders gives them a career path within the profession. To misquote a famous phrase, behind every great headteacher, there is a great deputy. And great heads of departments, and heads of year and SENCos and teachers and on and on.

In order to help with this problem of leadership capacity, we have developed a programme which seeks to improve the leadership skills of teachers using a whole-school approach. We want to offer the knowledge, tools and confidence they need to inspire the next generation of engineers, astronauts, plumbers, lawyers, doctors, artists and teachers.

Leading Together is a two year programme of mentorship, learning and coaching. Our model is founded on evidence of what works for teachers, informed by evidence of what doesn’t, and focused on the impact on students, teachers and the entire school.

I am convinced that many of the best leaders in our country can be found in our schools. Too often they succeed in spite of, rather than because of, the system in which they work. If we can support those leaders and potential leaders, then I’m excited about the impact this programme could have on schools and pupils in the most disadvantaged communities in the country.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education in the UK isn’t fair. A young person from a low-income community has less than half the chance of going to an outstanding school compared to their better off peers.¹

Last year, less than half of disadvantaged pupils achieved the benchmark of A*-C grades in GCSE English and maths, compared to over two thirds of their wealthier peers.² This problem of poorer children missing out on the support they need is familiar and stubborn.

As we are warned of a post-Brexit skills shortage of up to 3 million high skilled workers³, it has never been more important to ensure that every child has access to a world class education and opportunity to fulfil their potential.

There are many examples of schools supporting pupils to achieve against the odds. One thing they have in common is strong leadership teams. Ofsted data reveals that schools with strong leadership are up to ten times more likely to improve overall at their next inspection.⁴
This report reveals:

- The vast majority (91%) of teachers say the quality of leaderships is very important to their school’s success.\(^5\)

- **Schools are experiencing a shortage of up to 3,000 leaders** with demand set to rise as pupil numbers continue to increase.\(^6\)

- There is no shortage of teachers wanting to make the step up. **Half (49%) of classroom teachers say they would be interested in taking up a leadership position in the future. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of middle leaders say they would be interested in taking on a more senior position.**\(^5\)

- But the demand for support and training is not being met. More than half of teachers (54%) spent no more than a few hours away from their usual work developing their leadership skills in the last year, including 40% who said they spent no time at all.\(^5\)

- Nurturing existing talent in schools could help address the leadership shortage and help retain teachers in the profession. **Nine out of ten (88%) teachers say their school offering excellent leadership development opportunities would have at least some impact on their likelihood of remaining at their school, with a third of teachers (34%) saying it would have a great impact.**\(^5\)

- Support for school leadership too often focuses on individuals or so-called ‘super heads’. Yet evidence shows that whole-school approaches are more sustainable and **85 per cent of teachers and leaders say it is important that leadership training involves the whole team.**\(^5\)
WHY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP MATTERS

The attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils, those eligible for free school meals, and their wealthier peers has barely moved in the last decade. And we know that poorer areas of the country are much less likely to have a school rated outstanding by Ofsted. Indeed, the poorest fifth of areas are half as likely to be served by an outstanding secondary school as the wealthiest fifth.

But tackling educational inequality isn’t an insurmountable challenge. There are many excellent schools across the UK that are already delivering remarkable results and extraordinary outcomes for pupils in disadvantaged areas. We have a very good idea of what a great school looks like. But the difficulty remains in making sure schools have the support and resources to get there.

We know from our experience of working with hundreds of schools over the last 15 years that the combination of great teaching, effective support structures and great leadership can significantly influence results for the most disadvantaged children in the country.

According to polling of teachers carried out by ComRes on our behalf, the teaching workforce overwhelmingly agrees on the importance of leadership. The vast majority (91%) of teachers surveyed said that the quality of leadership is very important to a school’s success, with a further 9% saying it is fairly important.

Data published by Ofsted in March 2016 underlines how the quality of school leadership can have a significant impact on the future performance of a school.

“To date we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership”

Ofsted gives all schools in England it inspects a rating for the effectiveness of leadership and management, as well as a rating for overall effectiveness. Where Ofsted rated leadership and management higher than overall effectiveness, a school is ten times more likely to improve its overall rating at the next inspection.

Those schools with a better rating for leadership improved their overall rating at the next inspection in 74% of cases. Schools with poorer leadership than their overall rating improved in just 7% of cases, with 40% declining in their overall Ofsted rating at the next inspection.
Leadership and effective teaching

Good leadership isn’t just about those at the top. Instead, it should empower all teachers to be as effective as possible, resulting in great outcomes for pupils. In large part this is achieved through creating a culture of learning and development at all levels of the school.

Ofsted agree that having strong structures and support in place yields better results. Schools do not achieve by chance but through “highly reflective, carefully planned and implemented strategies.”

In the research report ‘Learning from Leadership: Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning’, the authors concluded that: “To date we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership.”

Analysis of school behaviour and performance indicates that the biggest obstacle to developing effective teaching in schools is ineffective leadership. The quickest and most effective way to increase the quality of teaching and learning in priority areas is to increase the skills and abilities of existing teachers and leaders.

Research from the Department for Education into hundreds of schools achieving extraordinary student outcomes against the odds shows that laying strong structural and behavioural foundations creates an environment in which teachers can thrive.

Analysis shows good and outstanding schools prioritise and invest in professional learning. They create cross-curriculum pedagogical strategies, set high expectations and put in place systems for regular teacher feedback.

By identifying and establishing teachers as ‘teacher leaders’, responsible for the professional development of their colleagues, schools have yielded improved results. This has included steps to empower school leaders with the time and authority to lead a team of teachers, facilitate high-quality ‘network learning’ and create strong alignment with performance evaluation.

Improving the whole leadership team has an effect three to four times as large on student outcomes as providing “transformational” leadership

Crucially, the evidence suggests that building stronger leadership teams and driving up performance of all leaders has a greater impact on student outcomes than focusing on placing individual leaders where they are most needed. Focusing on improving the whole leadership team has an effect three to four times as large on student outcomes as providing “transformational” leadership of inspiration and energy.

Given the overwhelming evidence of the impact on student outcomes, Teach First is determined to work in partnership with schools to improve the standard of in-school leadership across the whole school, to ensure that every child gets the educational experience they need to unlock their full potential.
Leadership and retention

The focus of developing great leaders should always be on the impact it can have on outcomes for pupils. But offering meaningful development opportunities to those not yet in senior leadership – either middle leaders or classroom teachers with the potential to step-up – also provides an opportunity to improve retention and keep talented people in schools.

It provides them with an additional incentive to stay in education, rather than seeking progression opportunities elsewhere. Providing teachers with a positive and supportive culture of learning and development could support with morale and retention.

This is backed by our research, with the vast majority (88%) of teachers saying that their school offering excellent leadership development opportunities would have at least some impact on the likelihood of remaining at their school. More than a third (34%) of all teachers say it would have a ‘great impact’. Importantly, this rises to 41% of those teachers considering leaving the profession within the next year.

As we show later in this report, a substantial proportion of those same teachers do not feel they are provided with development opportunities. Thirty eight percent of teachers we polled say they are considering leaving the teaching profession within the next five years, for reasons other than retirement.

Thousands of teachers left the profession last year, against a backdrop of rising pupil numbers. Outlining clear pathways for teachers to develop and move into leadership positions could be a significant contribution to retaining talent in the profession.
THE LEADERSHIP GAP

The leadership gap – the shortfall of leadership capacity in the education system – is a problem of both numbers and opportunity. Not only are there too few people coming through the leadership pipeline, but – for those that are – there is a lack of support and development opportunities available to them.

Our research found the majority (63%) of teachers said that they rate the quality of leadership at their school as very good or good, 14 percent said it was either poor or very poor.

An uneven gap

According to the latest inspection data, there are exactly 2,000 schools where Ofsted has found the “effectiveness of leadership and management” to either require improvement or be inadequate.

That equates to one in ten schools, and means that approximately 850,000 pupils are missing out on good or outstanding leadership. But the burden – as is so often the case with education in the UK – falls disproportionately on the shoulders of the poorest children.

For schools serving the wealthiest fifth of communities, just 5% are rated as requires improvement or inadequate for leadership.

But for schools serving the poorest fifth of communities, 14% are given one of these two ratings for leadership. That means the poorest children are nearly three times more likely than their wealthier peers to be missing out on the benefits of effective leadership.

The Figures also show that many schools serving the poorest communities already have outstanding leadership, despite often working in challenging circumstances. A total of 892 schools in the poorest fifth of communities were rated as outstanding for leadership at their latest inspection, around one in five of the total.

Table: Effectiveness of leadership for schools in the most and least deprived areas

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Deprivation index of area</th>
<th>Number of schools by effectiveness of leadership and management</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (wealthiest)</td>
<td>1348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1053</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>805</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 (poorest)</td>
<td>892</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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A lack of leaders

A 2016 report carried out by Teach First and Ambition School Leadership revealed that schools in England are facing a shortage of up to 3,000 leaders with demand set to increase as pupil numbers continue to rise.⁶

The report set out a number of challenges that will lead to so many vacancies in school leadership positions:

- **An increase in demand**
  It is estimated that by 2022, up to 8,000 new school leaders could be needed to meet the expansion in leadership positions.

- **Existing vacancies remaining unfilled**
  There are up to 3,000 leadership positions vacant.

- **More leaders leaving the profession**
  Half of the existing leadership pool is expected to leave the education sector in the next six years, either through retirement or seeking a new career.

In addition to the above factors, school pupil population is expected to grow by around 650,000 over the next decade, placing additional strain on the system.

Overstretched teachers and unfilled leadership positions in some of the most challenging schools in the country will reduce the quality of education available to disadvantaged children.

Schools spend around £200m annually on recruitment, with no guarantee that a successful candidate will be found. The National Association for Head Teachers found that a third of adverts for headteacher positions in 2015 received no applications whatsoever.¹⁸ The Department for Education’s proposed Teacher Vacancy Service is a welcome step towards tackling this issue.

We know that there are thousands of talented potential leaders currently in our schools. We found, half (49%) of classroom teachers said they would be interested in taking up a leadership position in the future, and nearly two-thirds (64%) of middle leaders said they would be interested in taking on a more senior position. The pool of potential leaders is particularly large among young teachers, with 70% of those aged up to 34 saying they would be interested in taking up a leadership (or more senior leadership) position.
A lack of development opportunities

Despite the evidence on the importance of leadership development, many schools are struggling to embed leadership and development structures. An absence of the conditions conducive to teacher development often contributes to good teachers leaving their school or the profession to gain a rounded skill set elsewhere.

One of the key challenges in keeping good leaders in a school is the limited availability and variety of leadership development opportunities.

According to research by Teach First and Ambition School Leadership, one in four head teachers (24%) have not attended a principal training programme, a third (34%) have not received instructional leadership training and two-fifths (42%) do not have the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH). Teachers said schools provided few opportunities (28%) or did not provide any opportunities (4%) to become a school leader. 19% of senior leaders said there were few opportunities and this rose to 33% of middle leaders and 29% of non-leaders.

The majority of all teachers have only spent a few hours or less away from their usual work developing their leadership skills in the last year. Fourteen percent said they had spent ‘up to a few hours’ and 40% said they had spent no time at all. Half (51%) of non-leaders said they had spent no time at all developing their leadership skills. One in five (18%) senior leaders and more than a third (34%) of middle leaders had spent no time away from their usual work developing their leadership skills.

The underlying issues driving these challenges vary between schools, but themes include a lack of time and capacity to invest in leadership development and patchy access to support and training. Programmes that are available often vary in quality.

Previous research has found that schools often have plans in place to help transformational individuals, but do not do enough to establish and develop plans on how those passionate individuals will implement their vision, transform a school and raise outcomes. Supporting a whole school leadership team is a more sustainable method of raising standards.

Effective professional development should give teachers the ability to embed the latest research and evidence-informed practice into their work. Yet many professional development courses focus solely on giving teachers just key aspects of knowledge. But changing habits – and embedding new knowledge into their work - requires sustained challenge and support. The greatest difficulty is “helping teachers change habits rather than [just] acquire new knowledge”.

An absence of the conditions conducive to teacher development often contributes to good teachers leaving to gain a rounded skill set elsewhere

Our new analysis of teachers found a similar concerning lack of opportunities for middle leaders or classroom teachers to make the step-up. When asked their opinion on opportunities for existing staff to become school leaders, just one in five teachers (20%) agreed that their school provides a great deal of opportunities. Perhaps unsurprisingly, existing senior leaders were more likely (37%) to say their school provided a great deal of opportunities than middle leaders (18%) or non-leaders (15%).
OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS

We know what effective leadership development looks like:

- Programmes are tailored to individual needs and school circumstances.
- Training is modular and combines academic and practical learning.
- Support features training in practical and business skills.
- Mentoring and coaching from outstanding leaders is accessible as needed.
- Peer-to-peer networks are built.

Intervention by a powerful leader remains important. However “schools based around a single extraordinary leader never sustain their success. When superman or superwoman leaves, it all falls apart”. Instead, school leadership is most effective when it is distributed.

Teachers learn mostly from fellow teachers because ongoing feedback is needed to change their practice. Therefore, leadership programmees need to be peer led. Teachers with more supportive and effective peers become more effective over time, compared to teachers whose early placement was in a less supportive environment. Supportive schools also help reduce teacher stress and burn-out.

Effective inter-school collaboration has an impact on school improvement, including on staff professional development and career opportunities; sharing good practice and innovation; reductions and realignments in headteacher workload, and organisational and financial efficiency.

Research also points to the positive influence of inter-school collaboration on teachers and teaching, and increased opportunities for staff members to take on leadership responsibilities both within and between schools.
A case study on developing great leaders

The following case study sets out the nature of the leadership challenge in one school, and some of the innovative approaches that schools are already taking. This is a concise version of an essay published in “Challenging Disadvantage Together”; a collection of essays written by senior school leaders in Teach First partner schools.

Angela Trigg, Executive Principal, London Academy, Edgware, North London

The quality of leadership is without doubt a key determinant in how well any school serves its young people. When good leaders are hard to come by, as is currently the case, it is young people that suffer the most.

London Academy is a large all-through school in Barnet, North West London. In a school with a higher than average proportion of disadvantaged young people, high-quality leadership at every level and across all functions is critical.

Excellent leaders ensure excellent teaching, which improves outcomes for all children but especially for those disadvantaged pupils who join us already behind their peers in reading, writing and mathematics.

Traditional recruitment campaigns to attract leaders from outside London Academy were often unsuccessful. Therefore, my immediate solution to finding the leadership I needed was to look for talent from within. We sought coaching and support for fledgling middle leaders from external sources and we had participants in both the Teaching Leaders and Future Leaders programmes from 2008 onwards.

However, developing our own leaders, offering incentives such as high-quality professional development, and ensuring we offer competitive salaries is increasingly challenging. This year we have two leaders retiring and one moving on. They can’t be replaced.

It is difficult to evidence the impact this will have in the long-term. In the short-term, the physical absence of the senior leaders will mean fewer people able to monitor standards, develop teachers, apply rules consistently and continuously, to check on vulnerable children, and to spot the child who needs talking to immediately.

Senior leaders also have strong oversight of the whole school. They can spot trends and issues within the community to quickly make sense of what may otherwise appear to be an isolated incident or event.

Another concern is the shortage of young leaders available or willing to step into headship. This can be linked directly to the perception that headteachers can and should bring about transformational change in a school within a very short time frame.

Headteachers often cite the isolation and lack of support immediately available to them as a major issue when trying to raise standards. Transformational change is not a sprint, but a never-ending marathon which requires resilience, determination and - most importantly - support when we have to take risks.

High-performing leadership at every level of our schools and education system has never been more important. We are in uncertain times. What is predictable is that the teaching workforce will need to be highly skilled and adaptable. Now is the time to think innovatively, even radically, about how all services that reach our most disadvantaged families and young people work together to ensure that every child can fully realise their potential.
What teachers want from leadership development

We asked school teachers and leaders about what good leadership development looks like. We also asked them about the existing barriers to better leadership at their school.

When we asked teachers how important various aspects of school leadership training are:

- 85% said it was very or fairly important that it involves the whole team
- 93% said that it should be tailored to the needs of their school
- 93% that it should be delivered by people who understand the circumstances of their school.

We asked teachers about the barriers to better leadership at their school. Time pressures were the most common theme.

Nearly half (45%) of teachers cited a lack of time away from the classroom and other time pressures as a barrier and nearly two-thirds (62%) cited workload as an issue.

And when we asked teachers what had prevented or made it harder for them to take up a leadership position themselves, one in five (22%) cited a lack of support and training and nearly half (47%) cited protecting their work/life balance.
Leading Together

It is in this context that Teach First is launching Leading Together; a two-year programme supporting schools in areas of greatest need to build strong leadership teams. Supported by funding from the Department for Education, Leading Together will help participating schools to create an environment in which all teachers and young people can thrive.

Whilst there is substantial investment in programmes to find and place transformational individuals in schools, evidence shows that there is rarely a plan in place for how these individuals will effectively transform their school as a whole.

Leading Together aims to build capacity across the whole leadership team to provide sustainable improvement. The scheme provides a comprehensive, structured two-year package, targeting schools in areas that need the most support.

We know that, in turbulent times, what schools need above all else is stability. The Leading Together programme will acknowledge the talent that already exists within school leadership teams, and will focus on providing the opportunities, training and support to develop high-quality leaders across the whole school.

Leading Together will create a whole-school culture of learning and development and provide senior leaders with the skills and knowledge they need to apply their learning in a practical way. Teachers will learn how to introduce sustainable practices that will develop, support and retain high-quality teachers and leaders across the whole school.

Over 15 years we’ve witnessed countless success stories of schools achieving against the odds. One thing they have in common is strong leadership teams.

Over 15 years we’ve witnessed countless success stories of schools achieving against the odds. One thing they have in common is strong leadership teams. The expertise these schools show has informed Leading Together. Our goal now is to support more schools to achieve, sustain success and ultimately support more young people to achieve their potential.
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