

# narrowing the gap in outcomes:



## leadership

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## Key messages

This report/paper is based on research conducted by the NFER and commissioned by the LGA for the national Narrowing the Gap team. It aims to identify whether or not leadership has an effective role in narrowing the gap in outcomes between vulnerable children and young people, and other children. The study included a literature review and interviews with case study local authorities.

### Has leadership helped narrow the gap in outcomes?

The literature reviewed provides little evidence of the impacts of leadership whether at an operational, strategic or political level, on outcomes for children and young people. The literature is particularly limited in terms of evidencing the contribution of leadership to narrowing the gap. In contrast however, interviewees from the case-study phase of this research were able to identify where particular gaps in outcomes had been narrowed and determine a link with effective leadership, albeit often indirect and mediated through other factors.

The impact of leadership on narrowing the gap was most often evidenced in relation to educational achievement and to improving outcomes for looked after children (LAC). The contribution of leadership to narrowing the gap was also identified in terms of health-related outcomes, post-16 education, employment and training outcomes (EET), and the participation and voice of vulnerable groups. Although the evidence for this is based mainly on perception, rather than direct demonstrable links, this would suggest that the role of effective leadership in narrowing the gap should not be ignored.

### How has leadership helped to narrow the gap?

Effective leadership for narrowing the gap is not fundamentally different from effective leadership generally. However, the gap appears to be narrowed through leadership which emphasises the following six key ingredients:

- **Prioritising the most vulnerable and developing a local vision:** being responsive to the local circumstances and targeting those in the locality with the most need; developing shared priorities among all partners; prioritising resources for vulnerable groups; establishing a clear vision tied into local plans, policies and targets; championing the vision for vulnerable groups from the top and to all partners; and ensuring staff understand what needs to be achieved and how their role contributes to improving outcomes.
- **Championing the voice of vulnerable groups and encouraging their participation:** establishing meaningful methods of consultation; having a genuine commitment to listen to service users and act on what they say (e.g. in terms of service design and delivery); championing joint ownership of corporate parenting responsibilities and championing the needs of vulnerable groups through partnership working.
- **Using good quality data to identify needs and provide services for vulnerable groups:** collecting 'real time' intelligence on emerging needs; gathering information directly from children and young people, their

families and the local community; drawing together local intelligence from front line staff; establishing a baseline from which progress can be measured; setting appropriate actions and targets; monitoring and reviewing progress towards improving outcomes; and having the skills to analyse and interpret data on vulnerable groups.

- **Fostering partnership working around vulnerable groups:** being committed to joint working which focuses on the most vulnerable; facilitating collaborative working through joint planning, commissioning and pooled budgets; implementing multiagency locality locality-based teams; and fostering a notion of collective responsibility.
- **Developing and motivating the workforce to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups:** ensuring that staff have an understanding of the vision for narrowing the gap; making it clear to staff how their roles contribute to improving outcomes; developing the emotional connection staff have with vulnerable young people; developing staff to work in partnership to meet the needs of vulnerable groups; encouraging and facilitating the sharing of good practice; and providing access to staff training and development.
- **Having an unrelenting drive and passion to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups:** having a genuine empathy and commitment to support the most vulnerable; instilling a 'can do ethos' and an expectation that the vision will be delivered; rearticulating the vision; ensuring that staff have continued commitment to the vision and are held accountable for meeting its targets; monitoring and reviewing progress; engendering a culture of support and trust; and fostering a professional learning culture that encourages innovation.

The main distinction between leadership for narrowing the gap and leadership in general is the unremitting focus on vulnerable groups, which is driven forward by those with a strong desire to improve outcomes for the most disadvantaged children and young people.

## What are the outstanding evidence gaps and issues for attention?

The NFER's previous review of research findings for narrowing the gap (Kendall *et al.*, 2007a) found limited evidence of leadership contributing to improving outcomes generally. This current, more extensive review of the literature supports these initial findings and identifies only a few studies which refer to the role of leaders in improving in outcomes. There is a particular deficit in terms of evidence explicitly linking leadership to narrowing the gap.

While the case-study phase of this research was able to demonstrate a link between leadership and outcomes, and more specifically the contribution of leadership to narrowing the gap, this was on a small scale and the evidence base is not comprehensive. Although there is some evidence linking leadership for narrowing the gap with improvements in educational achievement and outcomes for LAC, there is a particular need to tease out, for example, the role of leadership in improving other ECM outcomes (e.g. staying safe and making a positive contribution) and for other vulnerable groups. Links between the central elements of good leadership and pre-specified outcomes were difficult to ascertain. Further work is therefore necessary to help leaders to realise and articulate the links between



leadership and outcomes. An audit trail to provide further evidence of how leaders actually impact on outcomes would be beneficial. This could be used to develop the practice of existing leaders; inform the training and development opportunities for developing leaders; and identify prerequisites in terms of the qualities and skills required of leaders in the future.

# 1 Introduction

Through the Local Government Association (LGA) research programme, the national Narrowing the Gap (NtG) team commissioned the NFER to conduct research into leadership in relation to the Narrowing the Gap agenda. The research focuses on the key features of leadership necessary to narrow the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups, and explores whether leadership that is effective for narrowing the gap is different from leadership that is effective generally. This report will be of interest to directors of children's services, children's trust board members, policy makers, senior leaders and managers within local authorities, the National Health Service (NHS), schools, and the third sector. A parallel research report by the NFER focuses on governance for narrowing the gap (Lord *et al.*, 2009a). Further information can also be found in a joint paper on the relationship between leadership and governance for narrowing the gap (Lord *et al.*, 2009b).

## 1.1 Background

Since the publication of the Children Act (England and Wales. Statutes, 2004), local authorities and their partners have been working to support and improve outcomes for all children and young people in relation to the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda. Whilst there is a drive to improve outcomes for all, there is also a particular need to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups, and 'to narrow the gap' between these groups and other children and young people.

Introduced in 2004, ECM has brought about systemic change to improving outcomes for every child through agencies and services working together effectively to deliver integrated services that address the needs of children and young people (DCSF, 2008a). Revised statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the lead members and directors of children's services (DCS) is currently undergoing consultation (DCSF, 2008b). The guidance aims to explain how these roles are distinct yet complementary, and how working together they can drive forward improvements in outcomes for all children and young people, and narrow the gap for disadvantaged groups.

Narrowing the gap in outcomes between vulnerable groups and all other groups of children requires systems change on a large scale. 'Transformational change' is widely seen by government as the form of change most relevant for those managing change in public services (McCrone *et al.*, 2009, forthcoming). Transformational change is 'change initiated and led from the top, but detailed changes in working practices emerge through a process that engages and involves many people throughout an organisation'. Systems change on a large scale necessitates strong leadership in all areas but particularly for those staff with strategic influence and budgetary control.

## 1.2 About the study

In order to inform the Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) and LGA's work on Narrowing the Gap, this study aimed to identify what is known about the features of leadership that are best able to influence a narrowing of the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups of children and young people.



Through a literature review and case studies from local authorities, this research aimed to address:

- What are the key features of leadership necessary to achieve change and narrow the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups?
- Is leadership that is effective for narrowing the gap different from leadership that is effective generally?
- Are there any significant contextual factors or conditions that have supported local leadership in relation to children's services?
- What is most important in terms of growing and developing local leaders of the future?

The project was carried out in two phases:

- Phase one: a literature review of evidence of how leadership has contributed and been applied to narrowing the gap. This phase also included obtaining examples of current practice through an email request to local authorities (August-October 2008).
- Phase two: in-depth case studies in five local authorities (November 2008-February 2009), involving 25 interviews with a range of staff including directors and assistant directors of children's services, councillors/lead members, strategic managers, and chairs of governing boards.

Further details about the literature review, including the search strategy, can be found in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 provides further details on the case studies.

### 1.3 Structure of the report

Findings from the research are presented under the following chapter headings:

- Chapter 2: Leadership: has the gap been narrowed?
- Chapter 3: Leadership: how has the gap been narrowed?
- Chapter 4: Conclusions, including:
  - What gaps have been narrowed?
  - What is missing from the evidence?
  - What are the distinctive features of leadership for narrowing the gap?



## 2 Leadership: Has the gap been narrowed?

This chapter sets out evidence from the literature review and the case studies that indicates leadership has contributed to narrowing the gap in outcomes between vulnerable groups and other children. The literature does not provide strong evidence of improved outcomes or narrowed gaps that are directly related to leadership. Studies indicate that while effective leaders are instrumental in bringing about the conditions for improvements for children and young people (see Appendix 3), leaders and their actions have ‘small and indirect effects’ on outcomes for children and young people (NCSL, 2008a). The case studies, however, do highlight examples where, through the contribution of leadership, the gap is being narrowed in terms of:

- educational outcomes
- health-related outcomes
- post-16 education, employment and training outcomes (EET)
- participation and voice.

It is difficult for local authorities to accurately measure how they have narrowed the gap over a period of time. Quantification of narrowed gaps depends on year-on-year trends (i.e. through comparison of year-on-year cohorts). There are three key issues in particular. Firstly, the numbers of young people for whom such measures apply are small compared with the general local population (thus statistical comparison with the whole population can be seen as ‘crude’). Secondly, each cohort, indeed each individual, is different (thus year-on-year comparisons are not comparing like with like). Thirdly, results for all children can shift upwards (as in one of the case-study authorities) and the gap is not necessarily being narrowed. Here, the challenge to narrow the gap thus becomes even greater.

Throughout this chapter, case-study findings are presented first and, where available, evidence from the literature review follows.

### 2.1 Educational outcomes

Evidence that effective leadership contributes to narrowing the gap in educational outcomes is provided by interviewees in the case-study authorities. Many referred to improved educational outcomes for vulnerable children through strong leadership at all levels – authority, local and school level – that focuses on vulnerable groups.

Examples of narrowed gaps include the educational achievement of looked after children (LAC), black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, and children with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD). Having a strategic focus on school leadership and school improvement is also felt to be important in contributing to narrowing gaps in educational achievement.

#### Box 1 Narrowing the gap: educational achievement

- GCSE results for LAC have improved in an authority since taking a more integrated approach to LAC and demonstrating strong leadership (including lead member involvement) in its school improvement services (Authority C).



- LAC key stage 2 performance has improved in an authority where the DCS and political leaders champion the LAC agenda and challenge schools to monitor and improve progress (Authority B).
- Achievement for LAC at key stages 2 and 4 has improved in an authority where there is a virtual academy for LAC and a drive from the top to prioritise work for vulnerable groups (Authority E).
- Foundation Stage Profiles have improved for vulnerable children in an authority where there is felt to be strong leadership at the local level (Authority C).
- BME achievement has improved, and in some cases outperformed all pupils, in an authority with a sustained focus on the attainment of pupils from minority ethnic communities. This focus is driven by leadership from the top (Authority E).
- The gap between poor white boys' and other groups' educational achievement is being narrowed in an authority that has channeled school funding support into its more deprived areas (Authority B).
- Educational outcomes for children with LDD are improving in an authority with a dedicated LDD plan, as well as a plan for all children to achieve the five ECM outcomes (Authority B).

Other narrowed gaps in education outcomes which relate to effective leadership include improved school attendance for LAC and BME groups, and better school transitions for children with LDD. For example, leaders in one case-study local authority established a transition team for such children (Authority A) and, in another, leaders ensured that children with LDD are included within a universal approach to school improvements (Authority C).

In the initial review of the research findings for narrowing the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups by Kendall *et al.*, (2007a) found empirical evidence to suggest that school leaders and types of leadership (e.g. transformational) could have an impact on student outcomes and performance as measured by pupil achievement, engagement and motivation. Harker *et al.*, (2004), for example, highlighted that the provision of cross-agency training improved the educational experiences and outcomes for LAC. Similarly, a report for NCSL on ECM projects identified that attainment gaps had narrowed for pupils entitled to free school meals and for those with SEN, in full service extended schools (NCSL, 2008a). They attribute these improvements to the effects of these schools 'targeting pupils in serious difficulties with different types of mentoring and pastoral support programmes and family interventions' (Cummings *et al.*, 2007, p. 36). Leadership plays an indirect role in this: extended school leaders ensure that vulnerable pupils' needs are met by identifying and arranging input from appropriate services (for example, input from health services, providing access to counselling and bereavement help, and advice on smoking and contraception). However, the literature highlights that it is difficult to attribute improvements in pupil attainment to school leadership due to other mediating factors such as other teachers/colleagues, the organisation of the school (Kendall *et al.*, 2007a), and other influencing factors outside of school such as the family (NCSL, 2008a).

## 2.2 Health-related outcomes

'Being healthy' outcomes have been improved for vulnerable groups in some of the case-study authorities as a result of leadership practice. Strong leadership from both the local authority and health is perceived to be important. Examples of the narrowed gap in health-related outcomes are cited for LAC, teenage pregnancy and the Child and Adult Mental Health Service (CAMHS) service users.

### Box 2 Narrowing the gap: health-related outcomes

- Being healthy outcomes for LAC have improved where local authorities and their health services have taken joint leadership and responsibility for improving these children's health. Examples include the Healthy Schools Programme (Authority D), a LAC nurse in every school (Authority A), and locality partnerships between the PCT, children's centres and schools (Authority B).
- Teenage pregnancy rates have been reduced in an authority where leaders have championed new ways of working such as preventative work on healthy lifestyles (Authority A).
- CAMHS services have been transformed in one authority by having all initial assessments carried out within 48 hours of referral. Strong leadership from health services and the local authority is cited as supporting a whole system transformational change programme in CAMHS. This programme includes joint commissioning and pooling of budgets, single points of access to health services from tiers 1 to 3, and child and family intervention work at the time of the initial assessment (Authority A).

## 2.3 Post-16 education, employment and training (EET) outcomes

There is some case-study evidence that effective leadership contributes to narrowing the gap for those progressing to post-16 education, employment and training (EET) (i.e. economic wellbeing outcomes). Gaps have been narrowed particularly for care leavers and young offenders and reductions in the number of LAC not in education, employment and training (NEET) have also been recorded. Again, leadership practice which focuses on the most vulnerable is felt to be key.

## 2.4 Participation and pupil voice

Vulnerable groups' participation has increased in local authorities where children and young people are consulted on their views (e.g. through surveys, school forums and LAC councils). Political leaders ensure that the voice of the most vulnerable is heard at all levels (e.g. at the school level through chairing school forums, and at the strategic level through sitting on or chairing the Children and Young People's Board).

Parents' participation has also increased through improved access to services (e.g. through extended schools). School re-organisation and improvement, driven by effective leadership were strategic drivers to this in one authority (Authority C).



### Box 3 Narrowing the gap: participation and pupil voice

- LAC have a more active voice in one local authority through being consulted about their views, and having leaders who share and promote their voice to others, for example, a designated LAC virtual head (Authority A).
- One local authority has introduced ‘community parents’ who act as a link between vulnerable families and the services or support they need. This has increased vulnerable young people’s levels of participation. Effective and non-hierarchical leadership at the local authority is seen as key to this scheme’s success (Authority D).

There is some evidence, although limited, from the literature review that prioritising and facilitating young people’s involvement in local decision-making processes can have positive impacts on outcomes (Kendall *et al.*, 2007a).

### 3 Leadership: How has the gap been narrowed?

This chapter details the key features of effective leadership that have contributed to narrowing the gap in outcomes between vulnerable groups and other children. While the literature provides fairly limited evidence of improved outcomes or narrowed gaps that are directly related to effective leadership, interviewees in the case-study local authorities identify some essential ingredients of leadership required for improving outcomes for vulnerable groups. Whilst many of these features reflect the key principles of effective leadership in general (see Appendix 3 for an overview of the literature), particular emphasis is placed on some of these key features in order to narrow the gap.

Effective leaders contribute to narrowing the gap by:

- prioritising the most vulnerable and develop a local vision
- championing the voice of vulnerable groups and encourage their participation
- using good quality data to identify needs and provide services for vulnerable groups
- fostering partnership working around vulnerable groups
- developing and motivate the workforce to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups
- having an unrelenting drive and passion to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups.

#### **Box 4 Overview of effective features of leadership for narrowing the gap in outcomes**

Effective leaders: prioritise the most vulnerable and develop a local vision: they:

- identify and prioritise the most vulnerable children and young people
- are responsive to the local circumstances and target those in the locality with the most need
- develop shared priorities among all partners for narrowing the gap
- prioritise resources for vulnerable groups
- establish a clear vision for improving outcomes and champion this from the top
- research local need and analyse data
- establish narrowing the gap as 'core business'
- establish a clear direction tied into local plans, policies and targets
- ensure the workforce understand how their role contributes to improving outcomes
- communicate the vision to all partners
- develop clear frameworks for policy implementation.



Effective leaders: champion the voice of vulnerable groups and encourage their participation: they:

- encourage involvement of the most marginalised groups
- establish meaningful methods of consultation
- have a genuine commitment to listen to service users and act on what they say
- champion joint ownership of corporate parenting responsibilities
- champion the needs of vulnerable groups through partnership working
- monitor and challenge to ensure that the most appropriate services are delivered in the most effective way.

Effective leaders: use good quality data to identify needs and provide services for vulnerable groups: they:

- collect 'real time' intelligence on emerging needs
- gather information directly from children and young people, their families and the local community
- draw together local intelligence from front-line staff
- establish a baseline from which progress can be measured
- monitor and review progress towards improving outcomes
- have the skills to analyse and interpret data on vulnerable groups.

Effective leaders: foster partnership working around vulnerable groups: they:

- are committed to joint working and encourage collaboration among the wider workforce
- forge partnerships at all levels
- ensure that joint working focuses on the most vulnerable
- facilitate collaborative working through joint planning and commissioning and pooled budgets
- ensure the sharing of effective practice and a holistic view of outcomes among staff
- develop a commitment to improving outcomes among partners and foster the notion of collective responsibility for vulnerable groups.

Effective leaders: develop and motivate the workforce to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups: they:

- ensure that the workforce have an understanding of the vision for narrowing the gap
- make clear to staff how their roles contribute to improving outcomes
- develop the emotional connection staff have with vulnerable young people
- develop staff to work in partnership
- encourage and facilitate the sharing of good practice
- provide access to staff training and development
- provide cross-agency training.

Effective leaders: have an unrelenting drive to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups: they:

- have a strong unrelenting drive of the vision for vulnerable groups and lead from the top
- instil a 'can do ethos' and an expectation to deliver the vision
- ensure that the workforce has continued commitment to the vision and are held accountable for it
- rearticulate the vision and maintain a continued focus on this as 'core business'
- monitor and review progress and bring staff back to the vision if they get distracted
- have a genuine empathy and commitment to support the most vulnerable
- have skills to articulate the vision
- engender a culture of support and trust and foster a professional learning culture which is reflective and innovative.

These key features are explained further and, within each section, case-study findings are presented first followed by evidence from the literature review, where relevant. This chapter also explores the features of effective leadership at different levels (political, strategic and operational) and concludes with a summary of the factors influencing effective leadership for narrowing the gap.

### 3.1 Effective leaders: prioritise the most vulnerable and develop a local vision

Interviewees believe that effective leaders identify and prioritise vulnerable groups, and make a strategic decision to target those most in need. They focus on addressing the specific needs of vulnerable groups (and individuals) in order to achieve change.

*We don't need to be spending time monitoring our general population because they're doing really well. We have to spend our energy as a collective partnership on the most vulnerable. (Authority A)*

*In a place like [name of local authority] many of our children are vulnerable so we like to think we are tackling issues on behalf of all children in the area but within that we have identified our particularly vulnerable groups. (Authority D)*

Effective leaders ensure that narrowing the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups is a priority not only for those working in children's services and specialist services but also for those in universal services. This ensures all staff across all services share the same priorities, and are working towards the same goals.



### Box 5 Narrowing the gap: prioritising vulnerable groups

- NEET: In 2005, this local authority was a national hotspot for NEETs (16–18 years old). A strategic decision was made to target this group in order to improve outcomes. A partnership group comprising local colleges, the voluntary and commercial sector, and Jobcentre Plus developed a strategic plan for targeting individual young people and providing them with one-to-one support. Local leaders shifted provision from universal settings to two pilot programmes providing support in young people's homes, where staff worked with them and their families in the evenings. At the end of 2008, the local authority's NEET rate had fallen from 14 to 7.6 per cent. There are plans to extend this programme of support across the authority (Authority B).
- LAC: This local authority set up a virtual academy in order to improve outcomes for LAC. The virtual headteacher draws together all the information on LAC, monitors their performance through a personal tracking system and identifies where they need further support. Staff working with a LAC are better informed about their progress and the support they require to improve outcomes: 'I think we understand the landscape better than we did several years ago. So we understand what the issues are around LAC' (Authority E).

Effective leaders are responsive to local circumstances. They research local needs and analyse data on vulnerable groups (see section 3) in order to develop an understanding of the local situation. They set out clear goals for improving outcomes which are tied into local plans, policies and targets, and convey these to others: One of our interviewees told us: 'there must be a clear and simple message that narrowing the gap is core business.'

*The golden thread running through the corporate plan is the agenda around narrowing the gap ... In terms of the corporate direction of the council over the next 5-10 years, we definitely see narrowing the gap as the key challenge. (Authority B)*

*They've [vulnerable groups] been prioritised in terms of our children's plans; they've been prioritised in terms of the work that we do through the partnership and our sub-boards that support that partnership to really focus on whatever we're doing, what's happening in that area with our vulnerable groups. (Authority E)*

Effective leaders establish a clear vision for improving outcomes for vulnerable groups and ensure all staff are clear about what needs to be achieved and how they can contribute. They are able to back up the rhetoric with evidence:

*It's pretty hard to ignore the gap in outcomes for the most and least advantaged ... that constant use of evidence has been an important thing for us. (Authority B)*

They champion the vision from the top and communicate the vision to all partners at all levels so everyone understands and signs up to the outcomes they are working towards.

*Nobody in the authority could be in any doubt as to what our priorities have been. Narrowing the gap is explicitly referenced in the council's five corporate priorities and in associated objectives, and that's been*



*articulated very powerfully by our lead member for children and by me. (Authority B)*

*There's a very clear political steer now, that wasn't there previously, that addressing the inequalities agenda is the number one priority. Key politicians are trying to champion the narrowing the gap agenda, in every way we can. So from a political level, we've given it a much harder edge than hitherto. (Authority B)*

### **Box 6 Narrowing the gap: ensuring a shared vision**

- Regular meetings with school governors encourage a shared vision for narrowing the gap across a local authority's county. Conferences with headteachers and governors help to ensure they are signed up to the agenda. The lead member for children's services articulates the local authority's vision to schools and business groups, and talks to newly appointed members (Authority C).
- Many service professionals are linked to a particular area and prioritise the needs of local people. Effective leadership in a local authority focuses these professional's efforts on the needs of the vulnerable in their catchment areas (Authority D).

Effective leaders identify particular areas of work which will make the most difference to outcomes and prioritise resources for vulnerable groups.

### **Box 7 Narrowing the gap: prioritising resources for vulnerable groups**

In this local authority leaders focused on addressing the link between deprivation and attainment. Following a comprehensive consultation with schools, they changed the formula for school funding so that released funds are allocated according to deprivation factors. The funding is used by schools to directly support the social and emotional needs of vulnerable young people. The local authority's scrutiny committee has given prior notice to schools that they will be asked to evidence how the money has been used for narrowing the gap and what the impact has been. The local authority is also investing additional funding for social care teams in deprived areas.

*We've put our money where our mouths are. We've actually invested either new money in these areas, or we've diverted money from more affluent areas into our more deprived areas ... [it's not] just rhetoric and warm words.*

*It shifted pretty much all our available resource around deprivation, and this meant that the most deprived primary schools, for example, might be getting £70-80,000 more ... and in the case of the most deprived secondary schools, into the hundreds of thousands of pounds. (Authority B)*

Whilst the literature identifies effective leaders achieve change by developing a vision for services in their local area, establishing clear priorities and having strategic drive (NCSL, 2008b; Utting *et al.*, 2008; DCSF, 2008c; Bond, 2004a) (see Appendix 3), this is not linked to narrowing the gap. However, in the context of improving outcomes, the literature does



emphasise the need for leaders to be child focused (Bond, 2004b). Leaders are identified as being instrumental in ensuring that all those working with children and young people are clear about their own role and the roles of others, and understand the difference they and their services can make (DCSF, 2008c). At a political level, effective leaders (e.g. lead members for children's services) take responsibility for driving forward the narrowing the gap agenda and champion joint ownership of corporate parenting responsibilities with elected members (White *et al.*, 2008).

### 3.2 Effective leaders: champion the voice of vulnerable groups and encourage their participation

To narrow the gap, interviewees believe that effective leaders encourage the involvement of the most marginalised groups. They have a genuine commitment to listening to service users and acting on what they say (i.e. to inform planning and services). Having a leader, particularly the lead member for children's services, to champion the voice of vulnerable groups is said to be essential for improving outcomes.

#### Box 8 Narrowing the gap: championing the voice of vulnerable groups and encouraging their participation

- The lead member meets with universal services on a half-termly basis to discuss LAC, attends LAC support groups and networks, and is the quasi-chair of governors for a virtual school for LAC. The local authority also employs participation officers and funds project work to ensure vulnerable young people are included in the local authority's consultation and decision-making processes. The local authority helps young people participate by developing their presentation and communication skills (Authority C).

The literature also identifies that effective leaders focus on involving children and families by adopting an approach that has service users at its core. This includes facilitating the involvement of children and families in service design and delivery, and working actively to build their knowledge and trust (NCSL, 2008b; Aubrey *et al.*, 2005; DfES, 2006; Lownsborough and O'Leary, 2005) (see Appendix 3). Specifically for improving outcomes and narrowing the gap, the literature highlights that effective leaders recognise the role that communities can have in facilitating ECM outcomes (NCSL, 2008b). Effective leaders work with young people to increase their engagement in local democracy to ensure their perspectives are genuinely considered in policy development. Examples include developing the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and including the views of young people in performance management and quality assurance procedures (Ofsted, 2007). They also advocate for the 'needs and rights of under-served groups' within the overall remit of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child (DfES, 2006; p.8; Harker *et al.*, 2004).

### 3.3 Effective leaders: use good quality data to identify needs and provide services for vulnerable groups

Interviewees believe that key to narrowing the gap is understanding the needs of the vulnerable, and using this information to plan and develop services. Effective leaders have access to good quality information and data from which to conduct an analysis of need. They have the skills to analyse and interpret data on vulnerable groups to develop a good understanding of the local context in order to set appropriate actions and targets. They gather information directly from children and young people, their families and the local community, and from those working with vulnerable groups. They listen to the views of front-line staff about what they consider to be the main priorities.

*Part of the progress has been in identifying within localities excluded groups and the groups where there will be a difference in outcomes. This is more about having local intelligence rather than a blanket response such as saying we will aim to narrow the gap for teenage parents, and it may be an issue in some districts and not in others. (Authority C)*

Effective leaders establish a baseline and monitor and review progress towards improving outcomes. If there is a lack of progress, they intervene and re-profile the work. They identify 'what works' in terms of support for vulnerable groups and use this information to inform the further commissioning of services in order to narrow the gap. Effective leaders also ensure there are appropriate systems in place to monitor the use and impact of resources allocated to improving outcomes.

#### Box 9 Narrowing the gap: access to good quality information and data on vulnerable groups

- Partnership working between the local authority and schools highlighted a small group of Afghani pupils at risk of underachieving. The partnership working arrangements between the local authority and the schools meant that action could be taken quickly to allocate the necessary extra resources to support these pupils (Authority E).
- In this local authority, leaders are supported by an information manager. They use an exception reporting method and produce monthly reports for the leaders highlighting issues in communities that have been identified through a traffic light system. Data obtained in this way informs discussions about individuals and groups of young people (Authority C).

The literature review echoes the findings in the case studies. Leadership in the *ECM Premium Project*, for example, ensured that vulnerable pupils' needs were identified and appropriate services put in place to maximise their educational progress. Interventions delivered through extended schools led to positive outcomes and increased attainment for pupils facing particular disadvantages and barriers to learning and participation (NCSL, 2008a). Similarly, Ofsted (2007) notes that, when the strategic aims and operations of the local authority are based on a thorough analysis of data and information concerning local needs, this contributes to effective management practices for narrowing the gap.



### 3.4 Effective leaders: foster partnership working around vulnerable groups

Another key ingredient believed by interviewees to be effective for narrowing the gap is for leaders to be collaborative, to have commitment to partnership working, and to encourage this among the wider workforce. Improving outcomes requires services to work in partnership in order to support the wide and varied needs of vulnerable groups.

*It's recognising that closing the gap is not something that one agency can do on its own. To improve outcomes you have to also look at improving health outcomes, the lack of family aspiration, you have to take a holistic approach to what you're trying to do. (Authority B)*

*There is a much more coherent and joined up thinking across the partners about how we all contribute to each other's efforts to narrow the gap. (Authority B)*

Effective leaders are excellent communicators and have good relationships with key partners. They have an important role forging partnerships at all levels to ensure that joint working focuses on the most vulnerable. To narrow the gap, effective leaders create teams made up of staff from all relevant services. They co-locate services which have a key role in supporting vulnerable groups to ensure there is a holistic view of outcomes among staff. They collaborate across agencies, provide direction and support to partners and ensure effective practice is shared. They instil a commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable groups amongst partners and a foster notion of collective responsibility. Developing good working relationships, together with joint planning and commissioning (including budget alignment), is crucial:

*The difference was the people working together and the way that they were helping each other to meet targets. Fundamentally people working together, building relationships and trust will really make a difference. (Authority C)*

*Sharing leadership, connecting and working in partnership with other people, strategically aligning resources around the things that make a difference. (Authority D)*

#### Box 10 Narrowing the gap: partnership working around vulnerable groups

- Work by leaders in this local authority helped to improve relationships with schools. There are regular meetings between departmental management and headteachers, which engender feelings of working together to improve outcomes and help to establish clear priorities (Authority C).
- Leaders in local schools have used combined resources to jointly fund home-school development workers with a remit to narrow the gap. They engage children in schools and work with their parents to improve, for example, attendance and punctuality (Authority B).

- Leaders have developed good partnership working in localities to address health issues. There are successful partnerships between the PCT, children's centres and schools working to improve health outcomes (Authority D).
- In this local authority, the lead member's office moved to the children's services department: 'The gains are huge. The staff see me in their department and we have the repartee. I talk to them and they talk to me. What you have is the joining together of the political and the professional processes in a way that is showing pretty good dividends.' Such working arrangements help to establish the vision for narrowing the gap and develop good networks (Authority C).
- In this local authority, leaders have organised staff into teams based on the ECM outcomes rather than service areas. Events and workshops enable staff to share progress in their ECM outcome team with the other teams (Authority E).

The importance of leadership in the successful development of partnership working for improving outcomes is also supported by the literature. For example, Ofsted highlights that effective strategic leadership promotes the need to embed partnership working within the cultures of organisations delivering services to children and young people (Ofsted, 2007). Effective leaders also support partnership working through the development of policy statements and frameworks emphasising the need for a corporate approach to improve outcomes for particular groups e.g. LAC (Harker *et al.*, 2004). The Children's Workforce Development Council's (CWDC) practitioners' guidance for lead professionals highlights the benefits a strategically coordinated and integrated approach can have on impacts, particularly for those children at risk of poor outcomes requiring additional support from services (CWDC, 2007).

### 3.5 Effective leaders: develop and motivate the workforce to improve outcomes

Interviewees believe that leaders require a workforce who are motivated and who have the necessary skills required for their role. Effective leaders ensure that staff have an understanding of the vision for narrowing the gap, and that improving outcomes is a priority for them. They make it clear to the workforce how their roles contribute to improving outcomes. They work to develop the emotional connection of staff with vulnerable young people and encourage and facilitate the sharing of good practice.

#### Box 11 Narrowing the gap: motivating and developing the workforce

In this local authority, through their corporate parenting role, leaders champion the vision for vulnerable groups and motivate the workforce to improve outcomes through various actions. The Director of Children's Services (DCS) writes to all headteachers asking about the individual achievement of LAC in their school to emphasise the authority's focus. The DCS also writes to the Connexions Personal Advisors of all LAC who do not have a complete action plan, to emphasise their role as corporate parent.



*'I'd say, so when's my 'Karen' going to get her action plan?... they thought it was barmy, but what it did was it brought it back onto people's agenda'.*

*The local authority has also sent out thank you letters where progress had been made for LAC, to celebrate achievement (Authority B).*

Within the literature, Hallinger (2003) supports this view and suggests transformational leadership is required by leaders to succeed at convincing teachers and other school staff to change and embrace 'new' or different ways of working (such as the pursuit of the extended school agenda) in order to narrow the gap outcomes. Effective leadership encourages staff buy-in to the vision of delivering effective ECM outcomes (especially for vulnerable groups) by targeting individual staff members identified as being particularly receptive to the change agenda (Kendall *et al.*, 2007b). The literature also identifies staff training and development as contributing to positive outcomes for children and young people. One study, for example, highlighted cross-agency training as a way of developing staff to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for LAC (Harker *et al.*, 2004).

### **3.6 Effective leaders: have an unrelenting drive and passion to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups**

Interviewees believe that a strong unrelenting drive to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups is crucial to narrowing the gap.

*I've called it 'conspicuous care' – a drive coming from the top is essential ... Not settling for second best ... an absolute drive to improve those outcomes. Securing that commitment from all partners that this is absolutely where we want to be and this is what we have to do for our vulnerable groups to improve outcomes. (Authority E)*

Effective leaders instil a 'can do ethos' and a culture of high expectations. They ensure there is an expectation that the vision for narrowing the gap will be delivered. They ensure there is continued commitment to this vision and staff are held accountable for it. Effective leaders rearticulate the vision and remind staff of its importance if they get distracted. At the same time effective leaders monitor and review progress.

*Those leaders who do make a difference have a deep moral purpose and they don't back off easily if they get knocked down, they just get back up again and they also accept that they can't do everything themselves and that they are not the complete leader and that they need to work with other people. (Authority D)*

In order to drive forward the vision for narrowing the gap, leaders require a genuine empathy and commitment to support the most vulnerable. They want to make a difference to children and young people at the margins of society, and have passion and energy for improving outcomes.

*[An essential feature of effective leadership for narrowing the gap is] ...people who are passionate about vulnerable kids, people whose heart goes out to those children and families whose circumstances are the challenging and difficult. They also need a sense of injustice. They are the*



*driving force for finding out what we need to do differently and bringing about change. (Authority A)*

Effective leaders articulate the vision for improving outcomes for the most vulnerable and ensure staff have a good attitude towards vulnerable children and young people. Working to narrow the gap necessitates a long-term commitment and may require a 'leap of faith' for some. Effective leaders motivate staff and engender a culture of support and trust. They foster a reflective and professional learning culture that encourages innovation.

### **3.7 What are the features of effective leadership at different levels for narrowing the gap?**

The case-study interviewees did not cover all agencies or all levels of children's services. Most of the interviewees had strategic roles within local authorities and this is reflected in their responses. However, there are some findings from the case-study data about leadership for narrowing the gap at different levels.

Differences between effective leadership for narrowing the gap at the political, strategic and operational level included:

#### **At a political level, effective leaders:**

- have a strategic overview, understand the broad nature of narrowing the gap and are aware of the main aims and obstacles; they do not focus on operational details
- understand the vision for narrowing the gap for vulnerable groups and articulate and share this so that the needs of the most vulnerable are prioritised
- have some direct experience of vulnerable groups and can be champions for key groups because they understand their needs.

#### **At the strategic level, effective leaders:**

- understand the vision for narrowing the gap and can articulate the vision to operational level staff
- drive forward the vision by translating it into practice and commissioning services which can have an impact; they have responsibility for performance
- have a long-term clarity of direction and are not distracted by operational level issues; they provide a link between the operational and political level and have an awareness of what is working well at the frontline.

#### **At the operational level, effective leaders:**

- bring staff working to for narrowing the gap together in the locality; they have an awareness and understanding of the wider strategic context but focus on the details of service delivery to narrow the gap
- have good negotiation skills for dealing with the day- to-day issues while delivering high quality services for vulnerable children and their families
- provide a connection between the locality and strategic level; they feedback information about what is happening on the ground in relation to narrowing the gap, what has been implemented, and what the challenges are.



### 3.8 Factors influencing effective leadership for narrowing the gap

In addition to the six key features of effective leadership which have contributed to narrowing the gap some additional factors which influence leadership were examined:

- contextual factors
- factors important for developing and growing future leaders.

Contextual factors identified in the literature review and case-study data relate to leadership in general rather than specifically for narrowing the gap (see Appendix 4 for an overview of features of the local context linked to effective leadership generally). Only one specific factor, relating to the size of the local authority, was highlighted by interviewees. It was suggested that working in small geographical areas makes it easier for staff to identify individual vulnerable young people so that support could be targeted in order to narrow the gap.

Similarly, some interviewees' thoughts on the factors important for developing leaders of the future tended to focus on more general points rather than specifically the skills needed for narrowing the gap (see Appendix 5). Specific points that were made however suggested that the development of leaders should focus on their ability to:

- have an emotional connection with vulnerable young people
- articulate the vision and champion the voice of vulnerable groups
- work collaboratively with a range of partners
- analyse and interpret data, and monitor and evaluate performance.



## 4 Conclusions

This final chapter draws together broad messages from the literature review and the case studies on the contribution of effective leadership to improving outcomes for all children and young people, and to narrowing the gap between vulnerable groups and others.

### 4.1 What gaps have been narrowed?

The literature reviewed provides little evidence of the impacts of leadership whether at an operational, strategic or political level, on outcomes for children and young people. The literature is also somewhat lacking in relation to an evidence base for the contribution of leadership to narrowing the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups. In contrast, however, the data collected from case-study local authorities indicates that effective leadership does have the potential to contribute to improving outcomes for vulnerable young people, and to narrowing the gap between disadvantaged groups and other children. The impact of leadership on narrowing the gap was most often evidenced in relation to educational achievement and to improving outcomes for LAC. The contribution of leadership to narrowing the gap was also identified in relation to health-related outcomes, post-16 education, employment and training outcomes (EET), and young people's participation and voice. Although the evidence for this is based mainly on perception, rather than direct demonstrable links, this would suggest that the role of effective leadership in narrowing the gap should not be ignored.

### 4.2 What is missing from the evidence?

The research literature provides substantial evidence of effective practice in relation to the leadership of public services, particularly schools and more recently children's services. The NFER's previous review of research findings on narrowing the gap (Kendall *et al.*, 2007a) however found limited sources which evidenced the contribution of leadership to improving outcomes generally. This current and more extensive review of the literature supported these findings and identified a particular deficit of evidence linking leadership to narrowing the gap.

While the case-study phase of this research was able to demonstrate a link between leadership and outcomes, and more specifically the contribution of leadership to narrowing the gap, this was on a small scale and the evidence base is not comprehensive. Although there is some evidence linking leadership for narrowing the gap with improvements in educational achievement and outcomes for LAC, there is a particular need to tease out, for example, the role of leadership in improving other ECM outcomes (e.g. staying safe and making a positive contribution) and for other vulnerable groups. Links between the central elements of good leadership and pre-specified outcomes were difficult to ascertain. Further work is therefore necessary to help leaders to realise and articulate the links between leadership and outcomes. An audit trail to provide further evidence of how leaders actually impact on outcomes would be beneficial. This could be used to develop the practice of existing leaders; inform the training and development opportunities for developing leaders; and identify prerequisites in terms of the qualities and skills required of leaders in the future.



### 4.3 What are the distinctive features of leadership for narrowing the gap?

There is evidence from the literature review in Appendix 3 on what effective leadership, in general, looks like. Many case-study interviewees suggested that leadership for narrowing the gap was no different from leadership generally. Narrowing the gap was seen as an objective that leaders were working to achieve, and was just one aspect of the overall development of children's services. Consequently, the same principals and skills of effective leadership applied to narrowing the gap.

However, it may be that leadership for narrowing the gap is something that leaders themselves find difficult to articulate and evidence. When specifically asked about the essential features of leadership for narrowing the gap, interviewees did highlight elements of effective general leadership which could be emphasised or built upon to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups, such as:

- developing a local vision that identifies and prioritises the most vulnerable
- championing the voice of vulnerable groups and encouraging their participation
- using and interpreting good quality data to identify need and provide services for vulnerable children, young people and their families
- fostering collaborative work between services for vulnerable groups
- developing and motivating the workforce to improve outcomes.

Ultimately, having an unremitting focus on vulnerable groups and a strong desire to improve their outcomes is what makes leadership for narrowing the gap distinct.

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## Appendix 1: About the literature review

The literature review aimed to identify empirically based research on leadership carried out in the UK since 2002 with a particular focus on narrowing the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups.

### A1.1 The search strategy

The search strategy involved three key lines of enquiry:

- systematic scanning and identification of evidence from a range of relevant academic databases
- scanning and collection of information and documents from appropriate websites and internet subject gateways
- the collection of current policy and practice documents from local authorities via the EMIE at NFER link network (supplemented by an email request from researchers to directors of children's services involved in the national Narrowing the Gap work).

The criteria for inclusion were:

- evidence from empirically-based research and evaluation
- evidence on effective features of leadership
- evidence of impact (including narrowed gaps) for vulnerable groups
- evidence relating impacts and outcomes to effective leadership practice
- evidence from the UK from 2002 onwards.

### A1.2 Databases and key words

Database searches for the project sought to identify evidence of how leadership is contributing to narrowing the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups. Research carried out in the UK since 2002 was included, with a particular focus on England and on research undertaken since 2004. Searches were conducted during the period 5 September – 7 October 2008.

Search strategies for all databases were developed by using terms from the relevant thesauri where these were available, along with free-text searching. A set of terms was developed to explore the concept of leadership, and this was combined with sets covering individual service-providing agencies, the integrated and/or collaborative working between them, and the outcomes and effectiveness of such working. The keywords used in the searches, together with a brief description of each of the databases searched, are outlined below. Throughout, the \* symbol has been used to denote truncation of terms, (exp) the 'explosion' of a thesaurus term to include all narrower terms, and (ft) the use of free-text search terms.

#### Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA)

ASSIA is an index of articles from over 600 international English language social science journals. The database provides unique coverage of special educational and developmental aspects of children.



### ***Leadership set***

- #1 Leaders
- #2 Leadership
- #3 Leadership style
- #4 Democratic leadership
- #5 Transactional leadership
- #6 Transformational leadership
- #7 Directors
- #8 Management teams
- #9 Middle management
- #10 #1 or #2 or #3 ... or #9

### ***Integrated/collaborative working set***

- #11 Integrated management
- #12 Integrated services
- #13 Service integration
- #14 Interagency collaboration
- #15 Joint ventures
- #16 Joint working
- #17 Children\* service\* (ft)
- #18 Children\* centre\* (ft)
- #19 Children\* trust\* (ft)
- #20 Multiagency (ft) or multi agency (ft)
- #21 Interagency (ft) or inter agency (ft)
- #22 Local strategic partnership\* (ft)
- #23 Local safeguarding\* (ft) or LSCB\* (ft)
- #24 #11 or #12 or #13 ... or #23
- #25 #10 and #24

### **British Education Index (BEI)**

BEI provides bibliographic references to 350 British and selected European English-language periodicals in the field of education and training, plus developing coverage of national report and conference literature.

### ***Leadership set***

- #1 Leaders
- #2 Leadership
- #3 Community leaders
- #4 Youth leaders
- #5 Informal leadership
- #6 Leadership qualities



- #7 Leadership responsibility
- #8 Leadership styles
- #9 Leadership training
- #10 Middle management
- #11 Management teams
- #12 School leadership (ft)
- #13 Lead professional\* (ft)
- #14 Leadership development (ft)
- #15 Leadership role\* (ft)
- #16 Leadership skill\* (ft)
- #17 Distributed leadership (ft)
- #18 Effective leadership (ft)
- #19 Transformational leadership (ft)
- #20 Director\* and children\* and service\* (ft)
- #21 #1 or #2 or #3 ... or #20

### ***Integrated/collaborative working set***

- #22 Agency cooperation
- #23 Integrated service\* (ft)
- #24 Integrated children\* service\* (ft)
- #25 Children\* service\* (ft)
- #26 Partnership\* and children\* and service\* (ft)
- #27 Children\* trust\* (ft)
- #28 Children\* centre\* (ft)
- #29 Local strategic partnership\* (ft)
- #30 Local safeguarding children\* board\* (ft)
- #31 LSCB\* (ft)
- #32 Interagency or inter agency (ft)
- #33 Multiagency or multi agency (ft)
- #34 Joint working (ft)
- #35 Team working (ft)
- #36 Integrated working (ft)
- #37 Every child matters (ft)
- #38 ECM (ft)
- #39 #22 or #23 or #24 ... or #38
- #40 #21 and #39

### ***Individual agencies set***

- #41 Schools (exp)
- #42 Local education authorities
- #43 Local authority\* (ft)

- #44 Public agencies
- #45 Social agencies
- #46 Voluntary agencies
- #47 Welfare agencies
- #48 Youth agencies
- #49 Public service occupations
- #50 Youth service
- #51 Police
- #52 Primary health care
- #53 Youth offending team\* (ft)
- #54 Social care (ft)
- #55 Primary care (ft)
- #56 Primary care trust\* (ft)
- #57 PCT\* (ft)
- #58 #41 or #42 or #43 ... or #57
- #59 #21 and #58

### ***Outcomes/effectiveness set***

- #60 Models
- #61 Theories
- #62 Theoretical framework\* (ft)
- #63 Evaluation
- #64 Evaluation criteria
- #65 Organisational effectiveness
- #66 Programme effectiveness
- #67 Performance
- #68 Performance indicators
- #69 Effective (ft) or effectiveness (ft)
- #70 Outcome\* (ft)
- #71 Narrowing the gap (ft)
- #72 What works (ft)
- #73 Good practice (ft)
- #74 Best practice (ft)
- #75 #60 or #61 or #62 ... or #74
- #76 #21 and #75

### **Current Educational Research in the United Kingdom (CERUK plus)**

CERUK plus contains current and recently-completed commissioned research, PhD level work and practitioner research, covering all aspects of education (all age ranges from early years to adult) and children's services. Records retrieved by any relevant keyword were examined.



- #1 Lead professionals
- #2 Leadership
- #3 Leadership development
- #4 Leadership responsibility
- #5 Leadership role
- #6 Leadership skills
- #7 Leadership styles
- #8 Leadership training
- #9 Middle management
- #10 Directors of children's services
- #11 School leadership
- #12 Effective leadership
- #13 #1 or #2 or #3 ... or #12

### **ChildData**

ChildData is produced by the National Children's Bureau. It has four information databases: bibliographic information on books, reports and journal articles (including some full text access); directory information on more than 3,000 UK and international organisations concerned with children; Children in the News, an index to press coverage of children's issues since early 1996; and an indexed guide to conferences and events.

### ***Leadership set***

- #1 Leader\*
- #2 Lead professionals
- #3 Management
- #4 #1 or #2 or #3

### ***Integrated/collaborative working set***

- #5 Integrated care
- #6 Interagency relations
- #7 Multiagency
- #8 Multiagency centres
- #9 Cooperation
- #10 Partnership
- #11 Partnership schemes
- #12 Children's trusts
- #13 Children's centres
- #14 Local government
- #15 Schools
- #16 Police
- #17 Youth offending teams
- #18 Primary care

- #19 Primary care trusts
- #20 Voluntary and community organisations
- #21 Social services
- #22 Youth work
- #23 #5 or #6 or #7 ... or #22
- #24 #4 and #23

## **Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)**

ERIC is sponsored by the United States Department of Education and is the largest education database in the world. It indexes over 725 periodicals and currently contains more than 7,000,000 records. Coverage includes research documents, journal articles, technical reports, program descriptions and evaluations and curricula material.

### ***Leadership set***

- #1 Leaders
- #2 Community leaders
- #3 Youth leaders
- #4 Leadership
- #5 Leadership effectiveness
- #6 Instructional leadership
- #7 Leadership qualities
- #8 Leadership responsibility
- #9 Leadership styles
- #10 Teacher leadership
- #11 Leadership training
- #12 Transformational leadership
- #13 Middle management
- #14 Management team\* (ft)
- #15 School leadership (ft)
- #16 Lead professional\* (ft)
- #17 Director\* (ft) and Children\* service\* (ft)
- #18 Leadership development (ft)
- #19 Leadership role\* (ft)
- #20 Leadership skill\* (ft)
- #21 Distributed leadership (ft)
- #22 #1 or #2 or #3 ... or #21

### ***Integrated/collaborative working set***

- #23 Agency cooperation
- #24 Integrated services
- #25 Partnerships in education



- #26 Children's service\* (ft)
- #27 Integrated children's service\* (ft)
- #28 Children's trusts (ft)
- #29 Children's cent\* (ft)
- #30 Local strategic partnership\* (ft)
- #31 Local safeguarding children\* (ft)
- #32 LSCB\* (ft)
- #33 Interagency (ft) or inter agency (ft)
- #34 Multiagency (ft) or multi agency (ft)
- #35 Joint working (ft)
- #36 Joint venture\* (ft)
- #37 Team working (ft)
- #38 Integrated working (ft)
- #39 Every child matters (ft)
- #40 ECM (ft)
- #41 #23 or #24 or #25 ... or #40
- #42 #22 and #41

### **Social Care Online**

This database, compiled by the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), provides information about all aspects of social care, from fostering, to mental health and human resources.

- #1 Leadership

### ***Individual agencies set***

- #2 Schools
- #3 Local authorities
- #4 Public sector
- #5 Social welfare
- #6 Strategic health authorities
- #7 Health authorities
- #8 NHS trusts
- #9 Youth work
- #10 Youth offending teams
- #11 Police
- #12 Social care provision
- #13 Primary care
- #14 Primary care trusts
- #15 Voluntary organisations
- #16 Voluntary sector
- #17 #2 or #3 or #4 ... or #16
- #18 #1 and #17

## ***Integrated/collaborative working set***

- #19 Collaboration
- #20 Multi-disciplinary services
- #21 Integrated services
- #22 Children's services
- #23 Children's trusts
- #24 Interagency cooperation
- #25 Joint working
- #26 Teamwork
- #27 #19 or #20 or #21 ... or #26
- #28 #1 and #27

## **Web searches**

The following websites were searched for relevant publications:

- National College for School Leadership - <http://www.ncsl.org.uk>  
NHS Leadership Qualities Framework - <http://www.leadershipqualities-framework.institute.nhs.uk>
- Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) - <http://www.solace.org.uk>
- Virtual Staff College - <http://www.virtualstaffcollege.co.uk>

Additionally, documents pertaining to the National Evaluation of Local Strategic Partnerships were located on the following sites:

- Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy - <http://www.cipfa.org.uk>
- Department for Communities and Local Government - <http://www.communities.gov.uk>
- European Urban Knowledge Network - <http://www.eukn.org/eukn>
- Local Government Centre, Warwick Business School - <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/wbs/research/lgc>

## **Identification of the most relevant sources**

Initial searches by library and EMIE at NFER staff identified over 90 sources. The abstracts for these sources were examined and just over two-thirds were selected for more in-depth examination. From this, using the criteria outlined above, 25 sources were reviewed.

## **A1.3 Extent and robustness of the evidence**

Much has been written in on the leadership of public services. The review identified a number of key documents including: *Leading and Managing Children's Services in England: A National Professional Development Framework* (DCSF, 2008c); *Better Outcomes for Children and Young People – From Talk To Action* (Utting et al., 2008); *Every Child Matters. How School Leaders in Extended Schools Respond to Local Needs* (Kendall et al.,



2007b); and *What Are We Learning About: Leadership of Every Child Matters* (NCSL, 2008b).

However, the literature relating explicitly to leadership for narrowing the gap is relatively limited. Only four sources referred specifically to narrowing the gap and leadership. Demonstrating the impact on young people at a remove from an 'activity' such as leadership is problematic and empirical links between the central elements of good leadership and pre-specified outcomes are difficult to ascertain.

Taking this into account, we set out a brief overview of the characteristics of the reviewed literature, which showed that:

- the majority of sources focus on school leadership, particularly the leadership of extended schools and community schools; one source relates to the leadership of children's centres
- three of the sources focus specifically on the leadership of children's services and one on the role of the lead member for children's services
- around two-fifths of the sources focus on effective leadership for partnership or multi-agency working
- one of the sources focuses on leadership for a specific vulnerable group, looked after children (LAC)
- the majority of texts included in the review look at effective features of leadership
- there is little evidence on the outcomes of leadership practices for children and young people, and particularly few relating to narrowing the gap.



## Appendix 2: About the case studies

The case studies aimed to identify practice-based evidence on leadership with a particular focus on narrowing the gap in outcomes for vulnerable groups. (The same case-study sample was also used for the parallel NFER study on governance).

### A2.1 Identifying case-study local authorities

In order to inform the selection of case-study local authorities, researchers scanned the documentation received from the email requests to local authorities for relevant leads on effective practice and evidence of improved outcomes for vulnerable groups. In addition, researchers examined the most recent Joint Area Review report for a sample of Narrowing the Gap authorities to note where strong leadership practice had been identified.

### A2.2 The case-study sample

Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with a range of staff in five local authorities' children's services departments. A total of 25 interviews were conducted. This included interviews with six directors or assistant directors of children's services and four councillors/lead members for children's services. The sample also included other senior strategic managers such as the head of policy and planning, head of universal services, the chair of the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) and executive board. Table A2 provides a full breakdown of the interviewees by local authority and role.

**Table A2 Breakdown of interviewees by authority**

Local Authority	Interviewee role	Number of interviewees
A	Director/assistant director of children's services	2
	Councillor: lead member for children's services	1
	Chair (of executive governing board)	1
	Strategic manager (head of specialist services)	1
B	Director/assistant director of children's services	1
	Councillor	2
	Strategic manager (head of learning and achievement, head of participation and inclusion, head of leadership, management and succession planning, school improvement)	4
C	Director/assistant director of children's services	1
	Chair (of LSCB)	1
	Councillor (lead member for children's services)	1
	Strategic manager (assistant director of strategic services, senior strategy manager, head of universal services, acting assistant director of specialist services, services manager for safeguarding children)	5



Local Authority	Interviewee role	Number of interviewees
D	Director/assistant director of children's services	2
	Strategic manager (head of strategic planning for change, head of innovation, learning and care)	2
E	Strategic manager (head of policy and planning)	1

## Appendix 3: Key features of effective leadership from the literature

### Effective leaders are child centred and focused on ECM outcomes

#### Effective leaders:

- reinforce the message amongst their staff that a focus on ECM is important for meeting the wider needs of children and championing the vision of improving outcomes (NCSL, 2008a; Bond, 2004b; DfES, 2006)
- have the ability to be truly child centred in focus and are prepared to build services with them (Bond, 2004a)
- ensure that the focus on outcomes and improving services for children, young people and their families can be understood and sustained at every level of the organisation (DCSF, 2008c)
- bring staff and outside stakeholders together in a process where they can work constructively to plan better outcomes for children (Blank, 2005; DfES, 2006; DCSF, 2008c)
- provide clarity about what must be achieved and are advocates of high quality, accessible and customer-focused children's services (DfES, 2006)
- undertake systematic pursuit of the ECM agenda and provide a quality of leadership that is able to share a vision and sustain moral energy (NCSL, 2008b)
- shape service culture proactively around children's needs and strive for a service that responds flexibly and effectively to the changing needs of children, young people and families (DCSF, 2008c).

### Effective leaders have strategic drive and champion a vision

#### Effective leaders:

- bring together the strategic drive and the strategic vision to effect and facilitate change and progress (NCSL, 2008a)
- champion the vision of improving outcomes, develop a vision for children's services in their area and are able to communicate it persuasively (Utting *et al.*, 2008; DCSF, 2008c; Bond, 2004a)
- provide direction and articulate the vision for services, as well as making it happen (DfES, 2006)
- understand strategic commissioning and policy development and are able to translate strategic vision into local plans through collaboration (DfES, 2006)
- display leadership across the whole system through their behaviour and use the collective knowledge base to challenge the status quo (DfES, 2006)
- provide clarity about how improved service performance and customer satisfaction can be achieved (DfES, 2006)



- systematically pursue the ECM agenda and develop a shared vision, a shared sense of purpose and a shared commitment to change (NCSL, 2008b; Hallinger, 2003)
- have a strong personality, passion and drive, adopt a wide range of approaches to encourage buy-in from staff (Harker *et al.*, 2004; Kendall *et al.*, 2007b).

### Effective leaders focus on community engagement and the involvement of children and families

#### Effective leaders:

- recognise the role that communities can have in facilitating ECM outcomes and focus on community transformation (NCSL, 2008b)
- take on leadership responsibilities that go beyond the boundaries of their service into the wider community (NCSL, 2008b)
- adopt an approach that has service users at its core and believe in genuine student, parent and community consultation (NCSL, 2008b)
- engage in community-wide needs assessments and mapping and work in partnership with families and the community based (Blank, 2005; Craig, 2005; Thompson and Uyeda, 2004)
- empower communities and facilitate the involvement of children and families in service design and delivery (Aubrey *et al.*, 2005; DfES, 2006; Kendall *et al.*, 2007b; Lownsbrough and O'Leary, 2005)
- work actively to engage the community and build knowledge, trust and resilience within the community, families, children and young people (DfES, 2006)
- involve families, residents, school staff and community partners in building and planning and empower parents as effective learners (NCSL, 2008b).

### Effective leaders foster a professional learning culture

#### Effective leaders:

- place importance on developing their service as a learning organisation and are committed to learning at all levels in the system (NCSL, 2008a)
- recognise the need for continuing professional development and support for staff (NCSL, 2008b)
- make the link between delivering high quality service and giving professional development a priority (Aubrey *et al.*, 2005)
- provide access to leadership programmes and opportunities for leadership development (Craig, 2005)
- nurture professional skills and aspirations of team members; encourage informal knowledge sharing and joint learning (DfES, 2006)
- place a high priority on the professional development and view taking initiative and exercising responsibility as a vital form of professional development (NCSL, 2008b)

- encourage a climate where staff engage in continuous learning and routinely share their learning with others (Hallinger, 2003)
- create conditions in which others are committed and self motivated to work towards improvement (Hallinger, 2003)
- encourage reflective professional practice through their own behavioural management style (DCSF, 2008c).

## Effective leaders are able to drive and manage change

### Effective leaders:

- use the values underpinning ECM to drive change and pace change appropriately (NCSL, 2008b; DfES, 2006; Lownsbrough and O’Leary, 2005)
- adopt a strategic overview and build sustainable leadership capacity and system-wide development and change (NCSL, 2008a; Bond, 2004a)
- recognise the importance of securing cultural change so that the focus on outcomes can be understood and sustained at every level of the organisation (Lownsbrough and O’Leary, 2005; Bond, 2004a; Utting *et al.*, 2008)
- articulate the rationale, benefits and impacts of change for individuals, the local authority and partners and understand the nature of change required (DfES, 2006; Lownsbrough and O’Leary, 2005)
- are inclusive and facilitative in their approach and develop the team’s ability to plan, manage and instigate change (DfES, 2006; DCSF, 2008c)
- establish a shared understanding and a shared language, engage in transformational change and focus on developing a shared vision and shared commitment to change (DfES, 2006; Lownsbrough and O’Leary, 2005)
- they respect colleagues at all stages of embracing change and adapt their skill-set to the different stages of change (Lownsbrough and O’Leary, 2005).

### Effective political leaders:

- Have the relevant knowledge and information: improved knowledge and information is vital to underpin the lead member’s ability to lead the political drive (White *et al.*, 2008)
- Develop appropriate skills: previous political and professional experience of lead members is important in the development of the skills required to drive forward the agenda within children’s services (White *et al.*, 2008)
- Engage and share with the wider membership: effective lead members are able to share the corporate parenting role and responsibility through elected members (White *et al.*, 2008)
- Have personal characteristics which further enhance their role: their personal reputation and credibility amongst colleagues enhance their leadership abilities (White *et al.*, 2008)



- Prioritise working with young people: effective lead members have a strong corporate commitment to consulting with and engaging young people (Ofsted, 2007).

## Appendix 4: Contextual factors that best support local leadership generally

The features of the local context linked to effective leadership were identified in the literature review.

- **A collaborative local context:** the promotion and supportive collaborative local context is important for facilitating local leadership for addressing ECM (e.g. NCSL, 2008a; Blank, 2005; Robinson *et al.*, 2008). Effective leaders build on local willingness to collaborate and local authorities can support them by acting as key facilitators for engaging partners, e.g. by providing forums for collaborative planning (Thompson and Uyeda, 2004). Two sources identified that a collaborative local context needed to be supported by dedicated funding to be effective (Blank, 2005; Harker *et al.*, 2004).
- **Involvement, children families and the wider community:** it is important that there is a locally recognised need to encompass strong involvement of children, families and communities in service design, without which it is suggested that integrated services are likely to be ineffective (Robinson *et al.*, 2008). There needs to be local recognition of the role that the community can have in improving outcomes and a shift from organisational improvement to community transformation (NCSL, 2008a).
- **Providing new forms of support for leaders:** support for leaders needs to be focused, not only on good practice, but also on building their confidence and understanding to tackle the professional and policy questions raised (Craig, 2005). There is a need for bespoke leadership development that can help them meet the kinds of challenge they are facing locally and for the development of local support networks (Kendall *et al.*, 2007b). There is also a role for the local authority to coordinate training and research activities, to serve as a clearing house for information and the creation of research networks to disseminate information on evidence-based effective practice (Thompson and Uyeda, 2004).
- **Policies and frameworks:** these need to emphasise a corporate approach and ensure that principles are transformed into practice; sustaining the momentum of inter-professional activities requires additional supportive structures and mechanisms to ensure accountability and provide a sense of ownership as well as effective leadership (Harker *et al.*, 2004).



## Appendix 5: Factors important for growing and developing leaders of the future

The following themes were identified by case-study interviewees as important in growing and developing of leaders generally for the future:

- **Succession planning:** interviewees highlight the importance of looking ahead to identify when (and which) posts within the organisation are likely to become vacant. As one interviewee noted: ‘by identifying where gaps are then we know what we are trying to grow’. The need to recognise succession planning at a national level was also noted.
- **Early identification of leadership skills/abilities in staff:** this was considered important in order to fill future leadership posts; identifying workers with the potential and desire to progress so that skills can be nurtured and developed is key; creating a pool of candidates with high leadership potential is also recommended.
- **Providing ongoing training, support and development opportunities:** ongoing professional development opportunities (e.g. mentoring, shadowing and modelling) enable staff to gain experience of the leadership role and develop the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding; senior leaders need to be committed to providing opportunities for staff to take on leadership tasks and be supportive of requests for training and leadership experience.
- **Valuing staff and outlining the benefits of leadership roles:** interviewees believe that ensuring potential leaders feel valued by the organisation and ‘selling’ the benefits of leadership roles (e.g. improved pay and conditions, professional development opportunities and job satisfaction) is key to motivating and retaining existing staff who might fulfil future roles.

The factors for growing future leaders identified within the literature supported some of the views outlined above by interviewees. Six key principles emerged.

- **Foster a learning culture:** a commitment to learning at all levels of the system and the view that everyone, staff as well as children are continually learning (NCSL, 2008a); a long-term training strategy; the professional development of staff and building knowledge base within the team (DfES, 2006).
- **Facilitate distributed leadership:** distributed leadership is integral to securing system-wide development and change and current leaders need to recognise that their services are the training grounds for future leaders (NCSL, 2008a); leadership programmes need a strong commitment to succession planning and distributed leadership (NCSL 2008b).
- **Empower and motivate staff/ownership:** effective leadership that recognises the specialist knowledge of others and engenders the empowerment of others through sharing knowledge and responsibilities (Aubrey *et al.*, 2005).
- **Offer a supportive environment:** support risk-taking behaviour and learning by mistakes as well as from successes; use coaching, mentoring or critical friends to keep the challenge at the cutting edge (NCSL, 2008b).



- **Appoint and induct new staff:** the appointment of new staff with specific criteria and encourage them to grasp leadership opportunities through secondments and further qualifications in which they use key focus areas in the school for their research (NCSL, 2008b).
- **Provide training and development:** equip future effective leaders by developing local authority programmes which help them to understand their strengths and weaknesses, including partnership working and change management; have a talent pool in the region for capacity building and investment in younger management personnel to become senior leaders of the future; provide a forum for recruitment, promotion and training; provide opportunities to shadow managers in other organisations to develop skills (Triggle, 2008).



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