

Reinterpreting the authority of heads: Making space for values-led school improvement with the index for inclusion

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Abstract

To what extent can heads use an inclusive values-led approach to school development in the face of pressures from Ofsted and their Local Authority to focus almost exclusively on attainment outcomes? We explore leadership of school improvement in a qualitative study of ten head teachers in the English county of 'Preshire', who worked with the third edition of the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2011), a guide to values led school improvement. We situate the study within a review of conflicting research advice about the characteristics of successful heads and how 'values', seen as motives for action, affect the recommendations from research.

We found that the heads were able to use shared inclusive values to accomplish, with their staff, a degree of control over the way their schools are improved. To an extent they were able to resist extreme local pressures to engage in short term strategies to force up attainments. By making their inclusive values explicit they showed courage rather than compliance. To varying degrees they used 'the Index' to create inclusive, democratic and sustainable school improvement plans while conforming to Ofsted requirements. We consider the possibilities for more widespread implementation of school development led by inclusive values.

Keywords: leadership, authority, development, improvement, values, inclusion, exclusion

One for all, or all as one? Tensions in contemporary headship

What kind of leader should head teachers strive to become? Should they be charismatically driving their schools forward to higher standards through the force of their personalities? Or should they be responding to the increasing complexity of their role by building capacity and sharing leadership throughout their school?

Tseng's (2015) critical discourse analysis of education policy documents in England from the 1970s onwards traces the shift in emphasis from heads as teachers, to managers, and latterly to leaders. Highly centralised leadership is given considerable impetus through the way heads are held responsible for the performance of their schools by the strengthening of accountability systems (Ball, 2013; Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015). This pressure sometimes has perverse consequences; this is well illustrated by an exchange with a head teacher during our study where school leaders came to assess the degree of involvement they would have with a values-led approach. After listening to the discussion the head reiterated his determination to drive up test results by any means. It was suggested to him that he was talking as if he was intending to improve

results in short-term ways that might not be sustainable and then leave for another school. His response was “that’s the game we are in”.

In England, the former Education Secretary Michael Gove called Sir Michael Wilshaw, the man he appointed head of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), “a real hero” in relation to his prior work as head of the Mossborne Academy in London where he led with an avowed authoritarian style – “like joining the Army”, said one parent (Wilby, 2010). In 2013 he reportedly said of the then Principal of the Ormiston Victory Academy in Norfolk, (now Dame) Rachel de Souza, “If anyone asked me what my ideal education policy would be, it would be to clone Rachel 23,000 times” (in Gann, 2015, p. 176). The status of Gove’s heroes is founded on their record of delivery in terms of standardised test scores and Ofsted ratings, their willingness to accommodate and spearhead the structural reforms that Gove saw as central to increasing performance, and on the way they represent heroic leadership of an increasingly opposed teaching profession.

The limits to lone leadership

Yet despite the policy focus on the effectiveness of individualistic leaders in schools, the research consensus in the fields of school improvement consistently emphasises cultures of collaboration and a focus on capacity building as strongly linked to improving school performance (Fullan 2007; Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo, and Hargreaves 2015; Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins 2008), and to the wider health and development of the school community (Sergiovanni, 2000, 2005). This is what Fullan et al. call “internal accountability” (2015, p.4), which has been demonstrated by a range of research studies to lead to lasting school improvement. Other studies (e.g. Firestone, Rosenblum, and Bader 1992; Lusi 1997; Darling-Hammond 2000) have shown that a sole focus on external accountability as the main driver of improvement can be successful only in the short term. These studies reflect a trend in the research literature. Bolden (2011) has tracked the pronounced shift in the literature on school leadership from a focus on individuals’ traits and behaviours before the Millennium to an increased interest within the literature in distributed, shared and other forms of leadership that see it as a “collective social process emerging through the interactions of multiple actors” (p.251), and are “more appropriately understood as a fluid and emergent, rather than as a fixed, phenomenon” (Gronn, 2002 p. 324).

A place for modified heroism

Evidence on the role of shared leadership in raising achievement has been widely welcomed to counter support for the efficacy of ‘heroic leadership’. However, Gosling, Bolden and Petrov (2009), among others, have suggested that the field may have started to underplay the significance of individual leaders. Grint (2010) argues that, despite the shift towards distributed leadership in theory, there remain strong psychological and cultural drives within organisations towards identifying leaders who embody and articulate its aims and values, take responsibility for initiatives and, where those initiatives are widely perceived to have failed, can be held ultimately accountable and removed. As Gronn (2009) has suggested, heads inevitably take a more central guiding role at times and the reality of collaborative school leadership remains something of a “hybrid” between individual and distributed poles.

Leithwood et al. (2008) argue that they know of no school in the US that has achieved genuine turnaround in its performance without “talented leadership” from the head (2008, p. 29). In a study

of 110 US schools the influence of the head, positive or negative, was considered to have more impact on student attainment than any other factor. The authors offer a tentative way out of this contradiction: while they call for more research into the relative strength of impact on student attainment of different forms of distributed leadership, they claim:

“There is no loss of power and influence on the part of head teachers when, for example, the power and influence of many others in the school increase” (p. 35).

This challenge to the leadership dichotomy is supported by Sergiovanni’s summary of Tannenbaum’s work: “leaders can actually increase control by giving up authority... power has the capacity to expand” (2000, p. 135). The implication is that leadership, when shared well, *generates* and *increases* power for the head teacher, as well as sharing it out. This resonates with Fullan et al’s (2015) argument for ‘capacity building’ as the central aim of leadership: a determination to spread skills, knowledge and responsibility across a school.

Values as a source of leadership authority

Yet views of leadership not only reflect the results of research or policy directives, they are also an expression of values. Tensions in the research literature about leadership styles are also tensions about values. We suggest that the role of values in responsible action has been downplayed and under-theorised in the last thirty-five years. This is encapsulated by the title of Alasdair McIntyre’s book, ‘After Virtue’ (1981), presaging the rise of ‘managerialism’ as the dominant style of British public sector organisations, in which active values or ‘virtues’ appear neutralised through the goal of ‘efficiency’.

For us, values are deep-seated beliefs and commitments that operate as motives for right action; as well as providing a sense of direction they influence decisions in the moment. All social actions are an expression of a moral argument: they are a way of saying ‘this is the right thing to do’. They fill the gap between the lessons of a particular research study and what ought to be the actions of responsible educators. So when a local authority officer in Preshire commented “I’m a pragmatist, which means I set aside my values to get things done,” far from actually setting aside his values, he is actively promoting a different set of values that he wants to remain obscure, in all probability, even from himself.

Where a school’s principal accountability is understood to be to external agencies and systems, the head may lose agency almost entirely – as does the rest of the school community – regardless of internal decision-making structures. They may lose a sense that what they are doing arises from their own deeply held commitments, motives and values and in this process they can lose an awareness of themselves as moral actors: they become vehicles for the moral actions of others. So what looks from the outside to be strong leadership may actually be strong followership. We suggest that a framework of shared values can act as the source of authority – as distinct from the status and personal characteristics of a charismatic leader – and that this can give further meaning to the notion of a head “increasing control by giving up [personal] authority” (Sergiovanni 2000, p.135).

Covell, Howe and McNeil’s (2010) study of ‘Rights, Respect and Responsibility’, a values-led school improvement initiative in Hampshire, UK, examines the link between success of implementation and the nature of school leadership. A challenging programme, it implements the thinking derived from

the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child into the values and activities of the school. In distinguishing between fully implementing and partly implementing schools, the authors reveal that the Head's participation in, and satisfaction with, training was strongly correlated with full implementation; in those schools the Head was nearly always identified as leading the initiative and staff perceived themselves as having more support with fewer barriers to implementation. Teachers showed greater commitment to children's rights in these schools. The authors argue that commitment, competence and confidence from the head was the key enabling factor, leading in many cases to "a contagion of respect for rights" (p. 128) within and beyond the schools. Here it seems the leadership of the head was crucial – but the *authority* came from a common commitment to a values framework informing the UN Charter.

We take up the extent to which shared values can enable heads to lead school improvement in collaboration with their staff in the presentation of our findings after giving a brief introduction to the 'Index for Inclusion'.

Introducing the *Index for Inclusion*

The *Index for Inclusion* is subtitled in its 4th edition, 'a guide to school development led by inclusive values'(Booth & Ainscow, 2016). It supports collaborative self-review, detailed planning and implementation. It assumes that educators, governors, young people and their families, already have much of the knowledge they need to develop their settings. The indicators and questions of the Index are designed to refine this knowledge and encourage its further development so that Index processes remain owned by schools. It offers a framework or 'universe' of inclusive values as an underpinning for school improvement for those committed to more inclusive schools and a less excluding society. In making its values explicit and emphasising the flourishing of conditions for teaching and learning rather than outcomes, it offers a contrasting approach to that authorised by government and supported through Ofsted. Thus it does not necessarily appeal to those with different values even though, in practise, school priorities overlap irrespective of their values frames. Teachers can also find the comprehensive nature of the Index off-putting until they understand that they are expected to focus on only one or a few of its seventy indicators and their associated questions, at any one time.

The headings for values in the Index framework are shown in fig.1. It is important to emphasise that these headings are not values. Values are often used as a rhetorical device to make claims about the ethos of an organisation without being painstakingly connected to action. So evidence for the values in a school is provided by observing interactions rather than reading vision statements. The Index suggests the beginnings of an exploration of the meaning of each value heading and its relevance for educational development. It initiates a process of values literacy as adults and children explore the connections between values and action.

The framework was created through countless dialogues with other educators in the UK and internationally. The various editions of the Index have been translated into more than fifty languages, which gives some indication that the idea of development led by explicit inclusive values, translates across contexts.

Figure 1. A universe of inclusive values

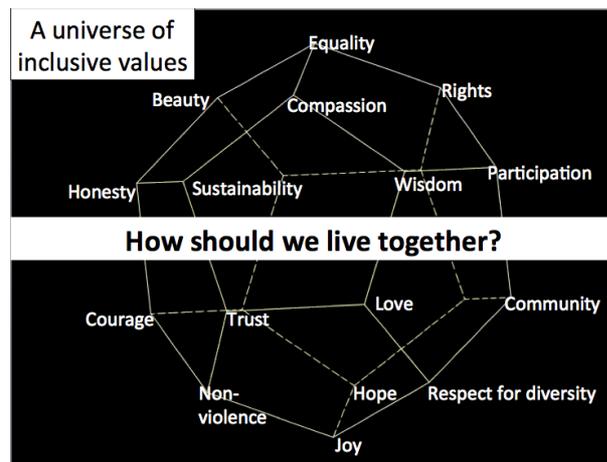
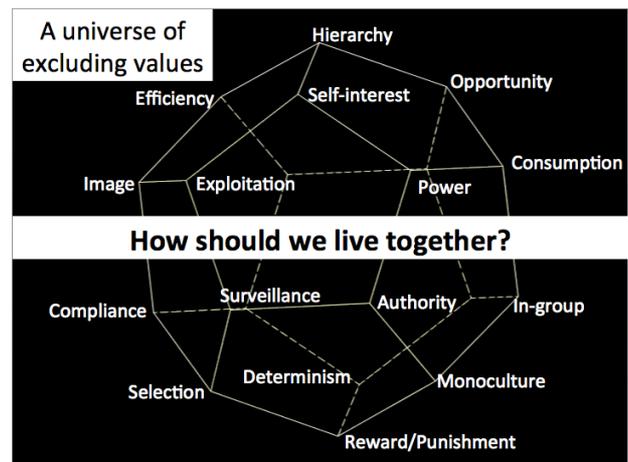


Figure 2. A universe of excluding values



The Index divides development along the dimensions of cultures, policies and practices, and distributes its seventy indicators between these dimensions. Each indicator – or aspiration for development – is given meaning by a set of around twenty-five challenging questions that also suggest how evidence can be sought that a particular aspiration is being realised. Through its indicators and questions, the Index sets out what inclusive values might mean for the arrangement of buildings, grounds, and interactions in staffrooms and classrooms and in relationships between and amongst adults and children. When people work with the indicators and questions of the Index they work within its framework of values.

The latest, 4th edition of the Index [blinded for review], provides an explicit contrast between inclusive and excluding values (fig.2) that underlie actions in modern school systems and societies, and have been linked closely with an economic orthodoxy. In seeking to have trust in others, then, one is likely to conflict with systemic pressures towards surveillance; acting courageously is likely to raise issues of compliance; a focus on rights for all will cause friction in a system designed to afford opportunities for some. So the task of putting inclusive values into action at the same time requires limiting the extent to which actions within schools are controlled by excluding values.

Both frameworks of including and excluding values are answers to the ancient philosophical question ‘How should we live together?’ – though very different ones. The Index gives the question a modern twist in asking about a limitless ‘we’ rather than a limited group of wealthy men in Rome or Athens. But the recognition that the question can be given contrasting, conflicting answers should restrict the currency of the idea that values are “universal”. Such a view is espoused by several other approaches to values-led development as, for example, *The Common Cause Handbook* (Holmes, Blackmore, Hawkins, & Wakeford, 2011) or the approach promoted from the Brahma Kumaris group and adopted in a number of British schools and others internationally, called “Living values” (Hawkes, 2003).

Several schools in Preshire had been involved in piloting the draft of the 2011 edition of the Index for Inclusion. During the pilot phase colleagues in our University were surprised that thirty-five schools had signed up to be part of a counter-hegemonic approach to school development in an

area under such pressure. Yet, councillors were influenced by positive head teacher reports of the developments with the Index to fund a similar opportunity to be made available across the County.

The pilot work with the Index had been initiated and led by a senior adviser and he took up the challenge of implementing the work across the County. Nevertheless at the same time, other officers in Preshire's education department were concerned to promote the dominant outcomes-focused view of school improvement promoted by Ofsted and Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) through school inspections and related appraisal systems internal to the schools. Preshire was under additional pressures because of the relatively low attainment of children on key stage tests and GCSEs. The response of most officers to these pressures led to them hardening the dominant approach even further. Some were dismissive of the Index at officer meetings, suggesting that its approach was 'touchy-feely' in contrast to their steely attempt to drive up standards by focussing relentlessly on coaching basic skills. We do not know the extent to which they actually opened the book or engaged with the challenge of its questions but we were made aware of such negative comments by key informants. This resulted in the senior adviser himself being relatively isolated in his work, with little time given to devote to this county-wide initiative.

So in seeking to implement an initiative likely to encounter cultural and systemic resistance both internally and externally, the support of heads was vital. Even if a head recognises that dominant approaches to school improvement are likely to have limited benefits for their school on their own in the long and short term, adopting another approach may require courage and ingenuity. But once they have taken this step, leaders can become powerful advocates for an approach that runs counter to dominant orthodoxies.

Through our interviews with head teachers we wanted to learn: to what extent can head teachers use the values-led approach of the Index to develop their schools in the face of pressures from Ofsted and their Authority to focus mainly on achievement outcomes? We explain our methodology and methods before presenting our findings.

Method

When initially scoping a wide range of evidence collected from the Preshire project we found, in line with the arguments above, a strong link between the extent and depth of a school's engagement with the Index and the commitment of the Head. This motivated us to explore the nature of the Heads' involvement in more detail. We sought to clarify their views of the internal and external pressures in supporting or hindering the implementation of the values-led development through the Index for inclusion. We did this through semi-structured interviews to engage with the depth and complexity of the issues we sought to clarify.

We interviewed ten heads of junior, infant or primary schools in the second year of the 2-year project. They all had substantial prior engagement with the researchers. Thus relationships had been established on the basis of shared values, shared practice and common interest. This, in addition to their powerful status, negated any power imbalance (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 171). The heads were asked about the successes and failures of the Index work, how the work might be extended and their estimation of the value of the Index approach in improving their own and other schools. Our focus on their personal experiences and their willingness to communicate openly meant that a narrative, semi-structured approach was taken, with the researchers asking follow-up questions, and

occasionally steering into a focus on shared future activity, such as future support visits or group meetings as our working relationship demanded. In Woods’ (1986) terms, this afforded high levels of trust, curiosity and naturalness on the part of the interviewers (in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 410), and led to “spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the interviewees” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 192). Names have been anonymised. Interviews were transcribed and coded through ATLAS.ti software and then subjected to thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998).

The evidence we present is not about the value of the Index *per se*. It concerns the interaction between the values led approach of the Index and the leadership of heads in developing their schools.

The nature and limitations of our sample

This study was part of a wider exploration of how schools across Preshire did or did not take up the opportunity to work with the Index for Inclusion. The schools represented a range of areas from suburban to remote, many strongly deprived, and all with relatively limited ethnic diversity – characteristics widely represented negatively and simplistically (Hillyard & Bagley, 2015), as in ‘rural and coastal schools’ (Social Mobility & Child Poverty Commission, 2014, p. 45). The sample opportunistic, consisted only of heads who, bar one, had made extensive use of the Index. The one who did not professed deep objections to the approach dominating the local authority but felt she had no room to adopt an alternative in her school. Many other heads across the County rejected deep engagement with the Index because they held conflicting views or were guided away from it directly or indirectly by local authority pressures.

Findings: Head teacher reports

We have organised the headteachers’ interview responses around emerging themes which we address in turn below. All the heads found that the Index matched many of the values that brought them into education; they all had to make the Index and outcomes-focused approaches fit together; most found that working with the Index helped them to lead development rather than simply follow Ofsted recipes; they felt encouragement to broaden ownership of school activities whilst enhancing their roles as heads; yet all of them recognised the limits that the constant national and local pressures for quick attainment fixes placed on the development of longer term strategies. Taken together they illustrate the ways an approach to school development led by inclusive values influences the heads’ style of leadership away from authoritarian to more collaborative approaches.

Table 1. Headteachers’ school stages

<i>Headteacher alias</i>	<i>School stage (ages)</i>
Peter	Junior (7-11)
Richard	Infant (4-7)
Ramona	Primary (4-11)
Robert	Infant (4-7)
Ingrid	Infant and Nursery (2-7)
Rose	Primary (4-11)

A welcome for values

In contrast to the considerable pressures to work in a particular way from the Authority and nationally, work with the Index was entirely voluntary. Several of our heads found a welcome match between their idea that education should be led by values and the approach of the Index. As head of a Church of England junior school, Peter had previously worked with the scheme recommended by the diocese – ‘Values for Life’ – and found them to have “quite an overlap with the Index – it has built on something we were already working on”. Richard’s attachment to values started as more personal:

I came here five years ago determined we would be a values-led school. I had many sleepless nights thinking about what they would be and trying to condense them to the absolute essentials... We have these values and principles around developing respect, responsibility and equality. We talk to children about those all the time. I can’t compromise on those and if people want me to then maybe this is not the school for me. (T1, L06)

Ramona, head of a primary school in a deprived coastal town, felt that she had painstakingly built up a culture of inclusive values over fifteen years to such an extent that her school stood out as a place where teachers wanted to work and were reluctant to leave:

People want to come and work here. I have no problem with recruitment at all. That’s where the values come in – it’s that long plan.... The Index fits with our idea of how we want our school to be, we haven’t found anything that doesn’t fit. (T5, L19)

Robert, head of an infant school, saw an immediate match between the Index and what he and his staff were trying to achieve in their school: ‘I felt it had to work because it shared our values.’

A values-led welcome

As an example of the easy connection these heads made with the values-led approach of the Index, three of the heads said they had worked on ‘welcoming’ using the Index. This features in the first of the 70 indicators (A1.1 ‘Everyone is welcome’) and has caught the eye and imagination of many readers as a litmus test of a school’s culture. Ingrid also head of an infant school, said that question f), “Do staff, children, parents and governors make an effort to learn each other’s names?” had caused her to critically reflect about their relationship with parents:

No, we call them ‘mum’ and ‘dad’ – but they’re not. It makes the world of difference if you can learn and use parents’ names. You can see the effect. (T4, L39)

Ingrid described how this further prompted her to dig beneath the surface of the school she had recently moved to: “there were pockets of people being very welcoming and over-compensating for areas where people weren’t”. Being more welcoming to parents was a theme shared by Rose, whose junior school, as a result of working with the same indicator, had set up Maths and Reading Cafes, leading to an increase in the number and range of parents coming into the school. Harriet described how her school’s governing body highlighted this indicator, undertook walks round the school to assess the welcome, and made recommendations; in the process, it helped new governors to

integrate and feel valued as the indicators and questions provided a non-technical framework for critical assessment.

Fitting the Index and Ofsted together

Since the County Council was paying for all schools to have the opportunity to work with the Index some heads assumed that it also had the full endorsement of the Council. Peter had embraced the Index approach following an evening meeting where it was introduced to schools in his area. He had already planned an In Service Education and Training (INSET) day for his staff but immediately went away and re-planned it around the ideas of the Index. He expressed pleasure at what he believed then was authority wide support for working with the Index.. After introducing it to his staff he commented on what the school was gaining from this work: 'the Index adds clarity and focus to Ofsted'. (T7, L21)

For some others though there was a concern that building development from their own values might be in conflict with Ofsted. As Richard commented:

In our SIDP [school improvement and development plan] we're trying to dovetail two things that don't really relate to each other – a values-led system against the Ofsted framework. (T1, L59)

This was a real dilemma for him. He felt that the school could not move too far from the Ofsted approach, saying: 'we have to safeguard ourselves'. Yet most of the heads stressed the practicality of the Index in helping to engage with a new area of policy or practice whether or not this arose as the result of an Ofsted recommendation. Robert had repeated a number of times that it made sense for his school to use the Index extensively since it could get their thinking started in a whole range of areas; it had been produced by thoughtful people who shared their values and had done some of the work for them. For Harriet (Junior school head) too:

What happens now is it becomes the way you think about things. You automatically reach for the Index to think, "I need to do this" and "I wonder what it says about that" It's extensive and a very powerful tool. (T8, L42)

We supported schools to structure their development plans by re-interpreting Ofsted demands through the lens of inclusive values. Six of the ten heads interviewed said they had used the Index to help build an inclusive values framework into their plan. Ingrid, who started out by using the Index very much as a support for herself, gradually brought all the staff with her:

Our school development plan is cross-referenced to the Index, and I know other schools have been doing that too. (T4, L21)

Peter and his staff used the Index systematically to check and flesh out their plan:

You can look at what you're not doing, and at what you could do to make things better, and then build your improvement plan. We are starting to look at every single development priority of the school and use the Index to help shape where we're going next. (T7, L21)

The Index was sometimes used in a straightforward way to help with a pressing concern. Ingrid reported how they referred to the Index frequently in the redesign of their behaviour for learning

policy by asking themselves: 'are we doing the best we can?' For Tessa though the Index was used more powerfully to unblock, with a values-led approach, the lack of progress in her primary school to increase attendance. Her school had been using a traditional approach of increasing the efficiency of checks and stressing the consequences to parents of the non-attendance of their children. As the staff worked through the Index questions under the indicator B2.8 'The school reduces barrier to attendance', they were struck by the change implied by a single question: 'Are children who have been absent given a genuinely warm greeting on their return to school?' This set off a chain of changes within the school about the power of relationships. As Tessa commented:

We are an area of considerable deprivation and difficulty. We had low attendance - 82% across the school year. The government wanted us to get up to 95%. We looked at all the questions around barriers to good attendance and chose three or four areas that we could really tackle. It made us think about the things we are currently doing in school and ways that we could do a bit better. We were able to put a lot of things in place over the course of the year to the extent that that the attendance went from that really low base and we are now hitting the 95% mark. And that's made a big difference to us...so now with other school improvement projects we tend to go to the Index first and ask if there is an area we can use to start our thinking. (T10, L02)

Taking ownership of the school improvement process

Some of our heads stressed strongly a wish to keep or regain control over their own development processes although this sometimes felt elusive. Harriet was clear in her view that the Index can 'give teachers ownership over their improvement', though the process was more subtle than that:

When you're just doing what you're told, you're not going to improve because you don't have ownership of what's happening. It's also really scary....We are in an area of high need and historically it's always been a satisfactory school. We tried every strategy that came along, none of it came from us, we were just told what to do to try to improve, which meant that our school improvement was stuck, we had to improve but we didn't know how. It felt like a very restrictive focus on English and Maths. Then three things happened: the data started to look more promising; Ofsted inspected us and said we were Good; and that opens up the world a bit for a time and then Robert invited us to come and be part of the Index [just] when we were looking for something to help us take ownership of what we did in school. (T8, L06)

Among the first things they did was to support governors to be more involved:

We had lots of new, inexperienced governors so we decided to use the Index to help us think about how we were going to strengthen governance, starting with how welcome is our school, and how well do staff and governors work together? (T8, L08)

After using the Index on a range of other issues – like embedding in ordinary routines the practice of teachers sharing skills and learning from each other – they drew on it in giving the school a distinctive environmental identity. 'Sustainability' is a value and imperative in the Index and is reflected in several indicators as well as in the reconstruction of the curriculum. The Index has been widely used by participating schools to support them to permeate environmental concerns in the

school. In her interview, Harriet gave a sense of the breadth and depth of her school's engagement with such issues:

We're also using the Index to consider creativity and green issues and our ethos as part of our planning for the new curriculum.... We're trying to make sure that every child in the school has access to some strand of it. They will all do Forest Schools, they will all be part of the Countryside Trust work, they will all grow food for the farmer's market. We now have an eco team on the school council. The cost of gas and electricity has plummeted because everyone turns off lights, we have a group of children going around gathering recycling, the kitchens gives us the food waste to compost. It's tying everything together. (T8, L42)

Several other heads mentioned using the Index in relation to restructuring the curriculum in their schools. For many schools curriculum planning is a key way to take some control over their development. It involves seeing that the requirements of the national curriculum can be met through an approach owned by the school. Peter was particularly keen to use the Index curriculum for the 21st Century to enliven planning in the school:

One of the things I wanted to do was to move the curriculum forward in a cross-curricular way. Fortunately, all the staff were of the same mind. We then took the curriculum aspect [of the Index] and used it as an audit. (T7, L05)

Each of the 13 curriculum subjects in the Index is linked to local and global concerns. In dialogue with his staff at their junior school, Peter adapted this idea to progressively broaden the curriculum across the four years from a focus on local concerns to increasingly global ones. Both Rose and Ingrid initiated consultation processes to re-imagine the curriculum:

We got those 21st century themes the children need to know through engaging with the Index. We looked at the ones we had that worked well, and we talked to the children because they'd done the questionnaires about what they wanted to learn. (T9, L10)

Rose here describes drawing on the Index for inspiration both through engaging with the Index curricular content, and gathering feedback from the children on its implementation. For Ingrid, a similar process succeeded despite initial reluctance from some staff; again, she saw the Index's outside perspective as enabling experienced teachers to imagine they could teach with a different framework from one presented by the government. Several heads reported that once teachers had liberated themselves from a narrow view of the curriculum they developed a new commitment to using their own ideas, stimulated by the Index. This was exemplified by Harriet's report of the reaction of her teachers to the introduction of the most recent 'national' curriculum:

Part of the success of the work that we've done on the curriculum is that the teachers were saying, "We'll still be able to use the Index, won't we?" rather than us saying you must do it. (T4, L48)

Broadening involvement, opening up dialogue

In Mary's primary school, the Index was used for her personal support rather than for whole-staff engagement and this is how it remained: 'I use the Index as a tool – it's my tool. I use it for various things and to justify what I'm doing'. Ingrid had started in a similar way. She joined a school where

she saw a disjunction between her values and those of many of her staff. She embraced the Index when she heard about it but as a support for herself to develop a strategy for gradually introducing changes to the school. She printed out the seventy indicators and used them to check the progress of her strategy. The Index was to be openly shared with her staff when she had confidence that they would engage with it:

I saw the Index and thought “that’s a good thing” – it arrived at a time when I needed a toolkit to support my vision for the school. I wasn’t sold the Index, it sold itself to me. (T4, L27)

She suggests that the Index acts as an alternative perspective in opening up dialogue with colleagues, an outside source of authority and questioning that promotes engagement. So she used it to share ideas with which she agreed, without staff feeling that she was exerting her authority.

The Index has been very helpful to me because it’s a book, not a person... so if we were reviewing a significant area of school practice, the questions get slapped on the table. (T4, L69)

Gradually however her staff became more and more involved, enjoying the freeing up of the curriculum that Ingrid and the Index promoted. For example, every class adopted both a local river and one in another area of the world, and chose a class tree. They reached the point where curriculum discussions supported by the Index became a regular focus for sharing ideas. This devolution of leadership was well illustrated by changes to recruitment practice:

Recruitment used to be something that happened in this room with two people who decided who was best - it had nothing to do with the people out there who would be working with them, or the rest of the community. Now we are all part of the recruitment process, and it has been very successful. (T4, L67)

Most of the heads felt that successful use of the Index involved promoting shared leadership. For Ramona, this started at the planning level:

The whole staff has responsibility for school improvement and the Index, every member of staff has an area of the school development plan. My deputy and I oversee all the information that comes in and put it together but every teacher has some part to play. If you’re not a part of it, why not? (T5, L07)

This theme of collective responsibility with oversight from the head was common in the interviews – but it was not portrayed as an easy process, especially in the face of external performance pressures and the challenging demands for change a values-led approach makes on many. Richard was honest about what he saw as ‘an emerging gap between ordinary staff and the senior leadership team’:

I don't want to lose that professional relationship because of resentment about how hard it is to work here. I want to get back to proper dialogue, being honest about how we work together. (T1, L92)

Yet most of our schools gained support from the emphasis on participation in the Index to

increasingly involve all groups of staff in school activities. Empowering teaching assistants was one of the most common uses of the Index across the Preshire project through use of the indicators on staff cooperation, expertise and on the role of assistants in supporting learning. As Rose reported:

There was a 'them and us' situation with teaching assistants. But now they come to staff meetings, they engage with the teachers far more and we try to give them more responsibility. And it has worked. Now we just see class-based teaching staff irrespective of whether they're a teacher or a teaching assistant. (T9, L09)

Barriers to sustaining values-led improvement

At the time of this project, the county as a whole, and all schools within it, found themselves under exceptional pressure regionally and nationally to rapidly increase test performance. Despite making positive use of the Index the majority of heads in this sample felt that the weight of external pressures limited their capacity to develop longer-term strategies to raise achievements. They reported a sudden raising of performance bars by inspectors and the Authority and a greater reluctance to contextualise data – even in Rose's school where high parent mobility meant that only 10% of students arriving in Reception (age 4) complete Year 6 (age 11). For Ramona, head of a well-regarded school in a deprived coastal community, the impact was tangible:

This has been a 15 year piece of work to get to this stage and up until this year that's been fine with Ofsted – but suddenly we're in a situation where we need a quick fix. And this is not an area where you can do quick fixes. The staff have a sense of something they value being undermined. An inspector asked a boy if we were a good school now – that's awful, to imply to the children that they're not going to a good school. (T5, L18)

Ofsted came at the wrong time; it was on 2013's data, which was the worst data we've had for about 10 years because of a particular cohort. They were going into lessons and saying, "That's good teaching, but it can't be good because your results aren't good." (T5, L05)

This sudden additional pressure is thus exerted on vulnerable parents and children as well as heads and teachers. Ingrid's experience was also of working to strengthen a fragile community, though her good Ofsted result meant that she was called on as a support to other schools:

This community is incredibly insecure and most of the issues we deal with actually are to do with the frailty of families and that manifests itself in the behaviour of children. And that sort of stuff you can't fix in a year. (T4, L05)

Kate, who returned again and again to Ofsted demands, admitted that in her school the relentless pressure towards short-termism from the local authority was undermining a long-term approach: "When you are being beaten, instead of doing what actually makes things better in the end, you retreat." (T2, L24)

Discussion

The evidence suggests there is an alternative to the dilemma posed at the start between directive leadership by a vision-driven head, and a shared, capacity-building model. The heads, with varying levels of support from their use of the Index for Inclusion, have *created a space for inclusive values-led development* in their schools as an alternative to outcomes-focused (some might say obsessed) school improvement. This does not mean that they focused only on sharing the use of fine words, but that there was a determined effort in some of our schools to relate actions and values. So values have acted as the ultimate source of their leadership authority – rather than relying on either their charisma and personal vision or their role as policy implementers. Values are added to the means by which heads can adapt to, rather than comply with, the prescriptive policy environment identified by MacBeath (2008).

The testimonies of the heads support Tannenbaum's (in Sergiovanni 2000) and Leithwood et al.'s (2008) claim that leadership is most effective when distributed, and is not lost through sharing. In particular, this is demonstrated by the many references to using the Index framework and inclusive values to develop school improvement plans through broad discussion in the school's communities; what goes hand-in-hand with this, however, is a growing sense of collective responsibility – a shared agreement that once a space of participation and equality is opened, refusal to participate and blaming those in senior roles becomes much less defensible. This was most clearly expressed by Ramona, who said that teachers must either not be sufficiently supported or not doing their jobs properly if they could not engage with this process; in this way the head must both hold open a space for dialogue and ensure that all take part appropriately.

We suggest that for these heads it is adherence to “core values” – inclusive values in this case – rather than inherent traits of personality that are central to their open-mindedness, resilience and qualified optimism. A framework of explicit values provides both the motivation and, with the support of the Index for Inclusion, detailed ideas for practical change through which to push a school forward in the face of adversity. The examples above, among many others, show heads drawing on the Index as a source of inspiration, of challenge, and of practical guidance.

Values-explicit frameworks such as the *Index for Inclusion* effectively enable the choices and commitments of head teachers to be shared across the whole school community as they are related back to previous agreements about shared values. Furthermore, heads gain authority through recognising their school's values as having been negotiated and shared by the community, as well as being their own. This empowers teachers to engage with and shape their values, rather than having to choose between accepting or rejecting a pre-set scheme. Several heads saw the Index framework, its proposed values, indicators and questions, as a shared text that depersonalised and decentred values-based discussions to aid ownership of plans for development across the school.

However, there is also ample evidence of the difficulty of this counter-hegemonic practice in the face of relentless regional and national pressure. This was a major theme of earlier work, which is testimony to the persistence of this tension in English schools (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006a). Hargreaves-Hammersley (2015) has discussed heads' continuing dilemmas about their moral and professional autonomy in the face of accelerating quasi-market reforms in education in England:

...neo-liberal agendas have, through the constant bombardment of new initiatives, undermined the spaces within which head teachers are able to think and are able to challenge these dominant ideologies. Consequently the importance of space for building dialogue and trust between school staff is emphasized by Thompson and Sanders (2010). Such spaces, they argue, enable staff to manage the tensions between performance regimes and creative endeavour. (212)

Hammersley-Fletcher (2015) also cites the work of El-Sawad et al. (2004) on how heads respond to 'crippling dilemmas' (205) between pressures stemming from competing sets of values by lapsing, often unconsciously, into 'doublethink' (ibid.) as a way of staving off the tension. This is a phenomenon further explored by Ball et al. (2011) in relation to the wider teaching profession. Their interviews, they argue, showed that teachers shift between different positions with regards to inclusion and standards, for example, depending on the context of the conversation, without acknowledging the contradictions between them. Teachers are thus in 'a liminal state of being' and 'essentially incoherent subject[s]' (616). Their very language is altered by incessant interventions and a managerial culture so that they become unwitting spokespeople for the official view of school life. Through making the connections between values and actions explicit we argue that schools can deal with the reality of pressures from 'standards' in ways that avoid such mental splits, a point reframed from earlier work (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006b).

Our heads' interviews indicate that the Index for Inclusion provides a robust framework of language for values, principles, indicators and critical questioning that, once engaged with, makes a lapse into doublespeak more difficult. We see this from the 'welcoming' example, where the principle, once explicitly acknowledged, was used to dig deep beneath the surface of school life, provoking honest self-assessment followed by changes in cultures, policies and practices. The use of the Index presents a dilemma for heads in the context of a regional and national culture of excluding values: it pushes them into a more politicised position that seeks to disabuse their teachers of the tendency to elide or falsely reconcile contradictory values embedded in policies of school management, inspection, curriculum and assessment. This is reflected in Richard's comments about the danger of a growing gap between the school leadership team and other staff, under unrelenting external pressure, despite the avowed attempt at values-led reform.

Only a small proportion of schools in Preshire worked in depth with the Index, although a much higher proportion took up one or other aspect, such as the development of a framework of values, and values literacy activities. The Index work is continuing in a number of areas in that County without external support at the instigation of groups of head teachers involving several of our interviewees in this study.

Concluding Remarks

We have provided compelling evidence that the heads in this study draw strength from relating inclusive values to the detail of their practice and making them explicit. This reinforces a strand of research on headship, which contests a necessary connection between strong leadership and an individual authoritarian rather than a distributed, shared style of headship. In theorising the place of values in action we make it easier to tease out and open for scrutiny the often-implicit excluding values that commonly underpin a school's interpretation of inspection- and outcomes-led development. These excluding values are linked to directive and authoritarian styles of leadership

that, we have argued, may indicate capitulation to top-down authority rather than strength. Asking heads and their staff to suppress inclusive values in favour of the more excluding values of government ministers and elements of the inspectorate inevitably creates personal and systemic strains. Where staff are asked to embody values that they do not fully share this can create stress and demoralisation leading to an increase in exits from the teaching profession (MacBeath, 2012).

We intend to engage in a more extensive critique of the Index in further articles informed by the work within a second authority in which the use of the Index has strong support from the authority's management as well as the gap that arises in some countries between the enthusiasm shown by those who translate and adapt the Index and its detailed use in schools.

Following the work in Preshire, the 4th edition of the Index has emphasised further the need for the Index to be used so that it works with rather than against Ofsted demands. Although we made a considerable effort by producing documents setting out the connections, we were unsuccessful in our attempts to form an alliance with those promoting the inspection- and outcomes-led approach to school improvement in Preshire. This article indicates that introducing inclusive values-led development will progress best when it is integrated within the authorized approach. This integration is being attempted in a further county, working with the 4th edition of the Index, where its introduction has full authority support. We call this county, Postshire, and we are in the process of documenting the initial processes of engagement. Colleagues in the authority approached us because they felt that current approaches to school development in their county fail to address the needs of many children and frequently leave both adults and children without a sense of joy in learning and teaching. We too want to raise the bar of achievement in education so that educational leaders are proud to announce the values that inform their actions, and that they draw on to lift the spirits and aspirations of future generations.

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