TeachFirst

Ethos and Culture in Schools in Challenging Circumstances

A Policy First Publication

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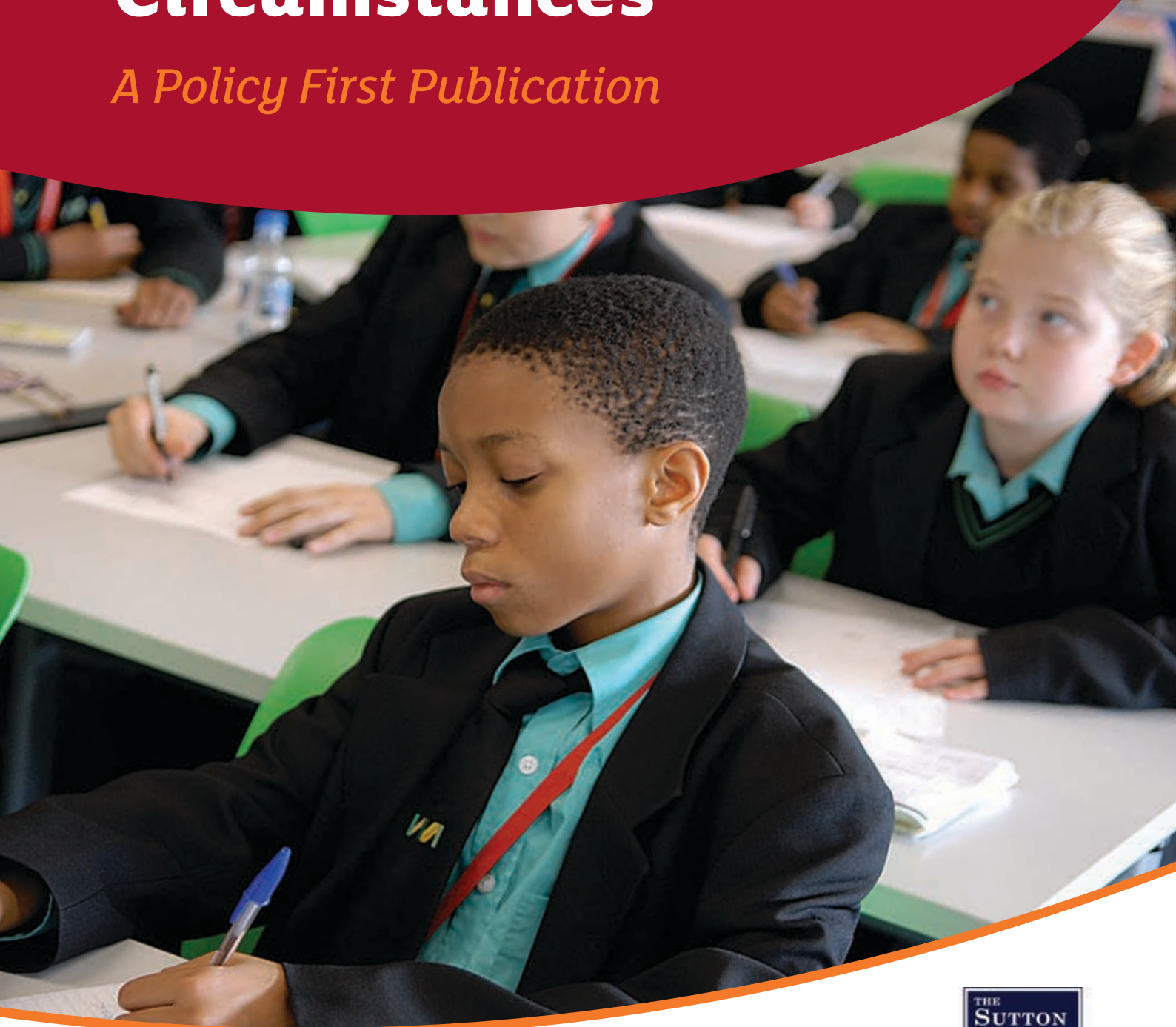
Teach First Ambassadors are working together to shape the future of education.

"Teachers are, I believe, like the front line ethos troops in a school."

'03 Ambassador

CONTENT

FOREWORD

Brett Wigdortz
Founder and CEO, Teach First

I am delighted to introduce this third Policy First publication, researched and written by a team of Teach First Ambassadors – graduates of the two-year Teach First Leadership Development Programme, and members of a uniquely empowered network working from all sectors to achieve the mission of Teach First.

In the UK today, the greatest determinant of a child's academic achievement is the wealth of their parents and this correlation is the strongest of any wealthy country on the globe.

I would urge you to read that sentence a few times and pause to think about it before delving into this booklet so that you understand the passion and urgency behind our ambassadors' work. It's a statement that sounds obvious at first glance, but increasingly awful, unfair and unacceptable the more one peels back the layers of its meaning. Behind those words lies hundreds of thousands of potentially wasted opportunities, of children who are not allowed the opportunity to make the most of their individual talents.

We believe that this one fact is society's most serious problem and a major contributing factor to many other ills. We also believe that this is a problem that can be solved.

We know that excellent classroom teachers and school leaders – who together can build a success-driven ethos for their pupils as discussed in this document - can change this situation and ensure that children from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds can succeed at the same level as their more fortunate peers.

Teach First is an independent charity that is dedicated to building a network of leaders focused on implementing this solution to ensure all children in the UK get access to the excellent education that is their right and our obligation.

Since Teach First was founded in 2002, we have placed over 2,520 teachers in schools serving disadvantaged communities, and now have a network of over 1,170 ambassadors, over half of whom are still working as teachers, and over two-thirds of whom are actively engaged in pursuing the Teach First mission of addressing educational disadvantage year after year. We have been voted seventh in the Times Top 100 Graduate Employers, showing that teaching in schools in challenging circumstances has now become one of the most prestigious careers for those leaving university. Recent research from the University of Manchester into the impact of Teach First teachers on pupils in schools in challenging circumstances has shown that there is a statistically significant correlation between participation in the Teach First programme and raised pupil achievement levels.

Teach First works to inspire, mobilise and equip our ambassadors by providing a number of initiatives through which they can create the systemic change necessary for us to achieve our mission. Policy First is one of these initiatives. We believe that influencing policy is a critical way to create systemic change in education, and that this systemic change will be achieved through collaboration with other colleagues in the education sphere, including teachers, school governors, business leaders, social entrepreneurs, and educationalists, as well as policy makers. This publication has been produced to capture the views and recommendations of ambassadors and to provide a method for communicating them to these key stakeholders.

Three years ago, in the first Policy First publication 'Lessons from the Front 2007', I wrote about the founding of Teach First and how it was based on the observation that there were schools which were successfully breaking the link between parental wealth and educational outcomes:

" All of these schools, without exception, had one thing in common: a talented and dedicated workforce; a workforce who had created a strong ethos of high expectations, and who worked hard to ensure that pupils had both the desire and the means to meet these expectations. "

A strong ethos is difficult to define, but you know when it's there. I have visited over 100 schools in challenging circumstances during my time at Teach First and it's the one thing that the most successful ones have in common. They may be grant maintained comprehensives, academies, voluntary aided or faith schools, but within a few minutes of visiting, one can tell what the school is trying to achieve and how they are uniting their pupils, employees and parents behind their vision. It's a feeling that permeates every aspect of the school environment, which everyone, including an arriving visitor, innately understands.

From the beginning, therefore, the ethos of a school and a classroom has been an essential part of the work of our teachers. This publication aims to explore this aspect, highlight the strategies our participants and ambassadors have used in collaboration with their colleagues to create this ethos and put forward recommendations that capture the voice of the Ambassador Community. Earlier this year, The Sutton Trust sponsored a research trip for a group of Teach First Ambassadors to visit four New York schools and investigate their approach to ethos and culture. Their experiences there have also helped to inform their recommendations.

Teach First, as an organisation, has worked over the last year to embed a set of values into our own working ethos – commitment, collaboration, excellence, integrity and leadership – and the process we have been through to involve all colleagues in this has been as important as the values themselves in creating a positive organisational culture. I am therefore particularly interested in the ambassadors' emphasis in this report on the people and processes involved in creating and enhancing a positive ethos and culture in schools and understand their

reluctance to be prescriptive about what exactly that ethos and culture should consist of. Our experience would concur that the journey is often more important than the destination.

The recommendations in this document are based on the experiences and observations of an increasingly diverse community of Teach First Ambassadors and Participants – diverse in the extent of their experiences, ranging from participants who are in their first year of teaching, through to ambassadors with up to seven years teaching experience and many years of leadership responsibilities; diverse in the schools in which they work, in five different regions in the UK; and diverse in their political views. Despite this diversity, the surveys, focus groups and discussions that went into the production of this publication all suggested overwhelmingly an agreement about the importance of ethos and culture for schools in challenging circumstances and the need for it to be high on the agenda of policy makers at a school, local and national level.

Discussion with mentors from PwC and also Professor Chris Husbands, Director of the Institute of Education, has helped to inform and develop the ambassadors' recommendations. In addition, these recommendations have provided the basis for roundtable debates at the three political party conferences. It will be interesting to see how this discussion further unfolds in light of the current education policy environment and in the context of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

We hope therefore that this publication sparks debate about an important aspect of education that is often considered too intangible to tackle, and that through this debate we can help improve the ability of schools and teachers to address educational disadvantage.

If you would like to contribute your thoughts and experiences to the discussion, please email ambassadors@teachfirst.org.uk

FOREWORD

Chris Kirk
Partner, Education and Enterprise
PricewaterhouseCoopers

On 22 October 2010, the Chancellor announced deep cuts to spending and services across the public sector. Schools, with a headline real terms increase in funding over the period, have fared better than most but, despite that figure, they will need to find efficiencies in order to maintain their present levels of improvement. Whilst many will be asking questions about the best ways to reduce cost and maximise income to continue to strive towards becoming a good, or even great, school, it has never been more important to look at the key question of what exactly it is that makes a school great.

In this publication, Teach First Ambassadors have provided important commentary on one of the key elements of school success. We know that strong and positive ethos and culture is intrinsically linked to great schools, but identifying what it is, within that intangible sense of 'the way things are around here', that makes the difference has proven difficult to pin down. The report begins to crystallise some of those elements and makes recommendations that will spark important and influential debate about what makes schools great.

New schools, whether they are academies or free schools, are likely to appear in greater numbers and more rapidly following this year's first tranche. Starting from scratch, these schools will be building their own ethos and culture, even before the moment they open their doors to their first pupils. They can take a great deal of insight from the experiences of the Teach First Ambassadors, whose observations and recommendations are carried in this report, and they should be looking for sustainable and scalable methods to develop a strong and positive ethos and culture. One of the key recommendations of the report is that the process of deciding on and establishing ethos and culture is in itself part of the output. New schools have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to develop and embed their ethos and culture without preconception, throughout the whole school.

Teach First teachers work in schools in challenging circumstances, which are likely to benefit from the Pupil Premium, a policy intended to provide greater support to those who need it most. However, all schools will be affected by the introduction of the initiative, and whether schools see funding increases or reductions as a result of the Pupil Premium, it will be important for them to ensure that their pupils and staff are supported by, and can rely on, a strong and positive ethos and culture.

Whatever the school, governors, leaders, teachers and other staff all play pivotal roles in developing, instilling and maintaining school ethos and culture. This publication advocates teacher collaboration when establishing a school's ethos. It also advocates recruitment, induction and CPD processes that are explicitly organised around the concept of ethos. There are implications from this for the way that schools deploy their most valuable resources – their staff – and schools will need to consider teacher pay and conditions when planning for the future, and defining their structure and requirements.
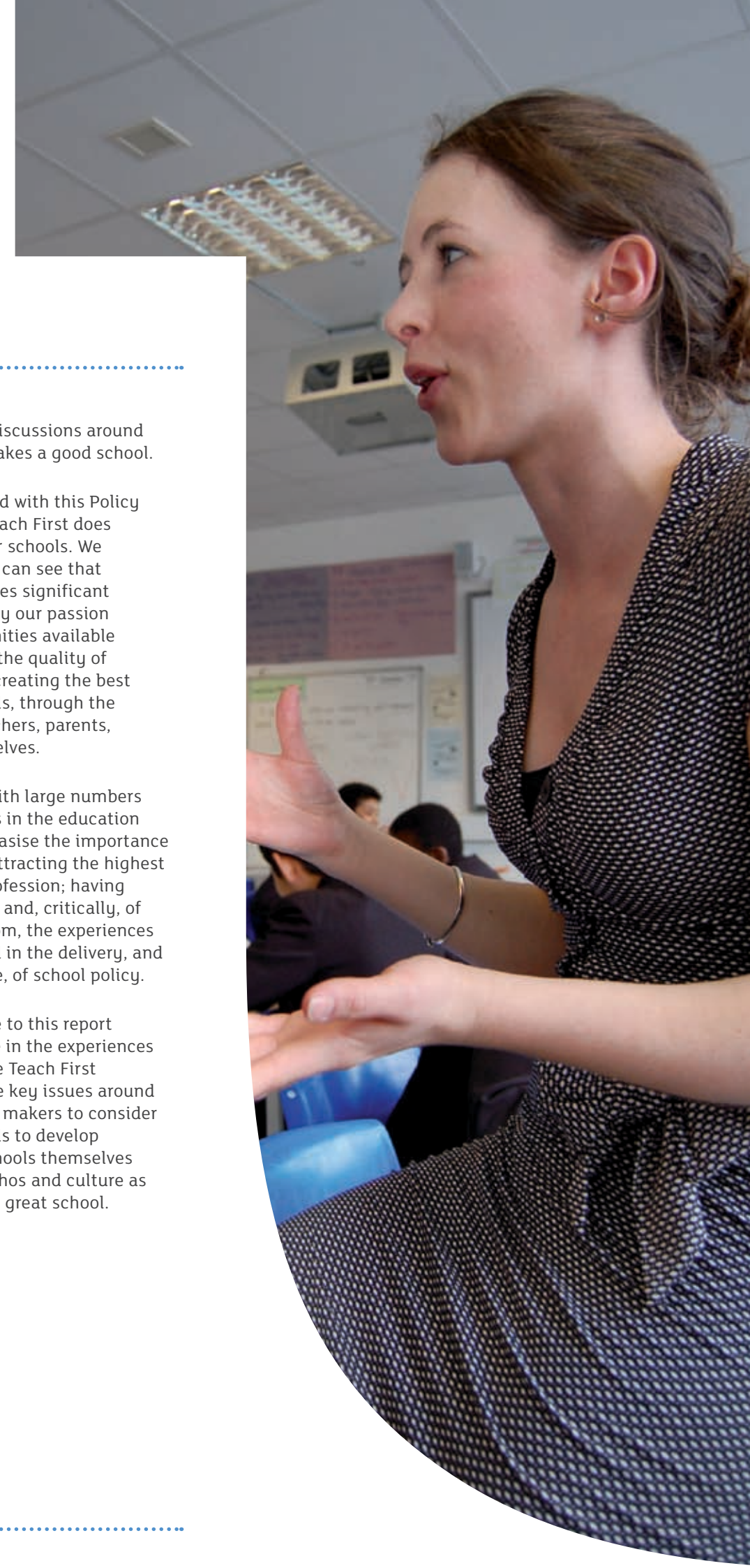
The publication focuses on schools in challenging circumstances, based on the experiences of Teach First Ambassadors. With a significant number of important new policies and with a tight fiscal environment in which to work, many more schools may consider themselves to be facing challenging circumstances over the next months and years. The recommendations in these pages, and the experiences described, will perhaps therefore begin to resonate with a larger number of schools, and the importance of ethos and culture will take a more prominent place in discussions around pupil outcomes and what makes a good school.

PwC is proud to be associated with this Policy First report, the work that Teach First does and the aspirations it has for schools. We share those aspirations, and can see that with significant change comes significant opportunity. We are driven by our passion for maximising the opportunities available to young people, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and creating the best possible experience for pupils, through the co-ordinated support of teachers, parents, governors and pupils themselves.

Our experience of working with large numbers of schools and organisations in the education sector continues to re-emphasise the importance of: the work of Teach First; attracting the highest calibre of teachers to the profession; having strong, visionary leadership; and, critically, of listening to, and learning from, the experiences of those individuals involved in the delivery, and therefore at the cutting edge, of school policy.

We believe that the response to this report should be for readers to take in the experiences and recommendations of the Teach First Ambassadors and debate the key issues around ethos and culture; for policy makers to consider how they can support schools to develop positive cultures; and for schools themselves to recognise and focus on ethos and culture as a cornerstone of becoming a great school.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Daisy Christodoulou
'07 Ambassador, Policy First Editor

This publication examines the role of ethos and culture in schools in challenging circumstances. We think it is of relevance to anyone interested in educational reform and improving social mobility. Teach First's mission is to tackle educational disadvantage – the shocking fact that a pupil's educational success depends to a large extent on the wealth of his or her parents. We know that this is something those from across the political spectrum deplore, and in this publication we want to contribute our experience and expertise to help solve this problem.

Ultimately, we feel that many current discussions about education reform miss out the crucial ingredient of ethos and culture. Structures, standards, teacher quality and curriculums are all important – and indeed we deal with some of these issues in this document – but we feel it is important to remember that, in many ways, a successful education depends on the intangible, hard-to-quantify sense of ethos and culture. We would want to be clear, too, that ethos and culture does not have to be expensive. On the contrary, we feel it is something that can offer huge benefits for very little financial cost, and thus offers a way of improving schools even in an era of austerity.

Although we think that all schools can benefit from our ideas, this publication is specifically aimed at those schools in challenging circumstances who suffer most from the correlation between wealth and educational success. As well as this, these are the schools we have experience in. The 25 people involved in writing and researching this document are all Teach First-trained teachers who have taught

for at least two years in schools in challenging circumstances. In April 2010, a smaller group of us visited four New York schools and investigated their approach to ethos and culture. We surveyed the views of Teach First Ambassadors and Participants on ethos and culture and received 225 responses.

In addition to our own experience, we consulted with other stakeholders at a series of roundtable events at the three main party political conferences, and we have engaged with some of the current educational research on this topic. PwC shared with us their expertise in public sector reform. Overall, this is a document informed by first-hand experience of schools, by an understanding of what works and what doesn't work, what's needed and what isn't needed. The schools we have taught in and visited deal with the sharp end of socio-economic disadvantage every day. We know not just from the statistics, but from our experience, the effect deprivation has on education. But what we have also seen, in some of the schools we've visited and taught in, is that great schools can get great results in challenging circumstances. Schools such as these are engines of social mobility, transforming the lives of pupils and transforming society at the same time. And we think that one of the main ways they do this is through ethos and culture.

Section 1 contains two chapters which deal with the theory underpinning our ideas. Chapter 1.1 asks why ethos and culture is important. It details some of the experiences of Teach First Ambassadors and Participants and looks at some of the practical ways through which they have improved ethos and culture in their schools. It also reviews the literature on the topic to show that ethos and culture helps pupils, teachers and schools to reach their potential. It also argues that prioritising ethos and culture is good in and of itself, regardless of any instrumental outcomes.

Chapter 1.2 outlines some of the theories of ethos and culture, and explains what we mean by these terms. It argues that ethos and culture is made up of common experience, shared values and beliefs and institutional symbols and practices. For ethos

and culture to be strong and meaningful, there must be consistency between all three of these aspects. Overall, it argues that ethos and culture can be defined as 'the way things are around here'. It also sets out the implications that this theory has for schools, implications that are addressed in the second half of the document.

Section 2 considers ways in which schools in challenging circumstances can bring about a strong ethos and culture. The four chapters in this section make specific recommendations that could be adopted at the school level. Our recommendations are specific yet not prescriptive, ambitious but workable. We know the pressures that school budgets will be under over the next few years and our recommendations take this into account.

Chapter 2.1 looks at the processes and structures that help to create ethos and culture, and concludes that changes to the school day and year, the school environment and the curriculum can help instil ethos and culture.

Chapters 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 all focus on a different school stakeholder and explain their role in creating ethos and culture. Chapter 2.2 considers the role of senior leaders, and advocates a hands-on and highly visible role that is symbolic of ethos and culture.

Chapter 2.3 looks at teachers. It argues that teachers, as much as senior managers, are leaders, and that all efforts to set and instil an ethos and culture must involve them. It advocates teacher collaboration when setting a school's ethos. It also advocates recruitment, induction and CPD processes that are explicitly organised around the concept of ethos.

Finally, chapter 2.4 explores the role of pupils. It recognises that the extent to which pupils should be involved in setting ethos is contested, but concludes that some form of pupil engagement is necessary for an ethos and culture to be truly accepted.

We conclude that recognition of the power of ethos and culture is necessary for all schools. Our

overarching recommendation is that the process of deciding and establishing the ethos and culture is in itself part of the output. Time spent by teachers and senior leaders carefully considering a school's ethos and culture and the best ways of instilling it are vital to a school's success. This is an important moment in UK education, with the potential to make significant and lasting changes to schools in challenging circumstances. We think that ethos and culture should be a part of these reforms, and this publication aims to help with that process.

SECTION ONE

CHAPTER 1.1

Why does ethos and culture matter?

Using our experience of teaching in schools in challenging circumstances, interviews with head teachers in the UK and US and current research, we make the argument that it is in the interests of schools to create a positive, learning-focused ethos and culture. This is because it will help pupils, teachers and schools to improve. We also feel that a focus on strong ethos and culture is particularly important in new schools, which have much greater scope when establishing an ethos and culture, and in turnaround schools, which are very often attempting to change a toxic culture. The current policy changes allowing the creation of new schools make our recommendations even more relevant and timely. In addition, at a time of financial austerity, we feel that a focus on ethos and culture can offer many benefits with limited financial costs.

Our experience is that not enough schools adequately value ethos and culture and that, where they do value ethos and culture, their efforts are not as successful as they might be. Under half of Teach First Ambassadors and Participants agreed with the statement that 'my school has/had a clearly identifiable set of shared values and beliefs that all staff and pupils are/were aware of'. As well as this, three-quarters of Teach First Ambassadors and Participants agreed that their 'school leaders would only prioritise creating a positive ethos and culture if it improved pupil attainment' (as opposed to broader pupil outcomes). The clear view from Teach First Ambassadors and Participants is that ethos and culture is extremely important, but that it is often not taken seriously enough.

There could be a number of reasons for this. The importance of league tables and 5 A* to Cs can lead to a short-term focus on year 11 academic attainment and an impression that focusing effort on long-term, relatively intangible projects such as ethos and culture is an unaffordable luxury. We are well aware that schools are bombarded with hundreds of new initiatives, expected to provide a range of services, seen as responsible for solving many of society's ills and yet are

ultimately judged by the number of 16-year-olds who get 5 A* to C grades at GCSE. Also, as we go on to discuss more fully in the next chapter, an important aspect of ethos and culture is common experience. Whilst it is fairly simple to establish a behaviour policy and a new badge, it is harder to constantly monitor the experience of over 1000 pupils to ensure that their experience is consistent with the school's stated ethos and culture.

Throughout this chapter, we give examples and case studies of the way that schools and ambassadors have worked to build ethos and culture, and of the powerful effect it can have. Our hope is that by clearly and convincingly stating the reasons why ethos and culture is important, we will encourage all schools to think carefully about their ethos and culture. There are three levels at which we can consider the importance of ethos and culture: the pupil level, the teacher level and the school level.

> Ethos and culture helps schools to improve

Educational disadvantage in the UK is closely correlated with socio-economic status (DfES 2005, 2006; OECD 2001, 2007; Blandon and Gregg 2004). Repeated studies have shown this effect, and have also shown that it is an effect transmitted down through the generations (Blandon and Gibbons 2006). This has important implications for ethos and culture. For some pupils, their home life will provide them with an ethos and culture that values education and educational success but, for others, this isn't the case. Therefore, in these circumstances, a school needs to create an ethos and culture that values education as the first step to addressing educational inequality. Ofsted (2009) noticed that this was the case in many outstanding schools:

" [Staff] work hard to create a safe, harmonious school environment that leaves the community's problems and tensions outside. The culture and norms inside the school can often be very different to those outside; as one head teacher put it: "The street stops at the gate". "

(Ofsted, 2009. p. 12)

A Teach First Ambassador noted what happened when this was not the case:

" There was a negative attitude towards education amongst a critical mass of pupils which influenced the direction of the entire school and had the effect of decimating staff morale. This led to a negative staff culture which in turn fed back to pupils, creating a vicious circle. "

'04 Ambassador

Ethos and culture is also particularly important in schools in challenging circumstances, because it is these schools which are most often the focus of school improvement initiatives. Much of the research emphasises the importance of understanding and paying attention to ethos and culture in the process of school reform. At a time when there is so much change in UK schools, this is a particularly important insight. Much of the rationale for new

schools comes from the improvement they are said to be able to bring to education in deprived areas. We think that, for this potential improvement to be fully realised, new schools will have to take advantage of their unique, one-off opportunity to create a powerful and enriching ethos and culture.

> Ethos and culture helps teachers to improve

It is important to recognise that ethos and culture is not just there for the pupils. It is important for teachers as well. Of course, money is a motivating factor and exam results are an indicator of success, but many good teachers are motivated by more than this. In the Ofsted profile of successful schools, teachers and head teachers, it is striking how many times the words 'moral purpose' and 'duty' are mentioned. In his book, The Moral Imperative of School Leadership, Michael Fullan argues that of all the aspects of school leadership, 'the drive should be moral purpose' (p.30). Wider perceptions of teachers seem to agree with this, saying that it is a 'noble profession' and that it represents 'giving something back, spotting potential, helping your community' (Freedman et al, p.10). Teachers in schools in challenging circumstances very often have a strong commitment to seeing all pupils do their best and making sure all pupils get an equal chance.

Case study

One ambassador planned and implemented his own 'No Excuses' poster campaign which started in his classroom and was eventually adopted by his department and then across the school. The ambassador started the campaign after seeing the lack of aspiration of many of his pupils, their often poor attitude and behaviour and the subsequent low standard of their work. A simple and catchy poster was displayed in several places around the classroom, including on the door into the classroom. At the start of the campaign, the ambassador spent time in the lesson explaining the poster, the importance of aspiration and the practical meaning of 'no excuses'. Then, at the beginning of every lesson, the poster would be the first slide of every PowerPoint and there would be a brief reminder and reinforcement of the key message. The initial explanation of what aspiration was and why it was important was incredibly valuable in making the poster more than a poster – it became a symbol of the values the ambassador wanted to instil in his class. Pupils could see straight away how their good or bad behaviour linked to the values represented by the poster.

Case study

One of the most powerful manifestations of the positive culture that existed at this school was the way in which staff behaved. The purposeful walk, the smiles they greeted pupils and colleagues with, the way they addressed pupils by name, picked up litter and adjusted displays – all this made it clear that the staff were proud of their school, the environment and their work. They liked being at school, they liked their pupils and the effect of this clearly influenced the pupils. The Ofsted report noted the powerful sense of community at the school, and also noted the way that the school allowed teachers to 'flourish'.

This commitment is stronger than any extrinsic motivation could be. A strong ethos and culture makes this moral purpose explicit, and is therefore a great motivating tool. Besley and Ghatak note that:

" *High-quality public services require a high intensity of effort… rewards to putting in effort are not purely pecuniary — agents could be motivated to provide high-quality services because they care about the output being produced. For example, teachers may care about teaching to a curriculum that they think is most conducive to learning. Thus, the mission of the organization can affect the degree to which agents are willing to commit costly effort.* "

(Besley, T. and Ghatak, M., 2003. p.13)

Or, as a Teach First Ambassador said:

" *It is easier to remain motivated where there is a clear vision.* " Ambassador

A strong ethos and culture does, by our definition, affect the whole school. As we have made clear, the emphasis should be on consistency and common experience. So a strong ethos and culture means that a teacher can see their efforts as being part of a wider effort, making their work more meaningful and valued.

One might expect, therefore, that given the benefits of a strong ethos and culture for teachers, it would lead to reduced staff turnover. Certainly, this is true in many cases. High staff turnover is a feature of many schools in challenging circumstances, and is

reduced in many schools with a strong ethos and culture - for example, Morpeth School and Challney High School (Ofsted pp.14-16). Nevertheless, it is true that many US charter schools with extended working days and years do have a high turnover of staff, most probably due to the heavier workloads for teachers at these schools. However, these schools were able to attract new dedicated staff and were confident that they could continue to do so. In many of the schools we visited there was a core of committed long-term staff, and systems and processes were strongly embedded, making it easier for new staff to quickly adapt to the school's ethos and culture.

> Ethos and culture helps pupils to improve

The qualitative research that has been done on this topic suggests that there is a link between ethos and culture and pupil attainment. Using statistical methods to measure school ethos, a range of surveys in the UK and the US have seen school ethos and culture as a determining factor in pupil attainment. In 1979, a study by Rutter concluded that ethos and culture was responsible for many of the differences between challenging schools in similar circumstances. Later studies (Mortimore 1988, Thacker and McInerney 1992, Glover and Law 2004) confirm the link between attainment and ethos. As Glover and Law say, 'effective teaching and learning requires the support of a forward-thinking culture stemming from a strong, and widely accepted, whole school vision' (p.331).

It's not difficult to see why a positive ethos and culture could raise attainment. As Rutter argues,

and as we discuss in the next chapter, it isn't just the shared beliefs and values that matter, but their consistency. 'Pupils are likely to be influenced both by the norms and values they are exposed to at school and also by the degree to which these appear to be consistent throughout the school.' (Rutter 1979, p.194). In a school with an inconsistent ethos and culture, boundaries and systems are in constant motion throughout the school day. These 'moving walls' do not make an atmosphere conducive to learning – where a pupil feels confident to explore, to question, to open up, to make mistakes, to push boundaries without fear of judgment or recrimination from peers or teacher.

Overall consistency of ethos and culture reduces the potential for conflict and behaviour problems. In a school with a strong ethos and culture, a pupil can learn in any classroom and know that certain actions will be met with comparable responses regardless of classroom, subject or teacher. Even more importantly, if the ethos and culture is well established, they will know exactly why a certain action produces a certain response. Pupils know what is not permitted, as well as what is allowed and encouraged.

Conclusion

As we have shown, there are strong instrumental reasons for encouraging a positive ethos and culture. Ethos and culture helps improve pupil attainment, raise teacher effectiveness and optimise school improvement.

However, we would also want to argue that, aside from this, school ethos and culture is the right thing to do morally. The policy climate of the last two decades has emphasised league tables and exam results. The previous Teach First report – Lessons from the Front 2009 – noted the distorting effects this could have; and again, in this year's survey, several respondents noted that this pressure could sometimes detract from a wider focus on ethos and culture. One ambassador said:

" *[In my school] there was, however, a very strong emphasis on measurable achievement that sometimes made efforts to improve ethos and culture feel forced for the sake of appearances or secondary to pupil attainment.* " '03 Ambassador

Certainly, the focus on league tables and exam results has had valuable results in focusing attention and energy on pupil attainment. However, there are also signs now that this approach is reaching the limits of its effectiveness in improving exam scores (Fullan 2004). There are also suggestions that it may have increased and exacerbated another problem the UK faces: that of the unhappiness of its children (Ofsted 2007, Unicef 2007). We would want to be sure that efforts for school improvement do not have the side effect of increasing stress and unhappiness amongst children. Fortunately, we believe that creating and sustaining ethos and culture can result in both improved educational achievement and improved pupil happiness. In many areas of life, the best thing to do is often in conflict with the most practical or the most efficient thing. In this case, we believe they are one and the same.

Case study

The mission statement governs all aspects of school life, including pedagogy and school management. Pupils are frequently asked to explain their behaviour – good or bad – with reference to the mission statement. Whenever giving instructions or commenting on pupil behaviour, teachers consistently ask pupils themselves to explain why certain actions are the right or wrong ones.

Case study

One ambassador built ethos and culture with her sixth form classes by using anonymous evaluation forms at the end of every unit of work. These allowed the students to explain the topics they had liked studying and the teaching methods they felt were most useful. The ambassador would then discuss the overall outcome of the survey with the class and discuss the ways in which she had incorporated their feedback into the next unit's lesson plans. This gave the students responsibility and helped them to take ownership of their learning, as well as giving the teacher valuable information about how the students learnt.

CHAPTER 1.2

What do we mean by ethos and culture?

Case study

Teachers at this school 'sweat the small stuff'. They pay great attention to the presentation of homework, posture in class, uniform and general appearance. As this is a small school, all the teachers know all the pupils by name, which means that they can confidently and consistently assert school rules and expectations at all times.
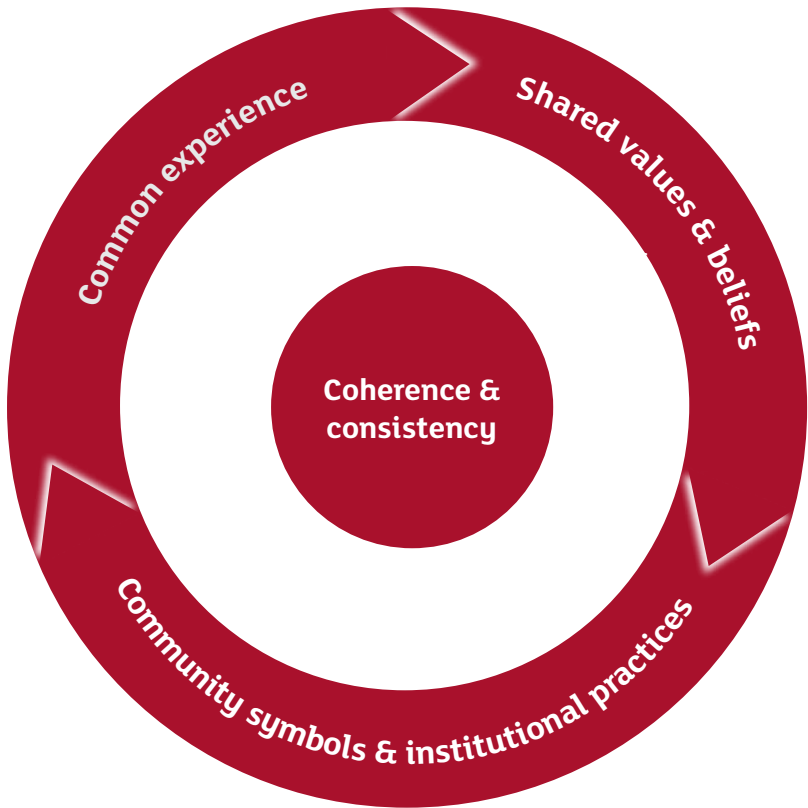
So, having established that ethos and culture is important to the success of a school, the motivation of teachers, and ultimately the attainment and well-being of students, we now want to explore what we mean by ethos and culture:

• Having a business-like uniform does not in itself mean a school has a business-like ethos and culture...

• Having an intake of academic students does not in itself mean a school has an academic ethos and culture...

• Having friendly staff does not in itself mean the school has a friendly ethos and culture...

So what does give a school its ethos and culture and how do different elements of a school community interact to generate ethos and culture?

In this chapter we give a four-step explanation of ethos and culture, drawing together theoretical perspectives and real-life case studies. We do not aim to define a good ethos and culture. Instead, we explore what lies behind these seemingly intangible concepts. We aim to show that, rather than being any individual aspect of a school, ethos and culture emerges from coherence and consistency between:

• Common experience

• Community symbols and institutional practices

• Shared values and beliefs

> *The role of common experience: Common experience grounds and shapes the shared values and beliefs on which symbols are founded.*

What's the thinking behind it?

Groups in society are bound together by common experience. This holds whether they are football fans caught up in the elation of a goal or religious groups bound together by the experience of worship. The same holds for schools. Any school can come up with a list of values and beliefs but, in order for these to be meaningful, they must be backed up by the day-to-day goings-on in the school. A school may claim to be a 'caring, safe community', but this is meaningless to the pupil who fears coming to school because of a bully, or for the bully who knows he can fight on every corridor. On the other hand, where pupils consistently experience staff who deal with bullying, and demonstrably value all pupils' well-being, over time they will learn that the well-being of others is to be valued. Their actions will then be guided by this value, common experience will be reinforced and a positive culture created.

Ethos and culture is generated by coherence between common experience, values and beliefs and community symbols. Because common experience impacts on values and beliefs, both positive and negative experiences have the potential to become part of culture. A striking example of this is the way a 'can't do' culture can develop in schools with a history of low attainment. A turnaround school may posit a new set of values and beliefs in an attempt to shape experience, but these will remain superficial until they are consistent with experience. The importance of common experience places responsibilities on all members of the school community, but perhaps most importantly on the leadership team, who are ultimately accountable for ensuring that day-to-day experience matches intended values and beliefs. The way values and beliefs themselves impact on common experience is discussed in the latter part of this chapter.

> *The role of community symbols and institutions: Community symbols and institutions (such as uniforms and policies) construct, represent and communicate shared values and beliefs and are part of the collective experience.*

What's the thinking behind it?

In schools, symbols and institutional processes are established, tangible features of a school that represent elements of the common experience. They give it direction and a raison d'être. They include policies, uniforms and mission statements.

Symbols and institutional processes perform three key roles. Firstly, within each school there are a whole range of values, beliefs and experiences that could shape the 'way things are around here' (Deal and Kennedy, 1982, pp.140-141). However, symbols and institutional processes reflect elements of the common experience which senior management, teachers and pupils consider important. Secondly, they represent these subjective experiences in a concrete way. Thirdly, they communicate them so that they can be shared by all members of the school community.

Lambkin (2000, p.190) argues that discussing the school badge provides a way of talking about ethos and culture with parents, pupils and staff in 'concrete rather than abstract terms'. One can appreciate that a discussion about 'what sort of ethos and culture do we want in this school?' might well prove nebulous and inconsequential. In contrast, 'how can we represent the things that we believe are important?' could help to overcome difficulties inherent in talking about something 'elusive and abstract'. He goes on to argue that one way of assessing students', parents' and teachers' understanding of the school's ethos and culture is by asking them to explain the badge. The badge therefore plays the role of a canvas on which culture can be painted and shared.

Case study

Around the school, large plasma screens display motivational quotations and thoughts for the week. These are explored in greater depth in assemblies and in lessons. Outside the school is a flag bearing the school's crest, a crest which is replicated on each pupil's smart uniform, including blazer and jumper. Trophies and certificates celebrating individual and team success on the sports field and in academic pursuits are displayed at the entrance to the school.

It should not be forgotten that the process of creating symbols and institutions itself impacts on school ethos and culture. In some schools, staff, pupils and parents work together to write policies or design symbols. In others a collegiate senior management team makes decisions; in others, decision-making is delegated to a key individual and leadership is distributed. Whichever method is chosen may be justifiable but it should always be chosen consciously, since it will impact on ethos and culture. In section two, we explore the impact that some of these different models of leadership can have.

It is important that we do not begin to think of community symbols and institutional processes merely as a 'means' to the 'end' of ethos and culture, but instead as essential components within it. We will therefore address the question: What symbols and institutions form the most significant elements of school ethos and culture? We can then move on to the question of how they are constructed and used.

> **The role of values and beliefs: Values and beliefs shape and are shaped by the collective experience. They serve to make symbols and institutions meaningful.**

What's the thinking behind it?

Members of the school community act on the basis of their values and beliefs. Their actions then shape the common experience. Members will also judge what they experience through the lens of their values and beliefs. Perceptions and interpretations of the common experience will therefore differ depending on them. Finally, values and beliefs determine the meaning that is attached to symbols and institutions.

People act according to what they consider valuable. This can be seen clearly in a school context. Working hard in a lesson makes sense to pupils who value hard work and believe that academic success is important. Ensuring that hard work in lessons becomes part of the common experience

therefore requires the engendering of values and beliefs that will motivate the desired actions.

Secondly, values and beliefs affect how pupils interpret situations. If a pupil believes that working hard is what 'swots', 'boffs', 'geeks', and 'neeks' do, then they will experience a hard-working classroom in a negative way and respond accordingly. Since the common experience is defined by all the actors in an institution, this needs to be founded on some commonly held values and beliefs. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that the common experience itself plays a significant role in developing these values and beliefs, as discussed in section one.

Once shared values and beliefs have been established they ensure that meaningful responses can be given to questions about symbols. Pupils may ask 'why do we have to wear this uniform?', but until they value being smart and professional, simply saying that a uniform is smart and professional is likely to fall on deaf ears. Correlation is easily equated with causation; looking at successful schools, it is easy to assume that having the uniform has led pupils to value what it represents. However, this can lead to endless energy being expended enforcing a uniform whilst failing to nurture the values and beliefs that it represents. Whilst symbols may be the objective manifestation of ethos and culture, values and beliefs are always there in the background underpinning them.

Staff and pupil induction days provide one opportunity for communicating values. At Lagan College in Northern Ireland, the school badge features a bridge. Discussing the way that the bridge represents the link between Catholic and Protestant communities provides a way of exploring and sharing the values behind this and making the symbol increasingly meaningful (Lambkin, 2000). Backing this up with a common experience designed to foster the value of cross-community partnership ensures that a virtuous cycle is created: values and common experience make the symbol more powerful and, in turn, the symbol consolidates the values and experience.

> **Ethos and culture: Ethos and culture is the emergent property of coherence between common experience, shared values/beliefs and community symbols/institutional processes. Together, they form an intangible sense of 'the way things are around here'.**

What's the thinking behind it?

We have shown that, on their own, neither shared values and beliefs, nor community symbols and institutions, nor experience, create ethos and culture.

Schein defines culture as:

" *A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.* "

(Schein, E.H. 1985, p.19)

In this definition, solving problems is a common experience that has led to basic assumptions and a 'correct' way of thinking and feeling (shared values and beliefs). These are 'taught' through community symbols and institutional processes.

Understanding why ethos and culture is so important, where it is located and how it can be generated requires investigation of:

- How schools create common experience and guarantee consistency.
- What symbols and institutional practices are effective in constructing, representing and communicating ethos and culture.
- How the values and beliefs of members of the school community can be aligned.

As stated at the outset, the aim of this chapter is to explore the concept of ethos and culture and not to prescribe what that ethos and culture should be. In the rest of this document, we argue that each school will and should have a different conception of the ethos and culture that is appropriate to its context. We firmly believe that each school should create its own ethos and culture, and that the process it goes through to do so is in itself a vital aspect of the outcome. However, saying that we do not want to define a good ethos and culture is not the same as saying there is no such thing as a bad ethos and culture. As we hope this chapter has shown, with its definition of ethos and culture as 'the way things are around here', an ethos and culture is not something that good schools have and bad schools don't. All schools have an ethos and culture, and in many cases that ethos and culture can be toxic, impeding the success of the school, teachers and pupils. Our discussion of ethos and culture in the following chapters is concerned with how schools can establish and shape a positive and learning-focused ethos and culture.

Case study

Aiming to succeed at higher education is one of the most important shared beliefs at this school. Its mission statement reflects this:
'We are working to provide our students with the academic skills, habits, and character traits to prepare them for success in college and in life.'
The school creates this ethos and culture by helping pupils to understand the many benefits of attending college. Memorabilia and merchandise from college campuses are displayed throughout the school, while teachers and returning alumni are encouraged to speak often to all pupils about their positive experiences of higher education.

> "The biggest way to determine whether a school has a strong ethos is how proud the students are of their school."
>
> **'03 Ambassador**

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SECTION TWO

CHAPTER 2.1

Processes

The day-to-day practices, structures and processes of the school are essential in creating and sustaining a positive ethos and culture. We have identified three areas in particular we want to focus on: the school day and year; the curriculum and extra-curricular activities; and the school environment.

> ### Organisation of the school day

The structure of the school day and year help to create and sustain ethos and culture. Firstly, we want to look at ways the school day or timetable could be changed to improve pupils' experiences.

As we discussed in chapter 1.1, common experience is an important part of ethos and culture. Too often, the structure of the school day and the timetable make common experiences hard to sustain. For example, in a typical school with 30 lessons a week on the timetable, a pupil might be taught ten subjects by as many as 15 or even 20 different teachers. Not only will each subject have a different teacher, but some subjects may be taught by more than one teacher. This is often referred to as a 'split timetable' and it means that a pupil may have four or five Maths lessons a week taught by three different teachers. As well as the fact that this makes tracking a pupil's academic progress difficult, it also makes it much more difficult to ensure that the pupil has a consistent experience and a clear understanding of the school's ethos and culture. Any teacher who has taken a class for only part of the allocated subject time can confirm the difficulty of constant

liaison with the other member or members of staff. They will also tell you how frustrating it is to try and learn names and build rapport; when you only see a class for an hour each week it is incredibly difficult to even begin to understand the young people behind the ID numbers and target grades. In contrast, teaching a group of pupils for several hours a week can help to build great relationships that have the potential to transform a pupil's learning and enhance the teacher's effectiveness.

This is a particular problem for secondary schools, which tend to be larger than primary schools. James Wetz has shown that, in Bristol, 38% of pupils who left school without any GCSEs achieved average or above average results at primary schools (2009, p.10). He attributes this to the smaller, 'family-like' structures of primary schools compared with the large, often impersonal secondary schools. It is for this reason that a previous Teach First Policy First report advocated smaller schools, or small school structures within larger schools. Even larger schools can use the structure of the school day to ensure that there are 'characteristics of smallness' which will help to create a strong ethos and culture experienced consistently by all pupils. So, instead of a pupil being taught by 15 or 20 teachers a week, the timetable should be organised so that each pupil is taught by as few teachers per week as possible. Time should also be set aside for collaboration between teachers teaching the same students rather than the same subject; this would increase the consistency of experience for the pupil.

We want to make it clear that this does not mean individual subjects or subject teaching time would have to be compromised. A large part of what we are advocating could be achieved by the abolition of split timetables. As well as this, it might make more sense, especially at Key Stage Three, to reduce the number of subjects taught and increase the amount of time devoted to each one. Depending on the capacity within the teaching staff, staff with the appropriate skills could also teach two subjects. We would also want to make clear that with innovation and creativity, this would not have significant financial cost.

> ### Length of the school day and year

The link between hours studying and success in a given pursuit is not as clear as may be expected. Despite Malcolm Gladwell's (2008) claim that 10,000 hours of studying can lead to being an expert in any given field, there is some conflicting evidence from school-system data. For example, Finland has one of the highest performing school systems in the OECD and yet their children begin school at seven years and have fewer hours in school than many other countries. However, many UK and US schools in challenging circumstances have extended and flexible school days and years with the explicit aim of increasing the time that young people spend in formal education and structured activities. We believe that this approach is successful in developing a strong ethos and culture in certain

environments. We recognise that this approach has the potential to be extremely expensive, as the biggest cost of any school is staffing and increasing this by 10% or 20% may be beyond the reach of most schools. That is why we would advocate some of the innovative staffing models we saw in the US. For example, at one New York school we visited they have increased the time pupils spend in school without increasing the amount of time staff work. They do this through a flexible approach to the school day and year. Some staff start earlier or finish later than in typical schools, and instead of rigid blocks of holiday, they have bookable holidays throughout the year. As well as this, senior management teach lessons. Taken together, these approaches ensure that costs are kept down.

> ### The curriculum and extra-curricular activities

The purpose of increasing the time pupils spend in school isn't just to increase the amount of work they can do. It also gives pupils more opportunities to experience extra-curricular activities. In many of the schools we visited with a strong, identifiable culture, the students experienced the shared values through common experiences in a range of different activities, some with explicit links to the curriculum, some without. In many cases this included an extended trip incorporating a variety of individual and group challenges. Throughout all these activities, the repetition and consistent reinforcement of values was evident. In schools in challenging

Case study

In this school, pupils in Key Stage Three are taught English and Humanities by the same teacher for two hours every day. Across the school, pupils have fewer teachers than would be considered normal in a UK school. This creates an environment in which all pupils can be known as individuals by all adults and have their specific needs met and understood. This also allows for powerful teacher-pupil relationships.

Case study

One ambassador introduced a series of character education lessons to improve pupil attitude in her school. Each lesson would be based around a different shared value that was a part of the school's ethos – for example, mindfulness, tolerance, the importance of preparation and what it means to be professional. This had the advantage of making the meaning of these frequently used terms clear and common to all. Pupils would role-play certain scenarios and discuss potential responses to typical school situations. Throughout the rest of the school, teachers would refer to these lessons and role plays to reinforce their importance.

Case study

At one London school, there is an established programme of off-site days. Every faculty plans one day out a year for each year group, meaning that every pupil takes part in several trips each year. All pupils are included in the trips – none are left behind. Trips include conventional ones to museums and galleries, but also less orthodox ideas such as a trip to a City firm to see how it worked. There are also in-school off-timetable days where pupils work on extended projects or cross-curricular tasks.

circumstances, many pupils will not visit museums, theatres and galleries unless their school takes them. Trips outside the school can also be extremely valuable in raising a pupil's self-confidence, and in building strong relationships between teachers and pupils. Nor do trips have to be expensive – walking to the local park or catching the bus to the local museum can have a big impact on pupils' learning.

> Environment and symbols

In Shaping School Culture, Deal and Peterson speak of symbols' 'powerful role in cultural cohesion and pride'. (2009, p.34) They list the sort of things they are talking about: 'Mission statements, displays of student work, banners, displays of past achievements, symbols of diversity, awards, trophies and plaques, halls of honour, mascots, historical artifacts and collections' (pp.35-36).

In our survey, we asked ambassadors and participants the following question: When you first walk into a school, how can you tell whether it has a strong ethos and culture? We received a list of responses remarkably similar to Deal and Peterson's observations. However, there were also plenty of responses which added a warning:

" *There are some external signs, like mottos on the walls, lots of pictures of student activities and events, and the state of classrooms, uniforms, etc, that link to a strong ethos, but I think many schools have those things but do not have a good ethos/culture.* " '04 Ambassador

" *Posters, quotes, slogans and such like. However, these can be superficial if the values and beliefs are not mirrored in the hearts and minds of staff and pupils. My school had the visual symbols, but if you scratched beneath the surface cracks appeared very quickly.* " '04 Ambassador

As we made clear in chapter 1.1, symbols are not the only aspect of ethos and culture and perhaps too often they become a tokenistic gesture towards the idea of an ethos. It is as well to repeat again here

that, on their own, these features do not create a strong ethos. Symbols have to symbolise something; there can be posters everywhere extolling the virtues of excellence, but if a pupil knows they can get away with a sloppy piece of homework it means very little.

With this caveat in mind, it is clear that in many of the schools we visited the physical space reflected the ethos and culture of the school. In many cases, schools had successfully and creatively made dated building facilities into pleasant and purposeful learning environments, with the values and goals of the school emblazoned on the walls (such as 'We will all read', 'We will go to college'). Where the ethos and culture is strong, display is used to celebrate success – with a large amount of student work displayed – as well as for communicating high expectations. For example, in several schools the names of the classrooms and teaching groups were the names of the universities where the teachers have studied, and the pupils aspire to study in the future. The key words and terminology were reinforced at every opportunity, from assemblies to lesson time to conversations in the corridors. In many of the schools we visited, pupils were clearly proud of their surroundings and took care of them – litter dropping and graffiti were rare and students would point with pride to their work on the wall.

Recommendations

✻ *Government should legislate to allow schools to be able to implement an extended and flexible day and year.*

✻ *Schools should organise timetables in order to ensure the common experience of pupils across the school and to give joint planning time to teachers of the same students.*

✻ *Schools should organise timetables to include dedicated time for extra-curricular activities.*

✻ *Head teachers, senior leaders and teachers should ensure that schools and classrooms are full of consistent and motivating slogans and displays.*

"A strong leadership is vital in pulling a school team together and delivering a coherent message on change."

'05 Ambassador

CHAPTER 2.2

People - Senior leaders

> *" A strong leadership is vital in pulling a school team together and delivering a coherent message on change. "*
> '05 Ambassador

What we saw in the good schools we visited, and what our ambassadors and teachers reported, was the importance of hands-on, visible, highly symbolic senior leadership in the creation of a strong ethos. This agrees with much of the research on school improvement and ethos and culture. For instance, Cheong (1993) links good senior leadership to stronger teacher motivation and satisfaction, whilst Senge (1990) points towards the role of a leader championing a shared vision and, in their most recent work, Deal and Peterson (2009) recognise school leaders as those who shape a school's identity and image.

In particular, head teachers and senior leaders have a particularly important role to play in schools in challenging circumstances, such as the kind analysed in Ofsted's Twelve Outstanding Schools report (2009). As was noted in chapter 1.1, Ofsted makes a strong link between school improvement and ethos and culture. Not only this, but all of the schools they looked at were transformed under the regime of a new head teacher. One of the central features they identify, and one of the central recommendations we make, concerns the visibility and presence of senior leaders. All that we have read and seen leads us to believe that if senior leaders are not immersing themselves in the day-to-day practice of their school, it is unlikely that they will be able to establish a strong and consistent ethos and culture. Ofsted notes that:

> *" Senior leaders acknowledge the importance of leading by example. It is seen as very important that senior staff (in most cases including the head teacher) teach, that they are seen to teach well, and that they are included in the usual arrangements for lesson observation, monitoring and evaluation. "*
> (Ofsted, 2009. p.33)

This 'high visibility' strategy offers a number of benefits. It gives staff support with behaviour concerns and ensures school policies are implemented consistently. It means that senior leaders can identify good practice amongst staff and establish who needs further support. Pupils know that what happens in the classroom matters to everyone, and that bad behaviour will not be overlooked. And, perhaps most importantly, this strategy allows senior leaders to model practice for the rest of the staff and pupils. As we make clear in chapter 1.2, an elaborate behaviour policy means nothing if it doesn't tally with the common experience of staff and pupils. A mission statement that encourages tolerance is not as valuable as the head teacher demonstrating tolerance in their day-to-day practice.

All of this is not to say that senior leaders can or should impose their vision on a school. The reason why we refer to senior leaders in this chapter is because we recognise that all teachers are leaders. Recent work on distributed leadership (Spillane, Diamond and Halverson 2001) recognises that leadership capacity in a school is spread out across people and practices. Fullan (2001) argues that the main role of heads should be 'to mobilize the collective capacity to challenge difficult circumstances'. Leading complex social institutions like schools and colleges requires a deep understanding of how those within the institution interact and how the systems in which they operate affect them. This would all seem to suggest that, in a turnaround school, an understanding of a school's current ethos and culture – or lack of one – is the first step to establishing a new one. And in a new school, collaboration with the staff who will be responsible for the success of the ethos is vital. This is the topic we go on to address in our next chapter.

Recommendation

✳ *Senior leaders should maintain a strong, visible presence around school. They should teach lessons, carry out regular duties and, through this, embody both leadership and culture to staff and students.*

Case study

In one London school, in every lesson of every day, one member of SLT is on a 'learning walk' in which they visit every single lesson going on in school. The head teacher does one learning walk each week. All staff get feedback on their learning walk visits at least once per fortnight. Every member of SLT is on duty before school, at break, lunch and after school and at lesson changeovers.

CHAPTER 2.3

People - Teachers and staffing

> *"Teachers are, I believe, like the front line ethos troops in a school."*
>
> '03 Ambassador

> Establishing Ethos

As we established in chapter 1.2, internal consistency is vital in building a strong ethos and culture. One of the biggest problems identified by Teach First teachers was that of a 'disconnect' between the senior leadership and teachers, and between the stated ethos of a school and its actual ethos. They saw this as one of the biggest obstacles to the creation of a positive ethos and culture, and much recent research reinforces this. Deal and Peterson (2009, p.162) note the damaging effects that result when schools become 'disconnected silos' and the efforts and energy of staff are fragmented and incoherent. The reason why this is so destructive to a whole school's ethos and culture is because every individual teacher plays a fundamental role in establishing ethos.

Recent work on leadership in schools makes it clear that leadership does not reside solely with the head teacher, but is distributed across the school (Spillane et al 2001). Classroom teaching involves many of the skills of leadership. This is why Teach First explicitly develops the leadership skills of its participants, and why Steven Farr of Teach for America (2010, p.4) writes, 'We see highly effective teachers embodying the same principles employed by successful leaders in any challenging context – principles we call Teaching as Leadership'. According to Farr, 'exemplary' teachers are those who, among many other things, 'create a welcoming environment through

rational persuasion, role models, and constant reinforcement and marketing to instil values' and 'respectfully mobilize students' influencers so that they actively invest students in working hard toward big goals'. This would also include modelling behaviour, and living out the values of the school.

When we combine the fact that teachers are leaders with the need for internal consistency to generate a strong ethos and culture, we realise that a top-down command and control method of accountability will not succeed in creating a strong ethos and culture. As Vlachou (1997) and Haydon (1997) make clear, teachers must be enabled to discuss values openly in order to understand them correctly and how they ought to be implemented. This would clearly help consistency and help the transmission of ethos to pupils. Thus, collaboration and open discussion between teachers and senior leaders should be encouraged, perhaps as a corollary to performance monitoring, which tends to be very standards-based.

Collaboration and open discussion is seen in many schools with a positive ethos and culture. In these schools, targets for the improvement of ethos and culture are generated through discussion in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and performance management meetings. In many cases, the wider aims of the school are broken down into individual department, class or student targets that are displayed and referred to regularly in order to keep students and teachers alike reminded of, and focused on, their shared vision. In one New York school the development plan targets were on display in every staff room, and in one London school they are on the back of the staff toilet doors!

Case study

At this school, all teaching staff could recall and discuss the school mission statement, which established higher education as a goal for all pupils. Teachers were willing and able to adapt their teaching style and routines to meet the demands of the school mission statement. For example, one Humanities lesson was structured as a university-style seminar. Teachers exemplify the school principle of 'Whatever It Takes'. Alongside pupils they work a significantly increased school day, beginning at 7.30am and ending at 5.30pm. In addition to this, teachers frequently arrive at pupils' homes in the evenings to share an update on progress with parents or carers and to learn more about pupils' interests outside of school.

> Recruitment and Training

Another important way we can help staff to understand the ethos and culture of the school is by staff training and induction that clearly introduces new staff into the ethos and culture of a school. In terms of Initial Teacher Training (ITT), we believe there are a number of current models which have had some success at this. Because we think that teachers need inducting into the ethos and culture of an individual school, we think that ITT which takes place in schools can offer benefits that college-based programmes cannot. This chimes with research that suggests that school-based teacher training may also be more effective at teaching classroom practice (Hargreaves 1990; MacIntyre and Hagger 1992; 2006). Teach First is a successful example of this, but so too is the Graduate Teacher Programme, which was launched in 1997. Recruitment onto School-centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT), in which a trainee is paid an unqualified teacher rate to work towards a PGCE within a school, is also popular. More than 1,700 trainees signed up in 2007, with many schools 'hailing it as an excellent "grow your own" solution to recruitment problems' (Barker, 2007). Ofsted noted something similar in the twelve outstanding schools it profiled, stating that:

> *"These schools train many of their own teachers. They are, typically, heavily involved in initial teacher training, some as "training schools"… More than this, leaders also see the benefits of being able to train and mould their teachers from the beginning, ensuring that they share their values and teach in a way that suits the needs of their school. As one head teacher put it: "If you've been trained here, you are already imbued with the culture and ethos"."*
>
> (Ofsted, 2009. p.16)

One of these schools, Challney High School in Luton, established SCITT provision which 'provided a supply of newly qualified teachers already attuned to the school's ethos, practices and expectations'. (Ofsted 2009, p.16)

> Staff Induction

Induction into ethos and culture should not just be for trainees, however: it is valuable for all new staff to understand the culture of the school they will be teaching in. We have observed good practices in which staff induction begins from the interview day, and involves a wide range of activities from extensive observation, assisting with extra-curricular activities, staff newsletters, summer training (up to four weeks in some cases) and working with an induction coach. In many schools, the tacit knowledge of the organisation has been distilled into as concrete a rubric as possible, such as a set of guiding principles or behaviours, which is passed onto new staff. In some multi-school organisations, the induction of new staff is a collaborative process, where, at best, a network of new teachers is formed and best practice is shared across institutions (such as the Uncommon Schools network in the US). This provides a collaborative ongoing network of support and development for new teachers. Ideally, this process would lead into staff identifying their own areas for professional development and identifying ways of developing and improving the school's ethos and culture.

Recommendations

* Government should expand the places available for school-based Initial Teacher Training.

* Head teachers should ensure all teachers are involved in the establishment of ethos and culture.

* Head teachers should use teacher feedback in developing and improving ethos and culture.

* All teachers should ensure that they take responsibility for establishing ethos and culture.

* Schools should make ethos and culture clear when advertising and recruiting.

* Schools should guarantee new staff a set amount of induction time.

CHAPTER 2.4

People - Pupils

" If the students do not have ownership they will not be on board. "
'07 Ambassador

As we have established, the head teacher, leadership team and teachers play a significant role in establishing and sustaining ethos and culture. Of more complexity is the role of pupils.

Our ambassadors and participants expressed a concern that an ethos entirely set and controlled from above was of limited relevance or value to a school. If pupils don't know what an ethos is or why it matters then by definition it has been unsuccessful. One ambassador stated that:

" The biggest way to determine whether a school has a strong ethos is how proud the students are of their school… the real ethos [should come] from the students themselves. Pupils need to be a central part of influencing the culture to give them ownership and make them proud of something that they have contributed substantially to. "
'03 Ambassador

However, many participants felt that it was not desirable for pupils to have a free hand in determining the ethos. As one ambassador commented:

" For challenging urban schools where the ethos and culture in the local community is not positive, it is perhaps the role of the school to try and influence the community's ethos. "
'06 Ambassador

Another ambassador, clearly aware of the political implications of this subject, said:

" I do believe the pupils (pupil voice) should set the ethos. However, there are obvious (without sounding too right wing) disadvantages; young people often don't know what is best for them, for example. "
'08 Ambassador

Certainly, this is an issue which affects all schools, whether or not they are in challenging circumstances. To what extent should pupils be empowered to change the school's ethos and culture? How much of a say should they have in the organisation of the school? Whilst this is undoubtedly an area of contention, we feel there are certain principles all can agree on. When pupils do not feel invested in the processes by which they are bound they are less willing and less interested in supporting or embedding it: 'participating in reform efforts increases students' agency, self-worth, respect, and sense of membership in the school' (Mitra, 2004; Rudduck and Demetriou, 2003). Therefore, at the very least, meaningful and serious efforts should be made to explain the ethos to pupils,

engage them with its central mission and show them the value it has to them. As well as this, in all of the schools we visited, head teachers used the student voice to check how widely the ethos had been adopted and to gain feedback about future direction.

However, other schools might want to go further and allow pupils to be engaged in the process of creating an ethos, with the idea that this will increase pupil engagement with the ethos. Perhaps the most famous example of this approach is at Summerhill School (Summerhill 2010), whose principle is 'to allow children to live in a community that supports them and that they are responsible for… and have the power to change community life, through the democratic process'. Other schools allow pupils more of a say over the content of their own curriculum.

In contrast, other schools adopt a more structured approach to pupil engagement, with the emphasis on getting pupils to understand the importance of specific beliefs and values. These schools encourage pupil engagement but limit the areas it can change, and seek to instil positive citizenship characteristics in their pupils through teacher-led lessons and activities.

Whatever the approach, the schools we saw with a meaningful pupil voice made use of traditional and innovative methods of engaging with pupils, such as the pupil council, form captains, prefects, head girls and boys, and pupil engagement in curriculum development.

However, in many other schools Teach First teachers felt that attempts to engage pupils in the development of ethos were tokenistic and essentially a way of fulfilling Ofsted criteria and meeting the raising standards agenda. A number of ambassadors and participants said that their school ethos was informed substantially by the 'warping' effect of attainment. The Harris Federation, which runs nine secondary schools across South London, has recognised and sought to address this with their Student Commission, which involves pupils in

evaluating and suggesting changes to learning. In a recent publication, they argue that student voice and similar common measures for engaging pupils 'rarely impact upon what really counts. They can keep students at the periphery rather than enabling them to take responsibility' (p.8). In contrast, a Student Commission is designed to 'create a widespread shift in motivation, engagement and partnership between all students and staff' (p.8). Another London school we visited has its own version of 'Thought for the Day'. Every day in the morning, senior leaders deliver a short speech on whatever the week's theme is. On Fridays, it is the turn of pupils to give the speech. Innovative approaches like this make pupil engagement a genuine and meaningful process rather than a box-ticking exercise.

Overall, we feel that the roles of senior leaders, staff and pupils in establishing a positive ethos and culture are intertwined. For all three groups, there are similarities in their role that we would want to emphasise. Senior leaders, teachers and pupils must be able to collaborate and communicate with each other, and they should model the beliefs and values of their school and see them modelled in each other.

Recommendation

* *Schools should have a formal method of engaging pupils with the school ethos and gathering their feedback about it.*

Case study

One ambassador worked with a charity to try and improve pupil voice and pupil engagement with ethos in a number of schools. One of the projects she worked on involved training sixth formers to give assemblies to pupils in the lower years of their school and local primary schools. Assemblies would focus on the importance of being considerate to others and being mindful of your environment. In one school, the sixth formers managed to tackle a long-standing litter problem by highlighting the issue in an assembly and creating an ethos that saw litter-dropping as unfair and uncool. The ambassador also ran whole-day workshops that helped younger pupils to understand the importance of civic engagement, and then worked with them to try and create visual media expressing this message.

CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst working on this report, many of us valued the chance to reflect on our practice and on the beliefs that underpin our own teaching. We've also valued the chance to share good practice, to discuss different methods of instilling ethos and culture and reflect on issues outside of the day-to-day practice of teaching. We feel this process is one that all teachers would like the chance to have, and one that they would all benefit from. We think that a positive ethos and culture and school improvement more generally can only be achieved through teachers and schools embedding these kinds of processes in their schools.

You may have noticed that most of our recommendations focus on the school or teacher level. A large majority of the respondents to our survey felt that ethos and culture was the responsibility of people in the school – head teachers, senior management, teachers and pupils. The clear view of our ambassadors and participants is that ethos and culture is vitally important, but that it is only effective when schools take responsibility for it. As we made clear at the start, the very process of establishing an ethos and culture is part of the output. There is no one-size-fits-all model that would work here. We would view the role of schools and teachers as being innovative, thoughtful and creative in their thinking about ethos and culture, and the role of government and policy to enable schools to do this. In the coming months we will be talking with politicians, policy makers and educationalists about our recommendations and how we can best communicate the importance of ethos and culture in schools in challenging circumstances.

* Government should legislate to allow schools to be able to implement an extended and flexible day and year.

* Schools should organise timetables in order to ensure the common experience of pupils across the school and to give joint planning time to teachers of the same students.

* Schools should organise timetables to include dedicated time for extra-curricular activities.

* Head teachers, senior leaders and teachers should ensure that schools and classrooms are full of consistent and motivating slogans and displays.

* Senior leaders should maintain a strong, visible presence around school. They should teach lessons, carry out regular duties and, through this, embody both leadership and culture to staff and students.

* Government should expand the places available for school-based Initial Teacher Training.

* Head teachers should ensure all teachers are involved in the establishment of ethos and culture.

* Head teachers should use teacher feedback in developing and improving ethos and culture.

* All teachers should ensure that they take responsibility for establishing ethos and culture.

* •Schools should make ethos and culture clear when advertising and recruiting.

* Schools should guarantee new staff a set amount of induction time.

* Schools should have a formal method of engaging pupils with the school ethos and gathering their feedback about it.

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*"Posters, quotes, slogans and such like...
these can be superficial if the values and
beliefs are not mirrored in the hearts and
minds of the staff and pupils."*

'04 Ambassador

SECTION THREE
Responses

RESPONSE

From The Conservative Party

> **Michael Gove MP**
> *Secretary of State for Education*

The most successful schools are those with a strong ethos led by an outstanding head supported by enthusiastic and dedicated staff. The common features of these schools are as described in the report. They typically have a consistent and vigilantly applied behaviour policy. And they make good use of symbols designed to emphasise a sense of community spirit in the school – such as uniforms and a House system. In the classroom teachers' attention to detail allows for a genuinely personalised approach. The inculcation of this type of ethos is absolutely essential to genuine school improvement.

I've seen academy sponsors take over schools in real trouble, with poor results and falling rolls and transform them by applying consistent principles. A strong leader with a committed team inspiring cultural change can raise attainment dramatically.

The authors of the report are absolutely right that this kind of change has to be driven by professionals. It cannot be achieved through Government diktat or centrally directed programmes. Both the report's recommendations to Government entail devolution of power to schools; by giving them greater autonomy over their school day and curriculum and more of a role in teacher training. I'm glad to say we're already acting on both these fronts. Our offer of academy status to all schools gives heads and teachers the opportunity to take far more control over curriculum, working conditions and budget. Many existing academies have used their freedom in the ways recommended by this report. Some have increased the length of the school day; others have laid on additional extra-curricular opportunities.

We're also committed to increasing places on school-based training routes. One of the first decisions I took as Secretary of State was to increase Teach First's funding. Over the next four years this fantastic organisation will double the number of trainees it takes each year; start training primary teachers and expand to cover the whole of England. In our forthcoming White Paper we will outline plans to overhaul the mainstream school-based route – the Graduate Teacher Programme – to make it more accessible and collegiate.

Alongside these changes there are other things Government can do to help embed a strong culture of success in more schools. Crucially we need to encourage our most successful schools to support those that are struggling. That's why we have insisted that all outstanding schools converting to academy status agree to help a weaker neighbour. And it's why we are increasing the number of National Leaders of Education – successful head teachers who agree to help their peers improve.

Rather than rely on initiatives generated by Whitehall and applied uniformly, our school improvement model is to broker support between those schools that already have a successful ethos and those that need help to develop one. That task is made easier by organisations like Teach First who have created networks of motivated, entrepreneurial teachers determined to drive improvement across the education system. This report shows that it is professionals who understand education best and why the role of Government is to help them get on with the job; not get in their way.

RESPONSE

From The Liberal Democrat Party

> **Sarah Teather MP**
> *Minister of State for Children and Families*

I'm delighted to be able to contribute a response to this publication. It makes a simple, but telling point – that the culture and ethos of a school, especially one in challenging circumstances, is critical to its pupils' success.

The Liberal Democrats have always considered education to be the engine of social mobility. It is a sad fact that, at present, we have an education system which too often perpetuates inequality rather than tackles it. The poorest children are only half as likely to leave school with five good GCSEs than their better-off classmates. And gaps in achievement emerge early - the impact of socio-economic status rather than ability can emerge as early as 22 months.

It is to tackle this that the Government is investing additional resources to increase free early education for the most disadvantaged, introducing a Pupil Premium to help to break the link between social background and performance at school, and planning a Green Paper proposing reforms to improve the system for children with special educational needs. These are important reforms which, together with increasing school autonomy and freedom, have the potential to transform our education system and give every child the fair start they deserve.

But, as this publication points out, children with special educational needs, or children from disadvantaged backgrounds, will achieve most in a school that is dedicated to achievement for all, and where the culture and ethos supports every child to succeed, whatever their background. The role of the head teacher and senior leaders in promoting that culture throughout the school, the role of every teacher in reinforcing that culture consistently, and how the culture and ethos can be articulated through the school environment, are critical to success.

Pupils too, have a role in shaping the environment for learning, and I was interested to read the final section of this publication which debates the contribution of pupils to creating or reinforcing the ethos of a successful school. To achieve our vision of education really transforming social mobility, the teachers of today and tomorrow will need to lead in new ways, create new school communities, and consistently challenge old ways of thinking. This is what Teach First is all about, and I am grateful to be able to contribute to its work in this way.

RESPONSE

From The Labour Party

> **Andy Burnham MP**
> *Shadow Education Secretary*

Teach First has established a reputation for achievement in a short space of time by placing inspiring top graduates into classrooms in the most deprived parts of our country. Its ambassadors are now well-placed to influence the debate on education reform via publications like this.

The collective experience ambassadors have gathered in recent years is invaluable. From a modest start in 2002, the Teach First programme has expanded considerably to become one of the top recruiters from Universities, including Oxbridge. The move to expand into primary schools is welcome and I wish Teach First the best of luck.

I have no doubt that ethos and culture play a hugely important role in unlocking aspiration and improving standards for all. A true commitment to social mobility means a "no excuses" culture. Fifteen years ago, we heard far too often phrases like "it's too difficult" and "children like this will never achieve".

In many of our schools this culture has already been turned around. Look at the achievements of the National Challenge programme where schools have been transformed by inspirational heads and excellent classroom teachers. Look at what has happened in places like Hackney and other deprived parts of the country – where Academies have played their part and schools are working together and learning from others that have turned the corner.

This will only happen in every community for every child if we take a collaborative, whole-society approach - where no-one is written off; where we give most and open up the best to those who face the biggest challenges; where success is measured not just in the results that individuals achieve – but also in the togetherness of the society we build.

This is the 'comprehensive ideal' and my belief in it is absolutely unshakeable. It's not about levelling down, but helping everyone to be the best they can be. It's about celebrating success, but always knowing the difference between excellence and elitism. It's about giving everyone the confidence to have hopes and dreams and not have aspirations held back by background, circumstances or low expectations of what life will deliver.

National Challenge and other initiatives have achieved a great deal but there is more to do. Any school without an ethos of aspiration and a commitment to ensuring every child achieves their potential is a school which needs to change. Countries around the world are continually striving to improve their system, and only by embedding a culture of aspiration in every school will we deliver the world class standards that we want to see.

The report identifies a number of factors as being critical to ensuring the right ethos and culture. A focus on getting the small things right resonates with parents as they work to instil positive values in their children. A clear behaviour policy and a focus on issues such as the importance of the presentation of homework can support children's development beyond academic attainment.

I welcome the report's recognition of the central importance of teachers and the underpinning "moral purpose" that great teachers have. Teachers are one of our most precious resources and their leadership is paramount to the success of our schools. It follows

that the training and support they receive should be one of Government's top priorities.

The report makes the case for the importance of leadership in developing a strong ethos and culture in schools. Great leadership is one of the most important factors in turning around schools in challenging circumstances. This is why it is so important that schools work together, with the best schools leading to improve standards across the system and embedding the "no excuses culture". Spreading excellence and unlocking aspiration means a joined-up collaborative system – not a disjointed, fragmented one.

The report argues convincingly that ethos and culture can help pupils, teachers and schools to reach their potential. I would argue that ethos and culture in schools can go further and help develop social cohesion and positive values across communities. Schools are uniquely positioned in modern society as a place where people from all backgrounds come together with common purpose – the personal, social and academic development of our children.

Speaking about comprehensive education in 1963, Professor Robin said, "It represents a different, a larger and more generous attitude of mind … the forging of a communal culture by the pursuit of quality with equality, by the education of their pupils in and for democracy, and by the creation of happy, vigorous, local communities in which the school is the focus".

Ethos and culture is hard to quantify but easy to identify. This report is a valuable contribution to current thinking, not just on education reform, but on the role of public services in the lives of all citizens.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1

Survey results

Please rate the following statement on a scale of 1 to 6; 1 being strongly agree and 6 being strongly disagree.							
Answer Options	1 Strongly agree	2	3	4	5	6 Strongly disagree	Response Count
My school has a clearly identifiable set of shared values and beliefs that all staff and pupils are aware of.	25	49	43	33	40	23	213
						answered question	**213**
						skipped question	16

Is ethos and culture important? Please rate the following statements on a scale of 1 to 6; 1 being strongly agree and 6 being strongly disagree.							
Answer Options	1 Strongly agree	2	3	4	5	6 Strongly disagree	Response Count
Developing a positive ethos and culture has a positive impact on pupil attainment	147	52	10	0	0	0	209
Developing a positive ethos and culture is important independent of its impact on pupil attainment	122	68	10	1	5	3	209
My school would only prioritise creating a positive ethos and culture if it improved pupil attainment	56	51	52	18	19	10	209
						answered question	**209**
						skipped question	16

Now please rank your top four answers with 1 being who you think should be the most influential.					
Answer Options	1	2	3	4	Response Count
Head teacher	86	24	27	16	153
Senior management	17	57	33	35	142
Parents	10	18	33	36	97
Teachers	50	54	60	24	188
Pupils	29	35	32	46	142
Community	4	9	10	27	50
Governing body	4	2	4	12	22
Politicians	0	0	0	0	0
Other (please specify, 50 characters maximum):					3
				answered question	**202**
				skipped question	23

How can we introduce a strong and positive ethos and culture? How important do you think the following are in creating a strong ethos and culture amongst staff and pupils? (Please rank your top four answers with 1 being most important).					
Answer Options	1	2	3	4	Response Count
Uniform	4	5	7	18	34
Mission statement	7	4	6	7	24
Consistent code of behaviour	52	40	44	24	160
Character education	3	11	8	16	38
All teachers aligned to common purpose/vision	39	58	38	16	151
Small school size	5	4	13	14	36
Structure of school day and year	2	2	4	8	16
Explicit messaging around school (e.g. displays)	1	3	8	11	23
Strong leadership	80	56	30	15	181
Meritocratic promotion and reward	1	9	19	40	69
Unity of purpose	11	15	28	31	85
Other (please specify, 50 characters maximum):					4
				answered question	**208**
				skipped question	17

Who is responsible for creating and maintaining ethos and culture? Who has the biggest influence on a school's ethos and culture? Please rank your top four answers with 1 being most influential in your school.					
Answer Options	1	2	3	4	Response Count
Head teacher	98	24	14	20	156
Senior management	31	82	32	22	167
Parents	3	10	19	28	60
Teachers	34	55	67	30	186
Pupils	26	18	41	68	153
Community	7	8	10	11	36
Governing body	3	2	11	15	31
Politicians	1	3	3	5	12
Other (please specify, 50 characters maximum):					7
				answered question	**204**
				skipped question	21

APPENDIX 2

The Teach First Ambassador Community

Ambassador Initiatives

The Teach First Ambassador Community is the uniquely empowered network of Teach First Ambassadors (graduates of the two-year Teach First Leadership Development Programme) working from across all sectors to achieve the mission of Teach First. Teach First Ambassadors have a shared experience of teaching for a minimum of two years in a challenging school and a strong understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing young people today.

Ambassadors have a strong personal commitment to ensuring that they continue their impact on education beyond the two years, whether they progress their leadership journeys within the classroom or beyond.

The Teach First Ambassador Community currently numbers **1,170**, approximately **50%** of whom remain teaching and leading in schools. The remainder are working in the business, non-profit, policy and wider education sectors or running education-related social enterprises. By 2020, the Ambassador Community will have grown to over **8,000.**

As an organisation, Teach First works to mobilise, equip and inspire its ambassadors to be effective in their roles by supporting their continued development as leaders, providing practical opportunities for their engagement with the Teach First mission and strengthening their networks with one another. In addition, we offer a number of ambassador benefits and career development opportunities that add further personal and professional value to becoming a Teach First Ambassador.

What is the Ambassador Vision?

Teach First Ambassadors are mobilised, equipped and inspired to address the Teach First mission as leaders in all fields. We work to achieve this vision by:

- Providing ambassadors with practical opportunities and support through which to address the mission, whether or not they remain in teaching.

- Providing ambassadors with access to the leadership development opportunities and networks needed to achieve this.

- Keeping ambassadors connected with one another and inspired by the mission of Teach First.

Ambassador Initiatives

Teach First's Ambassador Initiatives provide the primary vehicles through which over **67%** of ambassadors remain actively engaged with the Teach First mission on a day-to-day basis. We have broadly divided the ambassador offer into the following: **Teach On**, for those ambassadors continuing in teaching, **Social Change Initiatives** and **Career Development**. The following diagram identifies the six channels of support, all of which are supported by communication activities.

The initiatives work. This year:

- **223** ambassadors are in middle leadership posts; **31** in senior leadership including one head teacher.

- **14** social ventures have been launched and a community of over **50** meets regularly.

- **41** school governors are in post and **26** awaiting placement.

- Over **250** participants and ambassadors were consulted to develop this publication.

- **200** ambassadors are HEAPS mentors for over **400** pupils.

Over **300** ambassadors have supported the next generation of participants coming through Teach First.

For further information on Teach First's work with its ambassadors, please contact ambassadors@teachfirst.org.uk or call us on 020 3117 2445.

Teach On - Support, training and leadership development for those ambassadors continuing in challenging schools.

Governance for Change - A chance for ambassadors to develop leadership skills whilst maximizing their long-term impact as urban school governors.

Social Entrepreneurship - Training, networking and support for ambassadors interested in launching mission-focused social ventures.

Policy First - A forum for ambassadors to share their insights on educational issues and help shape education policy for the future.

HEAPS - A range of opportunities for ambassadors to support pupils from Teach First schools to progress to competitive universities.

Supporting Teach First - Opportunities for ambassadors to share experiences with participants, help recruit a cohort, offer financial support or engage new sponsors as Pathfinders.

Career Development - Tailored career support for ambassadors and second year participants to gain the skills, knowledge and networks to develop their long-term leadership paths both inside and outside of the classroom.

TEACH FIRST COHORTS

2003 COHORT

2004 COHORT

2005 COHORT

2006 COHORT

2007 COHORT

2008 COHORT

2009 COHORT

2010 COHORT