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**Structural Change for School Improvement: *Towards new models of leadership?***

**Paper 3:**  
**Emerging Patterns of Practice: Lessons from the field-**  
***Early reflections on ECM policy, practice and leadership***

**Christopher Chapman, Daniel Muijs, Mel Ainscow and Mel West**  
**Effectiveness and Improvement Research Group, School of Education,**  
**University of Manchester**

### **Abstract**

This paper draws on six cases from phase 2 of the NCSL sponsored research into '*new models of leadership*' to explore how the every child matters (ECM) agenda is being interpreted and implemented in practice. The paper presents two vignettes to illustrate the diversity of ECM policy, practice and leadership within new structural arrangements. The first is an example of an academy where ECM is considered as 'additional practice' and the second, an example of an area-wide initiative where a community partnership has been formed to support the implementation of the ECM agenda by beginning to 'rethink practice'. The paper then moves on to argue that a number of interpretations of the agenda exist within schools and that while some progress has been made, to date the policy has failed to fulfil its potential, drawing on the findings from all six cases involved in this strand of the study to outline five propositions pertaining to emerging ECM policy, practice and leadership within new structural arrangements. In conclusion, the paper poses three key questions for further consideration which it is argued must be addressed if the ECM agenda is to fulfil its potential by achieving a shift from 'every child's education matters' to 'every child matters' per se.

## Introduction

The drive for improved but equitable educational standards has become a central concern for educational systems around the globe; it is no coincidence that the focus of this congress is ‘quality and equality’. In 2003 the English government’s response to this challenge was launch the policy idea of ‘*Every Child Matters*’. The Green Paper (DfES, 2003) was published alongside a formal response to the Victoria Climbié enquiry, a girl who was abused, tortured and eventually killed by her Great Aunt in the London Borough of Haringey despite being on the radar of a range of services designed to protect young children. In 2004 government passed the Children’s Act and published *Every Child Matters: Change for children* (DfES, 2004a) and *Every Child Matters: Next steps* (DfES, 2004b). Over the past five years the ECM agenda has become part of English educational discourse and in addition to raising educational standards schools are now also expected to attend to the five ECM outcomes which demand every child can:

- be healthy;
- stay safe;
- enjoy and achieve;
- make a positive contribution

and

- achieve economic well-being.

These outcomes are universal ambitions for every child irrespective of ethnicity, socio-economic status or other circumstance which underpin a framework for action involving a range of national and local authority (district) agencies and departments including education (LEAs) and Social Services, which have been reorganised into Integrated Children’s Services, led by a Director of Children’s Services (DCS) who may or may not have been a former Chief Education Officer in an LEA.

It is worthy of mention that this paper has been written in 2008 as issues relating to ECM policy have, once again, hit national headlines in England. The recent events involving the death of ‘baby P’, again in Haringey, which led to the dismissal of the DCS and other senior leaders, indicate the level of challenge facing those responsible for developing a coherent and effective system where every child does matter. We do not draw directly on these events, since this is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, our reflections on emerging findings have potentially important implications for policy makers and practitioners alike who are facing this complex and challenging agenda.

This paper is based on an discussion document prepared for NCSL. It is intended to inform the development of thinking in relation to the implementation of the ECM policy agenda, particularly in relation to the implications for practice and leadership. In it we draw on two vignettes to illustrate the diversity of practice found within the ECM strand of the work. In addition to the vignettes we offer a number of initial propositions and frameworks developed during our analysis of data collected from six sites within the ‘ECM strand’ of our research and relevant data drawn from an additional seven site visits within the broader study of New Models of Leadership. We also draw on our combined knowledge, from a range of perspectives grounded in research, policy and practice, to reflect on the implications for future ECM policy, practice and leadership.

### Vignette 1: Big City Academy- ECM as additional practice?

This vignette has been selected as an example of where ECM agenda has been implemented as ‘additional practice’ (see proposition 3). That is, where additional structures and processes are added or bolted on to attend ECM issues while to those already in existence serve the standards agenda.

### **Context**

The Big City Academy opened in September 2006, replacing two predecessor schools. It is a larger than average mixed secondary school located in a disadvantaged area in a northern metropolitan borough, with an intake that is mainly drawn from this area. Its sponsor is the Church of England and its specialism is design and the built environment. This study focuses on leadership of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and picks up in particular on the role of the Support for Learning Team. This team is responsible for the attendance, guidance and welfare of students and is an area of heavy investment.

A detailed understanding of the educational, social and family contexts surrounding students was considered to be the basis for an effective response to the ECM agenda. In addition to internally generated data, a range of information from external sources is therefore utilised by leaders and managers to gain a better understanding of the circumstances in which they are working, for example information from the local authority and from multi-agency working groups. The network between local academies was also said to be very strong and the principal and vice-principal both have pivotal roles in promoting communication between members of this network.

However, the key to coming to a holistic appreciation of students’ lives was said to be communication between families and academy staff, particularly members of the Support for Learning team, and contact with members of the local community more generally. The close working relationships developed between team leaders, and students and their families, facilitate this. The Support for Learning Manager contrasted the academy’s pastoral system with a model of provision based on year head’s working with successive cohorts:

*In terms of thinking about what’s behind ECM matters, this structure’s best. You get a holistic view of pupils. In other schools year heads only have contact with particular families for one year.*

In addition to their work with students and families on the academy premises, team leaders learn about students’ lives by going out into the community. All members of the Support for Learning team take it in turns to spend a week following up attendance issues and home visits provide rich opportunities for knowledge exchange. They may also highlight particular issues, for example in relation to child protection. Some team leaders live in the local estate served by the academy and may therefore provide useful insights into the current community situation.

Primary schools are also a source of information about individual students transferring to the academy at the end of year 6. All primary schools with at least one child transferring are visited by the chaplain and family liaison officer, who learn about the new intake. The academy is also in the process of customising a CAF which will be completed in the future for every student in year 7. The aim is to generate as full a picture as possible of individual students’ capacities and circumstances on entry the academy. This should both support personalised provision and provide a baseline against which to measure ECM outcomes.

### **Key characteristics of current ECM leadership arrangements**

The leadership arrangements that were described in the previous case study are essentially unchanged. A key feature then identified was the structural separation of ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ functions, defined in the following terms:

*Leadership is here defined as those things that make for better provision in terms of Teaching and Learning. Management is defined as the oversight and deployment of the Academy's resources which support its mission.*

The rationale for this separation was that it would ensure the academy's sustainability. Leaders could focus on promoting the core vision and function of the academy whilst managers concentrated on the operation of support systems. The senior leadership team therefore comprised people with a strong teaching background, whilst managers were non-teachers with specific expertise in a range of areas relevant to the academy's requirements for support. Senior managers included a finance director, a facilities manager, an ICT manager and the manager of the Support for Learning team. Senior leaders and senior managers met regularly in their respective teams, and jointly approximately once every six weeks.

Delivery of the ECM agenda cuts across the leadership/management separation in that it is viewed as a collective responsibility at the same time as requiring some 'dedicated' leadership and management. A priority for the organisation as a whole is to develop an ethos that fosters ECM outcomes. All leaders and managers therefore seek to promote an internal culture through which students learn to value constructive and respectful relations, and which encourages their individual and collective aspirations. Different systems and strands of activity support ECM outcomes in specific ways. For example, leadership of teaching and learning is organised with the aim of supporting the highest possible academic outcomes. However, the Support for Learning team is understood as having a particularly important role in ensuring students' general well-being.

### ***The Support for Learning team***

In relation to student support, the emphasis has been on the development of a robust, internally managed system. The Support for Learning Manager, an ex-senior police officer, leads a support team made up of 18 non-teaching staff (known as team leaders), which aims to offer individualised support to all students. Team leaders are recruited from a variety of backgrounds, but the key attribute that they are said to have in common is being caring people. Unlike staff with pastoral responsibilities in traditional school contexts, they do not have to divide their time between teaching and other responsibilities. This allows them to be easily available to students and staff and to deal promptly with issues as they arise. They are the first port of call for students who are experiencing difficulties of any kind.

All students are members of teams of about 180, to which three team leaders are attached, one of whom is a 'senior team leader' who supervises the other members of the team. Each team leader is responsible for the attendance, guidance and welfare of about 60 students, arranged in two vertical tutor groups. Students remain within the same group and keep the same team leader throughout their time at the academy. This allows students and team leaders to get to know each other well and to develop relationships that are less formal than those between students and teachers. Team leaders were said to view themselves as surrogate parents ('mums in school') and to take on the role of advocate for the students in their groups.

Many of the issues affecting students are understood as relating to their family situations and the broader social context beyond the academy gates. Therefore, the remit of the Support for Learning team also includes working closely with parents and carers, who are viewed as partners in the support process and a vital source of information about issues that may be affecting students. Parents and carers may also call upon team leaders for help themselves and team leaders are required to provide parents/carers with a mobile telephone number so that they may be reached directly. All team leaders were said to have regular contact with a group of 'needy' parents/carers to discuss problems. To facilitate family support, siblings are grouped in the same teams, which allows team leaders to develop their knowledge of and relationships with individual families.

Although responsibility for pastoral matters and teaching and learning are structurally separated, teaching and support staff are expected to communicate closely. All information may also be entered into an internal database through an ePortal, where it can be reviewed by different staff and used to monitor progress or identify where support is needed. Team leaders are the conduit for informal and formal communication between the academy and parents/carers about progress. There are no parents' evenings, but each student has an annual progress meeting hosted by their team leader and to which their parents/carers are invited. The current attendance at these meetings was estimated by the head of the Support for Learning team to be 90 per cent, an indication of the success of the strategy in encouraging parental involvement.

### ***Multi-agency working***

The academy's leaders believe strongly that it provides effective support to students and their families through its own mechanisms, particularly the Support for Learning team. Where the need for an additional support role has been identified, the solution has often been to develop the academy's internal capacity. For example, the academy has appointed its own family liaison officer, and has bought in the services of a member of the local authority's attendance team. The academy's chaplain was also said to play a 'massive role' as an ear for people who experience problems.

Liaison with other agencies takes place where it is judged to add value to the support the academy can provide. For example, the academy has a particularly good relationship with the police service through the local liaison officer because this service is regarded as working closely with families on the ground in a similar way to the academy. However, in other cases liaison is not always viewed as helpful in resolving issues affecting students, and the academy may act independently, 'sidestepping' other agencies.

Nevertheless, the academy endeavours to maintain good relations with local statutory and voluntary organisations, and the Support for Learning Manager attends meetings regarding locality working arrangements (part of the wider area children's trust arrangements). He views these meetings as providing opportunities to make personal contacts and to break down some local resistance towards the academy. The aim at all times is to find ways of working with other agencies in practical and 'non-bureaucratic' ways.

### **ECM and Standards: Evidence of impact?**

After a monitoring visit in January 2008, the academy was judged by Ofsted to have made good progress, particularly at key stage 4, in addressing the 'legacy of underachievement' it inherited, and attainment has continued to improve. Other 'hard' evidence for success can be found in rising attendance rates and the high number of applications for places in year 7. It can also be found in students' positive responses to a survey carried out in the academy about the different kinds of support they have experienced.

As important as 'hard' evidence of outcomes in the views of those interviewed for this case study, however, were less quantifiable signs of the positive response to the academy from students, families and the wider community. Students' adherence to the uniform code was cited as one indication their pride in the academy, for example. Similarly, levels of parental participation at academy events, such as 'achievement assemblies', were viewed as evidence of pride in the organisation. Families were also said to be displaying increasing trust in academy staff, particularly members of the Support for Learning team. Many families, it was said, approach academy support staff for help before going to other agencies because they have confidence in their ability to provide assistance. In disciplinary contexts, parents were noted to have changed from being 'truculent' and questioning to being 'absolutely on side and supportive.'

Wider community engagement with the academy seems to indicate a growing confidence in the positive contribution it is making to the locality. This is demonstrated in increasing levels of participation in community activities that it hosts, and also the constructive relationships that are developing between community members and staff to resolve issues. For example, the Support for Learning Manager and the local authority's neighbourhood wardens have worked together to respond to concerns from local residents about students' behaviour in the vicinity of the academy. It is hoped that gradually students will become 'ambassadors' in the community, positively influencing a wider group because of their experiences at the academy. An example of the way this might work can be seen in the growing popularity of the local army cadet detachment, based at the academy. The detachment began with eight academy students but now involves 36 young people from the local community.

## **Vignette 2: Portree Community Partnership- ECM as rethinking practice?**

The Portree Community Partnership is a network of service providers with voluntarily shared but substantive and authoritative governance, leadership and management arrangements built around a secondary and four primary schools. The Partnership is notable for the substantial connectivity which has been created without a statutory consolidation of institutions. It faces the interesting question of whether it is best sustained in a voluntary and mainly informal framework or in a statutory and more formal constitution.

### **The context**

The Portree is a quiet market town of just over 20,000 people, in south east England, less than ten miles from a seaside town. It is not easily accessible by bus or car and the nearest railway station is three miles outside the town.

There are five schools amongst the partners in the Portree Community Partnership, one secondary and four primaries. The five schools in the partnership are:

- **Portree Community College (PCC)** a specialist sport college, deemed to be 'good and improving' at its last, 2005, Ofsted inspection.
- **Primary School A** described by Ofsted in July 2008 as "a good school" after being placed in special measures in November 2006.
- **Primary School B** moved out of special measures into 'notice to improve' in July 2008 after 20 months in the former category.
- **Primary School C** described as outstanding by Ofsted in October 2007
- **Primary School D** described as 'satisfactory' and 'improving' in October 2005.

The schools had been working separately with a variety of the support services in a way that they have previously described as 'chaotic', with misunderstandings, poor response rates and uneconomical working practices. The five schools have, over the past three years or so, built on relationships which had substantial roots in PCC's role as a Specialist Sport College providing support and services, mainly for Sport and PE, to the primary schools and wider community. They also drew on PCC's experience as a Full Service Extended School when they decided to create a different kind of Partnership with other services. This Partnership is designed to provide governance for operational groups supporting the development and delivery of provision across the town. This includes a multi-agency operational group, serviced by 36 agencies.

The Partnership uses a comprehensive range of data to inform its understanding of the local ECM context as well as commissioning or conducting questionnaire surveys of pupils and parents. The subsequent analyses and interpretations are shared with the Board and/or appropriate operational

groups. There is additional understanding from the good professional connections between a range of providers who can share information about their service concerns and ambitions.

### **Key characteristics of current ECM leadership arrangements**

The Portree Partnership is led by an Executive Board (PPB), comprising headteachers from the five schools and representatives from a range of agencies involved in service provision for children and their families. The Board has no statutory constitution or powers. It works closely with the local authority's 'Local Partnership for Children' which covers the town and some outlying villages.

The PPB is chaired by the Principal of Portree Community College (PCC). The PPB's programme is facilitated and administered by a full time ECM Development Manager for the town who holds a post as Assistant Principal at PCC. Her role connects the various parts of the locality system to ensure that the Partnership's vision for aligned, full service provision can be delivered. Each of the five schools retains its statutory autonomy and independent governance. Over the past three years, the schools have provided the centre of gravity for the development of the PPB, drawing together a range of partners and surmounting some initial concerns from primary headteachers and governors about potential threats to their schools' identity and autonomy.

The key characteristic of the arrangements is the Portree Partnership Board which draws together a range of partners, including for example representatives from the five schools, the county's Children's Services Department, District and Town Council, the local business sector, Youth Service and the Police, in an informal but authoritative group. The Board is serviced by a full time ECM Manager who holds a substantive, non-teaching post in the secondary school leadership team. The ECM Manager's role is to work with PPB and representatives from other agencies, to develop operational plans, secure stakeholder support, and monitor progress

The PPB meets monthly and works through operational groups each of which meets around six or seven times per year. At present the operational groups are:

Transition Group	Adult and Family Learning Group
ECA Group	Children and Out of School Group
Multi-Agency Group	Students Group
Specialisms Group	Parent Group
CAF Group (0-11 and 11-18 Years)	

### **ECM structures and processes**

The present structures and processes have been described above. Their voluntary nature is striking. The Partnership now faces a very difficult decision about sustainability and how to ensure that the improvements are maintained and developed without being dependent on the contribution of particular individuals. (It is notable that many of the key individuals have been working in Portree for some years). The options appear to be to continue as at present and to hope that the turnover of personnel can be managed to ensure the continuity of service organisation or to establish a more formal, legal relationship between the partners. The present preferred option is a legal arrangement, probably in the nature of a Trust with the five schools becoming Trust schools.

### **ECM and Standards: Evidence of impact**

Evaluation of impact remains a concern for the PPB. There is evidence of improved processes and stakeholders report improved relationships and more effective working arrangements. There is evidence that professionals and other adults believe that the current arrangements are more efficient

and effective. Importantly, they also report that the arrangements make their work more interesting and, since it at least feels successful, more enjoyable. In terms of standards there is evidence of sustained improvement in educational attainment over the past three years at the end of KS2 and KS4. There is also evidence to suggest behaviour in school is good and improving. Teenage conception rates are low and NEETS are falling.

Interviewees were concerned that although these correlations paint a good picture, they are not evidence of direct, causal effect. They are interested in using data and local enquiries to explore some of the underlying trends, looking more intensively at particular processes (the pupils' experience of Year 6 and Year 7 for example) or at particular vulnerable groups. Each school and service has its own approach to responding to its pupil or client needs. Each of the PPB's operational groups has a plan identifying areas for improvement, appropriate evidence of approval and a nominated lead person. The connection between the institutional and operational activities is provided in part by the oversight of the Board and in part by the shared professional planning which this approach promotes. Some co-location of providers is also contributing to the effective working of the partnership.

Reflecting on the vignettes and evidence from the other cases within the study has led us to formulate five propositions:

**Proposition 1: Findings from the schools in this study confirm ECM is a fundamental and challenging reform: its purposes are relatively simple to state but their implementation is socially complex**

We find that, in the main, those working in schools recognise the importance of this reform and, in the main, display a commitment to its overall purpose. The policy has radical aims and provides an opportunity for those involved in the lives of young people to reconsider, how as professionals, they should interact, relate to and structure the support and guidance necessary to prepare the next generation of our society. In this context, the phrase 'every child matters' is useful in that it has a common sense appeal which people can readily recognise and understand. Unfortunately, its apparent simplicity can also lead people in the field to conclude 'we already do it'.

Within schools, the ECM agenda tends to be seen as being about 'every child's *education* matters'. This has encouraged many schools to engage with students that in the past have existed on the margins, perhaps allowed to fail, or put bluntly, in some cases expected to fail. In this sense, the policy has already had a positive impact. However, we have found less evidence suggesting significant progress towards the effective integration of services, multi-agency working, or radical changes of provision. In this sense, it would seem that the implementation of ECM has so far fallen short of the broader policy intentions.

This said, there are some encouraging signs. For some people working in the schools in this study, ECM reforms have reaffirmed their values and beliefs, and acted to motivate them to continue to explore new ways of working to support the broader achievement of their students. For others, the reforms have served to challenge an orthodoxy of thinking relating to school standards and simplistic notions of improvement. As a result, we have seen how some practitioners have begun to explore and re-examine their understanding of the relationship between academic attainment and achievement in a broader sense. Here we see glimpses that suggest it may be possible to achieve at least some of the more challenging policy aspirations.

**Proposition 2. Findings from schools in this study suggest different meanings of ECM exist within the field: this has led to a range of responses.**

One of the strongest messages from our initial analysis is the way in which the ECM agenda means different things to different people in different places. This is a particular concern since it is well established that a shared understanding of purpose is vital to the successful implementation of even the most straight forward educational innovation. And, of course, ECM is far from simple in that it demands deep changes in thinking and practice amongst all practitioners working with children and young people.

Our evidence indicates how there are different meanings of ECM constructed between schools and, indeed, within schools. This plurality of meaning leads to a range of perspectives about what ECM actually implies for policy and practice. Specifically, we have found evidence of six broad perspectives that seem to underpin responses to ECM in schools (see figure 1.).

**Figure 1. Perspectives on the ECM agenda**

<p><b>Multi agency working</b> ECM means working with a range of other agencies: health, social services, etc.</p>	<p><b>Area-based collaboration</b> ECM means that we need to work with other schools serving our community to tackle local issues.</p>	<p><b>Extended schooling</b> ECM requires the provision of additional services ‘wrapped around’ the school.</p>
<p><b>Inclusive schooling</b> ECM understood as an issue of responding to vulnerable groups of learners.</p>	<p><b>Curriculum development</b> ECM as a curriculum theme</p>	<p><b>Common sense</b> ECM as integral to current practice: “we are already doing it; there is nothing new for us to do here”.</p>

Given this degree of plurality, it is common for a multitude of perspectives to exist within a school. This can lead to situations where, without precise articulation, the ECM agenda becomes perceived as concerned with anything and everything in a way that leads to little change. On the other hand, under certain conditions, it can lead to a fundamental review of thinking and practice: in effect, making ECM an overarching principle that underpins the work of the school. All of this suggests that school leaders have a key role to play in establishing a common sense of meaning about the policy across their staff and communities.

**Proposition 3. Findings from schools in this study suggest emerging responses have two key dimensions: the ‘organisation’ and ‘location’ of practice**

We note evidence of two significant dimensions in the field to emerging responses to the ECM agenda. The first of these relates to organisational arrangements, or indeed ‘new models’ and the second is concerned with the location of practice.

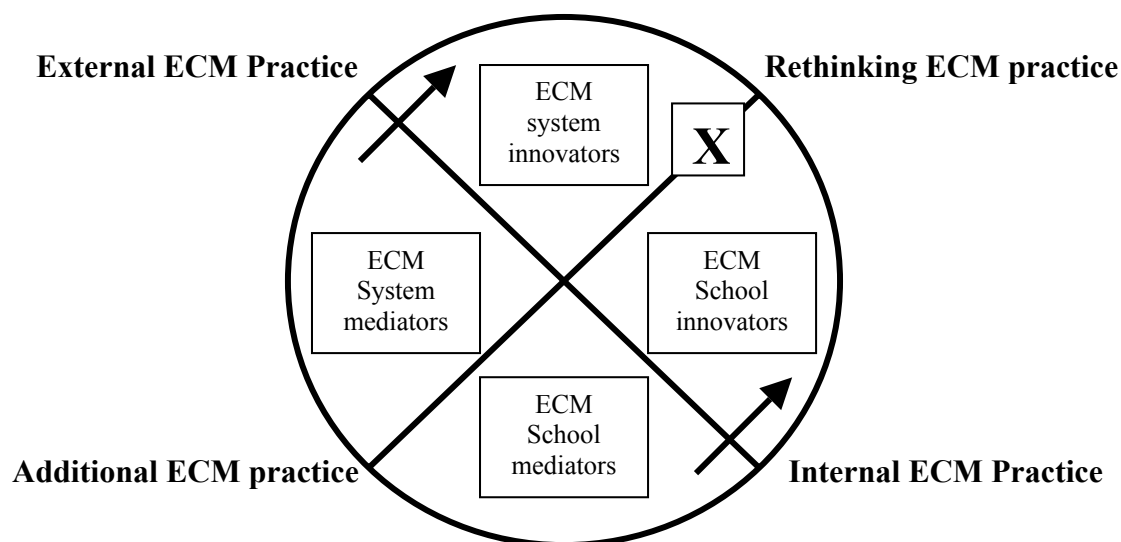
Drawing on the work of Mintzberg (1979) and, more recently, Lam (2004) - who make a distinction between bureaucratic and adhocratic forms of organisation - the schools in our study can be placed along a continuum where, at one extreme, ECM practice is seen as ‘additional practice’, a ‘bolt on’ to what is already happening; for example, the appointment of an attendance officer to monitor and track attendance of ‘at risk’ students. At the other extreme, ECM practice can involve a complete ‘rethinking of practice’, a re-conceptualisation of how and what is done; for example the reorganisation of local services to provide students with opportunities to follow a tailored 14-19 pathway through school and extended work/study placements.

A second continuum relates to *where* responses to ECM are located. At one end of this continuum the emphasis may be completely within the school; for example, the introduction of a new mentoring scheme for disaffected students. Alternatively, at the other end, practices may be completely external; for example a member of staff working in a primary care trust with social services.

In order to map out what all of this might imply, we can use these two dimensions as axes in order to formulate quadrants, where the external practices relate to issues of system design and internal practices relate to those of school design. This leads us to see more clearly how, adopting an approach of ‘additional practice’ or of ‘rethinking practice’ determines the extent to which practice innovates or acts to mediate the status quo (see figure 2 below).

Clearly, these are idealised positions and, in reality, no one school will fit neatly into any one quadrant. Rather, what we are summarising for purposes of discussion is, in practice, a messy and complex business. Nevertheless, these four ideal types serve to stimulate our thinking as to how and why different practices may occur and under what conditions they may be nurtured, and, perhaps most importantly, where current practice is located and which direction we would want it to move towards.

**Figure 2. A framework for thinking about ECM practice**



It strikes us that the ideal position on figure 2 may be located around X. Here practice is innovative and there is a blend of system and school innovation. So, the challenge for ECM policy is to move in the direction of the two arrows, to stimulate a rethinking of practice rather than promoting additional practice, and to promote an appropriate balance between internal and external efforts. In order to achieve this, we argue, the current uncertainties regarding the purposes of the ECM agenda must be articulated and interpreted as a coherent agenda, driven by common understanding and a shared set of values. If this can be achieved, then we might begin to see progress using what some have called system leadership. Otherwise, the dynamics and tensions in operation within the system will mean that, for the most part, system leadership will flounder in rhetoric, be limited to aspiration, with practice lagging some way behind.

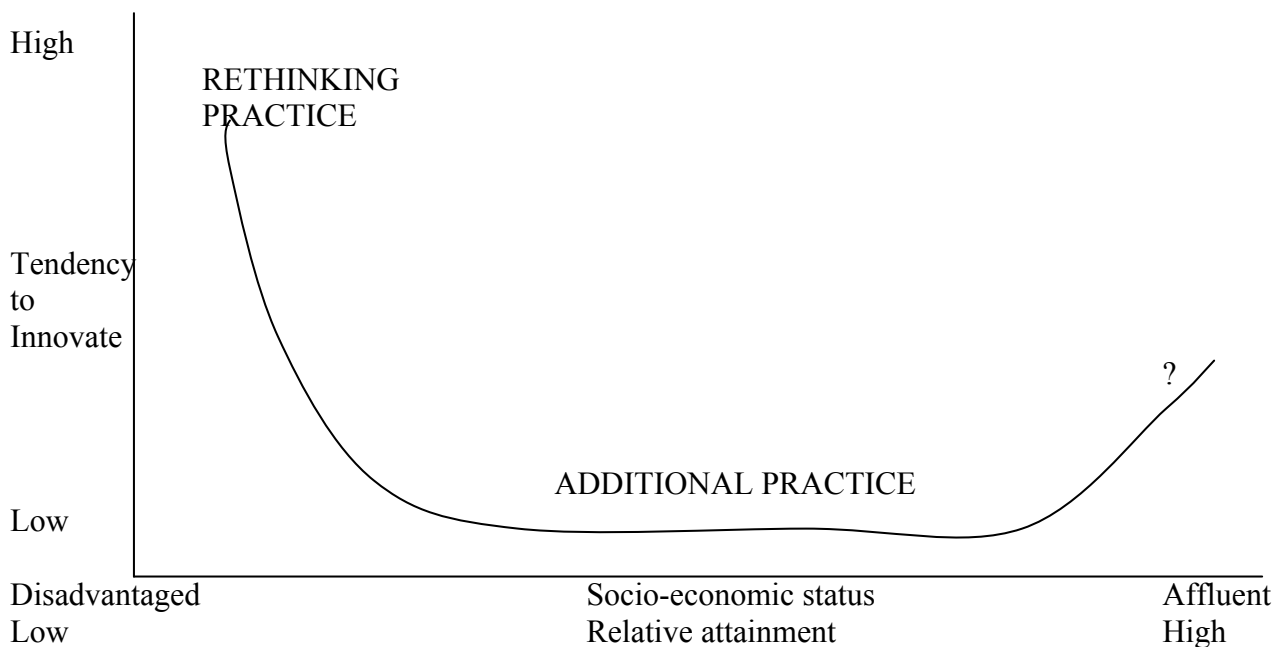
**Proposition 4. Findings from schools in this study suggest school context plays an important role in how schools understand, interpret and prioritise the ECM agenda: this is related to how easy schools find it to innovate**

We have seen how, within the schools in our study, context is an important factor in how those involved perceive and respond to the ECM agenda. Furthermore, we have noted how factors within school contexts play an important part in either triggering or resisting change. Whilst these schools are not representative of the wider population - they were selected as interesting examples from which we can learn - if we draw on our broader knowledge from a range of projects it would seem more than coincidence that many of those which tend to be experimenting and innovating to the highest degree are those in the most challenging and disadvantaged areas. As we have argued previously, it seems that the context has acted as a 'driver for change' (Chapman et al., 2008, p.8). So, for example, sometimes the restructuring or merger of an organisation into an academy, trust or federation presents necessary interruptions and, therefore, opportunities to 'rethink practice'. However, particularly in the case of secondary schools serving disadvantaged communities where a 'structural solution' has not been enforced, the converse can also be the case. For example, in those performing around and just above the National Challenge threshold, often in slightly less disadvantaged settings, we have observed a greater resistance to rethink practice. Here it seems the standards agenda continues to be so strong, preoccupying school leaders to such an extent, that the school's energy is consumed in developing traditional approaches to school improvement, such as literacy and numeracy interventions and a focus on strategies to increase the efficiency KS4 coursework and exam preparation. We argue that this tends to encourage situations where ECM becomes 'additional practice', bolted on in attempt to support efforts to ratchet up examination performance.

Our findings and broader experience also suggests that while examples which buck the trend exist, for the most part low to middle achieving schools serving lower middle class communities also feel pressured by the complex set of agendas they face and, therefore, tend to adopt approaches reliant on additional practice when it comes to ECM. However, the most promising examples in our study that would seem to have the potential to buck this trend have focused on developing coherent area based responses underpinned by 'rethinking practice'. At the other extreme of the continuum, we speculate that- in areas of high affluence where standards are seen to be high and there is less pressure or central government intervention - schools have more freedom to innovate and begin to rethink their practice.

In summary, then, as figure 3 illustrates, we conclude that opportunities for the most innovative practice occur in the most disadvantaged settings and that further work is required to ascertain whether this is also the case for the most affluent settings.

**Figure 3. Tendency to innovate**



School context involves more than standards and socio-economic factors, however, and by drawing attention to structural solutions and secondary schools, we have hinted at the importance of school phase in ECM leadership and practice. For primary schools we found that the ‘ECM as common sense’ perspective was widespread. Primary school leaders tended to argue: “Why wouldn’t we see ECM as central to our role? We’ve always attended to this agenda”. For those holding this perspective, ECM has provided a framework and a justification for their continuing work in this area.

Leading and developing ECM practice is further complicated in high mobility settings. For schools with very high staff turnover it is difficult to establish meaningful relationships with the students and their families. In addition, for communities with high mobility it is more difficult to track children as they move around our cities, or across authority boundaries. Where schools and communities both have high mobility, these issues are most acute.

A further important contextual factor contributing to the leadership and practice of the ECM agenda, are the local authority arrangements in place to support school leaders. Here we find considerable variability. At one extreme, there are some local authorities that have had to cope with the re-organisation of poorly performing education and social service departments into one integrated children’s service; whilst, at the other extreme, we see the merger of two very strong departments; and, of course, there are many combinations in between. The extent to which these new services have been able to support school leaders in responding to ECM has, therefore, varied considerably and this has been further complicated by an increase in the proportion of DCS’s appointed from non-educational backgrounds. School leaders in the schools in our study have a good understanding of the local arrangements and the LA’s capacity to provide support on ECM issues.

Some school leaders in our study spoke highly of the work of their local authority in supporting them with the ECM agenda, while others felt detached and remote from the local authority. Where there was no perceived support, school leaders tended to develop approaches based on additional practice gained from informal headteacher networks. Others had drawn on other types of support, including NCSL or SSAT, and some had worked within their close partnerships (eg. groups of academies sharing the same sponsor).

As we have argued previously (Chapman et al., 2008) it is headteachers who are tending to engage in increased boundary activity in an attempt to link the school to its wider context. Therefore, we view the development of multi-agency locally based networks involving headteachers as a major opportunity to develop a common meaning and co-ordinated approach to tackle ECM issues within, between and beyond schools.

**Proposition 5. Findings from the ECM strand of phase 2 of this research offer deeper insights into some findings from phase 1.**

**A) Our work confirms schools the fact that school leaders views are critical in determining how the school responds to ECM- Quality headteachers in the most challenging settings do make a difference**

If schools are to engage effectively with locally-based multi-agency networks, there is a need to construct a shared understanding and shared responsibility regarding ECM amongst key stake holders. Our findings suggest that there is further work to be done in this regard within education (and our broader experience would suggest this would also be the case in other sectors).

The range of perspectives held by school leaders, combined with the nature of the developments they are supporting, suggest considerable variation in the priority school leaders are currently giving to the ECM agenda. Therefore, we argue, more needs to be done to engage school leaders in these issues. Once engaged, school leaders then need to be provided with opportunities to discuss and develop their interpretation of ECM. This will provide the opportunity to develop a shared understanding of ECM but not guarantee it either locally or nationally. This indicates a strategic dilemma: policy makers cannot mandate a shared understanding; this can only emerge from the leaders themselves and must be linked to an analysis of local contexts. The danger, however, is that this could further reinforce the plurality that already exists, suggesting that relevant policy makers and agencies, at both the national and local authority levels, need to work together to create the context where school leaders have access to clear ECM policy guidance and its underpinning principles.

With all of this in mind, our findings suggest that school leaders are keen to see the development of new accountability measures, better tuned into the ECM outcomes, which recognise the multitude of inputs children receive from different sources within schools and across children's services. In this sense, individual schools have become an outmoded unit of analysis. In a system where partnerships, collaboratives and networks within, between and beyond schools serve much of the ECM agenda, accountability mechanisms need to accurately reflect where within the system issues are tackled and how inputs should be measured. However, the issue of is not only concerned with improving accountability arrangements and measures; there is another issue relating to school leaders' attitudes and views. This leads us to argue that, sometimes, the assumptions of school leaders need to be challenged. More specifically, the aim must be to shift thinking away from an over preoccupation with standards and the view of the school as an independent organisation, operating within a competitive system where the core objective is to out-do their nearest neighbours. It seems to us that it is unlikely that such a shift will occur if school leaders continue to

perceive government policy demands as, “first you sort out standards and, when that is done, you can move on to think about ECM”.

These arguments point to the need to place the very best school leaders in our most challenging settings, and to keep them there. The complexity of the issues leaders face in such contexts is such that only the best can lead and manage these schools, including the challenges presented by their communities and the ECM agenda.

## **B) Reconsidering our previous analysis: consolidation and innovation remains a constant dilemma**

The arguments we have developed take us back to the analysis we presented in our report on phase 1 of this research, particularly our discussion of the maintenance/development dilemma faced by school leaders. As we have noted, the new structural arrangements found within the system have created interruptions that provide opportunities for rethinking practice in relation to the ECM agenda. However, a structural solution or change of arrangement does not guarantee the rethinking of ECM practice or, indeed, the emergence of new models of leadership. At its best, we see examples of a complete rethinking of arrangements and practice. However, in some contexts, we see traditional and innovative leadership practices emerging together. We argue it is in these locations, where every child’s education matters, that further rethinking is necessary to fulfil the broader ambitions of every child matters.

The increased opportunity for school leaders to engage in boundary activity presents a number of opportunities, some of which have been discussed in this paper. However, as we noted in our earlier report, it also can lead to a potentially dangerous separation of maintenance and developmental roles within an organisation. In terms of developing leadership for ECM, this could be viewed as particularly problematic. Specifically, there is the risk that those left to attend to matters of maintenance within the school are unlikely to develop an understanding of wider ECM developments. As a result, they may not develop the skills necessary to take on ECM leadership roles. Similarly, opportunities for senior staff to develop the facilitative, brokerage and negotiation skills in an environment where there are no clear lines of hierarchy are likely to be limited.

Senior leaders taking on the operational management of the school while the headteacher is engaged in boundary activity also miss the opportunity to develop a shared understanding and meaning of ECM matters with colleagues from other sectors. The outcome of this situation is that future leaders may fail to make relationships with those from other sectors and not get sufficient exposure to the complexity of the task in hand. In short, there is a risk that we are developing an introspective set of future leaders and, in doing so, failing to prepare them for some of the most challenging leadership roles they are likely to face if they desire promotion.

### **Issues for consideration**

So, then, how do we move the system forward from a position where the dominant focus is one of making sure that ‘every child’s education matters’ to the next level, whereby ‘every child matters’? In this paper we have argued for a shift from *developing additional practice* to *rethinking practice*, and the need to balance developments between internal and external, or school and system level innovation. If this analysis is correct, it raises a number of questions for further consideration. These are:

- *In terms of policy*, what needs to be done to achieve greater clarity amongst stakeholders regarding the purposes and implications of the ECM reforms?
- *In terms of practice*, what needs to be done to move from ECM issues being tackled through the use of bolt-on, additional practices, to the idea of ECM as a set of principles that require a deeper rethinking of practice?
- *In terms of leadership*, what needs to be done to develop models of leadership that have the capacity to address the tensions between the need to ensure internal maintenance whilst at the same time ensuring the development of effective responses to the ECM agenda?

We believe that an engagement with these questions will lead to a greater understanding of how the ECM agenda relates to service provision and implementation, and that such an understanding is required to accelerate the movement from ‘every child’s education matters’ to ‘every child matters’.

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## Contact:

Dr Christopher Chapman  
 Reader in Educational Leadership and School Improvement  
 School of Education University of Manchester  
 Oxford Road  
 Manchester UK  
 M13 9PU  
[chris.chapman@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:chris.chapman@manchester.ac.uk)