**Features of Outstanding Schools**

**Analysis One**

1**. Overarching commitment to fairness, equality and social justice.**

This commitment drives the schools mission, values and practice in schools and is their ‘raison d’etre’ for leading schools in challenging circumstances. The leaders are confident and command respect from their school community, but at the same time have a sense of humility and modesty, with an eagerness of wanting to learn more about their often changing communities. They have high expectations of their staff, pupils and their communities and ensure that this is permeates across everything the school does.

2. **Distributed leadership at all levels**

All leaders in the school passionately share in the Head’s vision and commitment to fairness, equality and social justice. This team of leaders play a pivotal role in ensuring that the many difficult issues they come across on a daily basis are dealt with promptly and effectively, without distracting them from the smooth and efficient running of the school and their core focus of delivering high quality teaching and learning opportunities for their pupils.

3. **Delivery of Quality First Teaching, with a high emphasis on literacy skills and the use of swift and effective interventions for those at risk of falling behind**.

The leaders relentlessly focus on the delivery of high quality first teaching by all their staff, from teachers to support staff, each with a key role to play in accelerating pupil’s progress and learning. They ensure that all staff are experts in teaching literacy and reading, which is taught explicitly and consistently across the curriculum, with interventions carefully monitored for progress and impact. They create opportunities for their pupils and parents to engage in fun literacy activities, even when parents may be less confident in their own literacy skills or do not have the literacy skills in English. They are solution focused by using innovative strategies such as use of technology in the form of “Talking books” or using bilingual reading resources to overcome barriers. Another key feature of these leaders is that they ensure that the curriculum offered to their pupil’s is reflective of their backgrounds and interests, including positive portrayals of diversity. This demonstrates to pupils and their parents that they are respected and their heritage is valued. A rich variety of enrichment activities are used as a way of enhancing the learning experiences of pupils and are carefully planned at key points in the delivery of the curriculum to actively support learning in a practical, fun and meaningful way. Often when affordability is an issue they use school funds to either subsidise or fully pay for the costs.

4. **Use of effective and regular tracking systems which are not only disaggregated by different groups (i.e. gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, language background and special educational needs) but also look at how structural inequalities can come together and impact on pupil outcomes.**

They use their tracking data at regular intervals to monitor pupil progress and ensure that both quality first teaching and interventions are delivering faster than average rates of progress, which they know is essential for their pupil’s to get to age related expectations, as many of their pupil’s start at lower levels of attainment on entry. They use this tracking information to deliver bespoke and personalised learning suitable for meeting the needs of either groups of pupils or individual pupils. They expect their pupils to reach at least age related national expectations, irrespective of their starting points and although they are aware of both LA and national performance of particular groups of pupils, they continue to set expectations for them to reach the national benchmark rather than that of their peers, as they know this will perpetuate lower standards.

5. **They know each and every child, their background and circumstances.**

They use this knowledge to ensure that the holistic needs of the child are met but without compromising on the high expectations they have of them. They show “tough kindness with empathy” rather than expecting less of them because of their particular circumstances. On many an occasion, whilst on a learning walks, with these outstanding leaders they are vigilant and aware of their pupils’ needs and interactions. They also make it their business to know more about the personal circumstances of their pupils as do all Headteachers. However, in addition they make it their business to be knowledgeable of the extra learning their pupil's undertake at weekends and after school, including competency in other languages the pupil's may be learning or speak within the community and at home, as they can see the benefits of bilingualism as a tool for learning.

6. **Proactive engagement with the community**

They recognise the important role that parents and carers play in the lives of their children, especially since they know that schools only have pupils for 15% of the time. They, therefore proactively look at ways in which the remaining 85% of the time their pupils are with their parents can be maximised. They do this enabling their school to become a hub of the community, providing extended services in partnership with other key services so that wrap around care is available when needed. They also enable successful partnerships to be forged between their school and local complementary schools, who provide additional study support in language, religious or academic study. They work in synergy to meet the holistic needs of the same groups of children, with a collective emphasis on high attainment.

7. **They nurture and develop their own staff and governors and try to ensure that they are representative of the community their school serves.**

These leaders understand that the school is at the heart of their local community and that pupils need to see positive role models from the community in its staff and governing body. They therefore, nurture and develop staff and governors by providing high quality professional development opportunities and coaching. This also assists in alleviating some of the difficulties they can face in recruiting and retaining staff and governors. The schools develop strong partnerships with local universities and colleges who place trainee teachers in their schools. The advantages are that the school is able to train these teachers in both the generic and specific skills and competencies needed for teaching in urban schools, thereby having a ready pool of potential teachers to recruit from. They also benefit from having highly qualified additional staff in their school which means they can provide more focused quality teaching to their pupils, at minimal cost.

**Analysis two**

* They excel at what they do, not just occasionally but for a high proportion of the time.
* They prove constantly that disadvantage need not be a barrier to achievement; that speaking English as an additional language can support academic success and that schools really can be learning communities.
* They put students first, invest in their staff and nurture their communities.
* They have strong values and high expectations that are applied consistently and never relaxed.
* They fulfil individual potential through providing outstanding teaching, rich opportunities for learning, and encouragement and support for each student.
* They are highly inclusive, having complete regard for the educational progress, personal development and well‐being of every student.
* Their achievements do not happen by chance, but by highly reflective, carefully planned and implemented strategies which serve these schools well in meeting the many challenges which obstruct the path to success.
* They operate with a very high degree of internal consistency.
* They are constantly looking for ways to improve further.
* They have outstanding and well‐distributed leadership

**Analysis 3**

**Why do some schools achieve against the odds?**

The quality of the leadership. with a powerful vision, articulated and ‘lived out’ by the leadership, which engaged and motivated all staff, staff with very high expectations and the highest aspirations for pupils; commitment and teamwork; and excellent teaching and learning taking place

**Why are some schools outstanding?**

* There is a passion to see every child achieve their highest potential.
* They understand that barriers to learning have to be tackled in order to make learning possible.
* They are adept at reducing barriers, overcoming emotional and psychological hurdles and creating the right conditions for learning.

**What are the factors contributing to their success?**

**Achievement and standards**: ‐ The schools’ core purpose of maximising children’s achievement has been realised through a fundamental belief that every child can succeed.

**Leadership and management**: ‐ The leaders are intrinsically motivated to sustain excellence. Descriptions such as ‘brave’, ‘pioneering’ and ‘courageous’ sum up the qualities of leadership expressed by their colleagues. All are strongly focused on developing further the highest possible standards and achievement. In each of these schools there is a culture of high expectations and no excuses, collaboration with colleagues and close links with parents/carers and the community.

Schools which, while focused on their pupils and communities, are alert to the need to not only appoint high‐quality staff but also to add to their repertoire of skills to sustain their interest, motivation and effectiveness.

The most important resource for the staff for their development is often their own colleagues. The depth and extent of teamwork, openness in sharing practice, and interest in providing new and exciting stimuli for children’s learning all contribute to these schools as real learning communities

**The role of the governing body in supporting and challenging the school:**

The governing body is excellent in challenging and supporting the head and SLT. They carefully monitor the impact of the school’s work in raising achievement and rigorously hold school leaders and managers to account through effective use of data. The governing bodies discuss extensively what the data tells them about the schools’ performance including the interventions strategies and the impact of the strategies the school has put in place to improve performance of particular groups of children.

**Teaching and Learning**:

There are high levels of rigour and consistency. There is also a lot of support, for example inexperienced teachers are paired with outstanding teachers or work with parallel year groups of colleagues to plan high quality lessons.

Collaborative planning, marking and the moderation of pupils’ work are other important features which offer support and challenge to teachers.

Pupils are highly motivated in lessons because tasks and explanations are matched exceptionally well to their needs.’ There are high expectations of what pupils can achieve, stimulating and enthusiastic teaching which interests, excites and motivates pupils and accelerates their learning, well planned lessons which provide for the differing needs of pupils, well trained and highly skilled teaching assistants and a close check on learning with effective marking and assessment.’

Teachers are continually encouraged to take responsibility for improving their teaching, with a high investment in their ongoing training

Teachers capture the pupils’ enthusiasm and make them want to succeed because they show how much they enjoy their teaching.

**Innovative Curriculum:** –

As confident organisations, the schools weigh up curriculum initiatives and local and national programmes before deciding whether they are right for the school, not being afraid to dispense with them if they are not. They understand the needs of their pupils and shape the curriculum to match them very closely. They place great emphasis on achieving very high standards in the core skills and enrich these through a creative and innovative approach to the curriculum. Curriculum project work is planned to provide children with opportunities to progress in key learning and thinking skills: to explain, question, investigate, discover, invent, apply, create, predict, prove, solve problems and collaborate. Homework is often linked to this project work.

Children benefit from an extensive range of extra‐curricular activities and visits to places of interest.

**Targeted intervention and support**:

There is high quality targeted support and intervention through the effective use of teaching assistants and HLTAs to support children with additional needs, pupils with EAL, more able and any underachieving groups or individuals. Highly skilled teaching assistants work very effectively alongside classroom teachers. They provide seamless and valuable support both in class and by working with small groups and individuals. Very rigorous checking of pupils’ learning leads to effective ‘pinpoint’ teaching of specific skills. Where additional support is required, it is extremely well matched to pupils’ needs

**Inclusion**: ‐ The schools place emphasis on the importance of early intervention in the case of children who require extra help. These needs are identified in the early years. The work of the inclusion teams is expertly co‐ordinated, and efficiently managed

**Parental engagement:** ‐

Gaining the trust and confidence of the community has been by employing specialists who can build trusting bridges between school and family, e.g. family support workers, and learning mentors with specific roles with parents/carers

**Use of data**: ‐ The use of data is exemplary and a strength of the school. High quality assessment, tracking and target setting procedures, for individual and groups, are the features of the effective management, which supports teaching and learning. Rigorous pupil tracking is established as one of the core elements of raising achievement in these schools. The use of data involves all staff, governors and parents

**Effective use of pupil voice**: ‐ Pupils have specific roles on the School’s Council or as monitors. Pupils are unanimous in their love for their schools, and can give examples of how they enjoy their lessons and their play times, after school activities and how they get on exceptionally well with each other and with the adults in the school, saying ‘Teachers, staff, TAs, all support us and push us. They want what’s best for us’.

**Celebration of cultural diversity**: ‐

One of the factors that has helped these schools to acknowledge and celebrate the diverse cultural backgrounds of pupils is that many of the staff working in the schools represent the communities they serve. Not only does this give them insight into the lives of their pupils, it also provides pupils with good role models and the sense that the school is also part of their community. In multi-cultural areas, these are truly multi‐cultural schools where the diversity of ethnic origin, languages spoken, and of cultural heritage, brings real life to learning. Pupils thrive because they see around them every day the living evidence of what it is to live in a multi‐cultural world

**Analysis 4**

**What makes an outstanding school leader?**

1. **Have a clear goal in mind**

A great leader should always have a clear vision of what they want to achieve. There is a great amount of responsibility on a school leader to make the right choices when it comes to deciding what knowledge and skills to bestow on the pupils. In a technologically advanced society, the skills that young people are expected to learn are changing rapidly as technology develops. However, the need to keep up with the changing times must also be balanced out with a need to provide continuity and consistency for the pupils and to deliver a curriculum that teaches the ideas and narratives of the past and the present.

**2. Retain a relentless optimism**

A great school leader must be able to maintain a stubborn optimism no matter what obstacles may come their way. They should be able to demonstrate that a disadvantage needn’t be a barrier to success and it should instead be viewed as an opportunity to do something unique and outside of the box.

Part of this optimism should be a confidence that great things come with time and that results cannot be achieved overnight. There is however a distinct difference between being patient and being complacent; a confident leader should know exactly when to ‘shift gear’ and develop a healthy sense of urgency in order to meet deadlines and be as productive as possible.

A school leader must also take responsibility for maintaining the morale of the staff. It is crucial for them to understand that even with the very best of intentions, sometimes a plan just doesn’t come into fruition. It is in these circumstances that a school leader must step up to the plate and be able to brush off these failures and start again. Otherwise, if the leader is unable to remain optimistic, then a feeling of negativity can spread throughout the entire team.

**3. Be inclusive**

School leaders should be able to create and maintain a culture that values the ‘we’ over the ‘I’ and promotes a feeling of togetherness. They should adopt an inclusive leadership style which treats everyone equally and has an active interest in the progress and personal development of every single individual – both staff and students. This inclusiveness should also extend to outside the school walls, as school leaders should also build strong working relationships with parents and the wider community. At the heart of what every school leader does there should be a desire to bring out the very best in people and this should be the driving force behind the school.

**4. Inspire teachers at all levels**

Teachers at any level, whether they have just started out or are 20 years into their careers, all have pressures to contend with. A school leader must be able to deal with their own pressures whilst finding the right words to motivate and help alleviate the stress of their staff.

Many school leaders adopt a caring role when it comes to their staff and try hard to protect them as best they can. However, wrapping your staff up in cotton wool and preventing them from taking their own risks can be counter-productive. It is only natural for leaders to want to shelter their team from the stresses and strains of life as a teacher. However they must be careful not to create a culture of dependency where staff are unable to think independently, as they have never been pushed to do so.

When a teacher is pushed out of their comfort zone, although this is initially daunting they more often than not find their own coping mechanisms. Through experience they learn eventually to be able to navigate these difficult situations with ease. With this in mind, it is important that school leaders allow teachers to stand on their own two feet and give them enough breathing space to make their own mistakes. The very best leaders are supportive, but empower their staff to be individuals and take control of their own futures.

**5. Stay current and keep innovating**

Even as a school leader, you should never ever stop learning; it is important that leaders put the time aside to ensure they are keeping up to date with current thinking when it comes to both education and the technology that enables and complements the learning process.

To stay current, leaders should not be afraid to embrace new technologies to empower teachers and to supplement the learning process. It is worth noting that technology should not just be used for the sake of it – before embracing the use of new learning technology, leaders should be clear about how it will be used and how it can be used as a tool to empower pupils and teachers. However, to enable real progress, leaders must be able to take risks and invest in new cutting-edge technology. They must also be able to persuade the rest of the staff of the key benefits of leading the way in innovation.

Further reading around the challenges facing the education sector in general is also key to keeping up to speed. One way to do this is to take the time to follow a couple of engaging education blogs, as this is an effective way to stay up to date and to reflect on their own teaching practices.

**Conclusion**

Great school leaders can come in many shapes and sizes, however, to effectively engage with the rest of the school it is essential to have a high level of emotional intelligence. Running a school successfully is not all about driving results, more importantly it is about inspiring the teachers to be the best that they can be and giving the students the support and resources they need to excel. For this reason, the best school leaders have a vested interest in the school and are driven by a strong moral purpose and not by monetary gains. Although arguably some people are born leaders, others can learn how to become one, most of all, the greatest leaders must have the best interests of the school at the heart of everything that they do.