

Improving the System

Graham Handscomb introduces this special double issue with its focus on school to school collaboration, system improvement and healthy leadership ... and implications for professional development.

Schools doing it for themselves

Self-help is the prevailing mood music in education. From the 1990s onwards the mantra of school self-governance and self-improvement has been intoned by successive governments. It has echoed with increasing resonance through the highways and byways of the school organisation framework ever since. Perhaps it attained its apotheosis in the series of publications by David Hargreaves in which he articulated the essential thinking and indeed ingredients that constitutes the self-improving school system (Hargreaves, 2010, 2011 and 2012). The consequences of this movement have been considerable, resulting in an educational landscape that would have been unrecognisable even as little as 20 years ago. Gone is the once pivotal strategic “middle tier” role of the local authority, and in its stead we have a visa of heterogeneity – a schools setting in which a thousand flowers bloom. Thus, the educational backdrop is now populated by: academies, Teaching School Alliances,

federated arrangements including multi-academy chains or trusts (MATs), free schools, the phenomenon of school sponsorship, and executive headteachers. For some this is seen as cathartic, empowering and the embodiment of choice which drives up standards; whilst others wring their hands at what is perceived as fragmented, chaotic and an unravelling of a coherent education infrastructure. System! – what system? In the minds of many, it no longer makes sense to talk of a national educational system.

Whatever one’s perspective there is no doubt that the push for increasing school autonomy linked to the prominence of the self-improving school concept have raised profound implications for both school leadership and professional development... and this is the major theme of this special New Years’ double issue of *Professional Development Today*.

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References: Hargreaves, D. (2010) Creating a self-improving school system, Nottingham: National College for School Leadership. ■ Hargreaves, D. (2011) Leading a self-improving school system, Nottingham: National College for School Leadership. ■ Hargreaves, D. (2012) A self-improving school system: towards maturity, Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.

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