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**Subject leadership in the primary school:
contributing to school improvement**

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Abstract

The drive to raise standards, increase effectiveness and bring about school improvement is a world-wide phenomenon and has become increasingly a focus of attention at all levels - international, national and local. Governments of different political persuasions have introduced national and state curricula and set standards that schools are expected to meet. Whilst there is an overall framework in which schools must operate, it is the responsibility of teachers to bring about improvements in the teaching and learning that takes place in all areas of the curriculum.

In recent years the importance of subject leadership in raising standards and improving the quality of children's experiences has been increasingly recognised in the England and Wales. In primary schools, however, subject leaders are faced with major challenges. Many feel their post is not clearly defined and are often daunted by the demands made on them. This paper presents some of the findings of an ongoing study into subject leadership in the primary school and will report the outcomes of interviews with subject leaders and their head teachers which explored their views on the complexity of the post, their frustrations and their responses to the challenges they face in raising the quality of teaching and learning in their subject area.

In the context of local developments and global effects it is argued that in order to raise standards and quality in education subject leadership in individual schools must be effective and that subject leaders are key people in the process of school improvement.

Key words: *leadership, primary, management, school improvement*

Introduction

The drive to raise standards, increase effectiveness and bring about school improvement is a world-wide phenomenon and has become increasingly a focus of attention at all levels - international, national and local. Governments of different political persuasions have introduced national and state curricula and set standards that schools are expected to meet. Such developments have resulted in, among other things, an extensive literature relating to school improvement and school effectiveness which, as Hopkins *et al* , observe has 'seen a growing enthusiasm for combining the perspectives, approaches and findings' of research in various ways. Understanding the concepts of school improvement (the process by which schools change) and school effectiveness (the knowledge of what makes an effective school) as well as the complexity of the interaction between them is of great interest throughout the world. Improvements and increased effectiveness in schools, however, have not come about by chance, rather such changes have resulted from the development of:

- professional high quality leadership and management;
- a concentration on teaching and {pupil} learning;
- a learning organisation, i.e. a school with staff who are willing to be learners and to participate in a staff development programme.

Clearly the development of a climate in which such characteristics can flourish is heavily dependent on the head teacher (e.g..

In England and Wales however, the introduction of the 1988 Education Reform Act has had a major influence on the way in which head teachers in both primary and secondary schools manage their schools. The impact of Local Management of Schools (LMS), National Curriculum, and Ofsted Inspections, amongst other things, has meant that it is no longer, if it ever was, possible for the head teacher to do everything. Thus during the 1990s head

teachers have had to respond to a rapidly changing scene in which their leadership and management skills have been tested to the full. For many head teachers their position as curriculum leader has been eroded by the necessity to deal with the financial aspects of the organisation. As a result head teachers, especially in primary schools, have had to be more willing to delegate authority and responsibility to other teachers thereby providing wider opportunities for leadership and management throughout their schools. Such shifts in responsibility have been particularly marked in relation to the higher priority given to subject leadership.

Although the idea of using subject expertise is not new, subject leadership has only become a major element in the management of primary schools in recent years. Bell goes on to argue that there is increasingly broad agreement as to the demands placed on the subject leaders. The National Standards for Subject Leadership, which were produced by the Teacher Training Agency (TTA) following a national consultation exercise, set out, perhaps the most comprehensive statement of the responsibilities and roles to be undertaken by subject leaders. These define the core purpose of subject leadership as the need,

to provide professional leadership and management for a subject to secure high quality teaching, effective use of resources and improved standards of learning and achievement for all pupils.

The document goes on to set out in some detail the requirements of subject leadership for all schools and identifies key outcomes under four headings:

- Strategic direction and development of the subject;
- Teaching and learning;
- Leading and managing staff;
- Efficient and effective deployment of staff and resources.

The standards and skills itemised in the TTA document provide the official definitive requirements for subject leadership in the UK at the time of writing. Nevertheless as point out this clarification of the post provides a daunting list of requirements and emphasises the many roles that have to be adopted by subject leaders. Furthermore highlight the change in nomenclature adopted by the in referring to the individuals holding such posts in primary schools not as "co-ordinators" (the most commonly used term) but as "subject leaders". It is indicative of the change in emphasis promoted by the TTA from a position of maintaining the status quo to a more proactive stance to bring about change and development. This switch in emphasis reflects the rapid and wide ranging changes that have taken place in terms of subject leadership in primary schools in recent years, many of which have been externally imposed. Almost all primary teachers now have subject leadership responsibilities and, as found, their roles have also changed. In the same study it is encouraging to note that many subject leaders were recognised as providing a significant contribution to curriculum planning, providing ideas and support and helping to ensure that the whole school planning process in their subject areas was completed. There is, however, still much to be done in order to understand the complexities of subject leadership in primary schools. This paper therefore aims to explore some of these complexities through consideration of the perceptions of a sample of subject leaders and their head teachers. In particular it will endeavour to examine:

- subject leaders' views of what they do, what they think they should do and what they believe to be effective;
- headteachers' views of the subject leadership in their schools
- the impact of subject leadership in the schools.

The present study

The findings reported here are based on the preliminary analysis of semi-structured interviews with 8 primary school head teachers and 20 subject leaders from 2 Local Education Authorities (LEAs) using 4 schools in each. This provided a range of type (inner city, suburban and rural) and size (from 45 to 550 pupils) of school. The schools were also at different stages of the development cycle and all had been inspected by Ofsted within the last 3 years resulting in one of them being put in special measures. Two of the head teachers were male and six female and their time in post ranged from six months to eight years. The subject leaders interviewed, represented responsibility in a wide range of curriculum areas and the data was collected over each of the three terms in one academic year (1997/98). Each subject leader was interviewed on three occasions while the head teachers were only interviewed once. Each interview, which lasted for between 30 and 60 minutes (interviews with head teachers being longer than those with subject leaders), explored views on a range of themes related to subject leadership. These included: the post of subject leader; the nature of subject leadership in primary schools; the way in which subject leadership is enacted in each of the schools; the impact the subject leaders were having on each school; and ways in which the impact of the subject leader might be enhanced in each school. All the interviews were fully transcribed and to date have been subjected to a content analysis to identify the main themes. No attempt has been made to make a direct comparison with the views of subject leaders from the same school nor between subject leaders and their head teachers. It should be noted, however, that during the period of the data collection subject leaders were in practice referred to as curriculum co-ordinators within the schools. The term subject leader will be used throughout paper but no value judgement is intended. A fuller discussion of the terminology is beyond the scope of this paper but some of the arguments have been set out elsewhere .

Subject leadership: views of subject leaders

From the interviews with subject leaders a picture was built up comparing what they do, what they feel they should do and what they consider to be effective practice. A content analysis of the responses demonstrated the wide range of tasks that are undertaken and placed each of the tasks into one of eight categories set out in table 1. The interview transcripts were then scored to identify, for each category, the number of subject leaders who:

- carried out tasks which fell within the particular category;
- felt they should carry out tasks within the particular category;
- consider tasks within the particular category to contribute to effective subject leadership.

The overall findings of this analysis are presented in figure 1.

Tasks linked to resources and paperwork were both mentioned by more than 75% of the subject leaders. As one subject leader said

....the first thing you think of gosh is there a policy in place... that's the first thing... you have to do an audit you know ... find out the resources that's the other big thing...

This would seem to confirm earlier research, which found that co-ordinators spend the greatest part of their time working on resources and paperwork . Influencing practice and monitoring were also aspects of the role which over half the subject leaders said they

undertook. This is in contrast to the findings of an earlier study and almost certainly reflects current pressures to improve subject

Table 1

Categories of tasks undertaken by subject leaders.

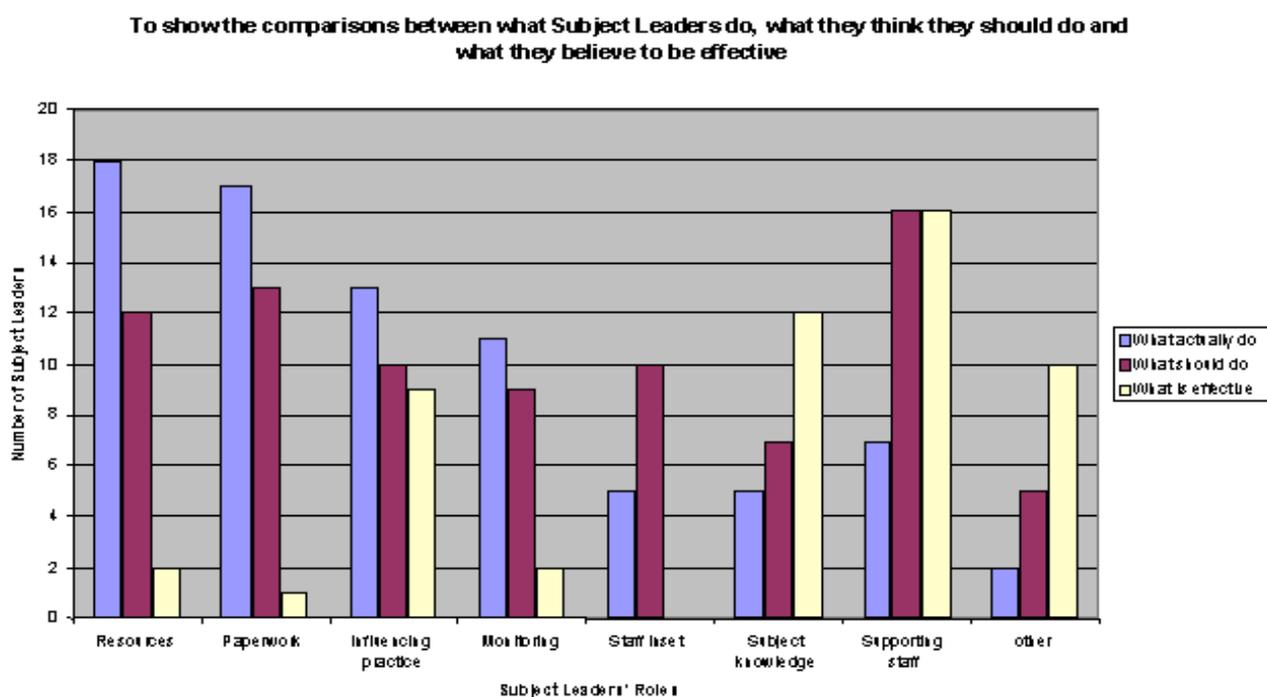
Category	Tasks included
Resources	Purchasing / organising / developing / reviewing / providing / updating / sorting / filing
Paperwork	Policy / scheme / planning / developing aims / raising awareness of requirements / ensuring progression and differentiation / planning
Influencing Practice	Lead by example / develop practice / ensure curriculum delivery / set targets / implement change / unify practice / discussion with colleagues / lead staff meetings / motivate / raise standards / help and advise / feedback from courses
Monitoring	Assessment / evaluation / progression / continuity / check display / check test results / check planning / check targets met / visit classes / check pupils work / record keeping
Staff Inset	Meet Inset needs / advise / arrange expert input / liase with inspectors / keep colleagues informed / lead
Subject Knowledge	Keep up-to-date / attend courses / have good background knowledge
Supporting Staff	Listen / communicate / liase / help / support / share ideas / be flexible / approachable / diplomatic / aware / open / have sense of humour
Other	Administration / maintenance / qualities of personality for effectiveness (ability to organise / prioritise / achieve goals)

standards and to monitor what is happening in the subject throughout the school. Only 5 of the 20 subject leaders, however, refer to tasks linked to organising Staff INSET or to improving their own Subject Knowledge and only 7 subject leaders claimed to be involved with Supporting Staff.

Interestingly the frequency pattern showing what subject leaders said they do is not followed by the pattern of responses relating to the things they felt they should do nor to those tasks they considered contributing to effectiveness. Although it is not true for all categories, the results do suggest a tendency for those tasks which most of the subject leaders identified as being important for effectiveness are the very tasks that are apparently undertaken by the

fewest subject leaders. For example, 12 subject leaders list Subject Knowledge as a factor contributing to effectiveness whilst only 5 claim it is something they have, or are developing. This may indicate that some subject leaders feel under-confident about the extent of their Subject Knowledge but still think it to be of great importance to their role.

Figure 1



In contrast, despite the high number of subject leaders involved in paperwork and resources, only 1 subject leader mentioned paperwork as a contributor to effectiveness and 2 mentioned resources. Therefore subject leaders seem to be spending a large amount of their efforts on factors, which they themselves do not consider to be effective. However, during the course of the interviews it became apparent that subject leaders did value the use of paperwork, especially schemes and policies, but once they were up and running they became part of the background, rather than something they constantly needed to consider or think about. Resources however, seem to provide them with something which they can do relatively easily and is a role that they can be seen to be doing. It is perhaps one of the less controversial areas of their roles. However, as argue it is from these resource tasks that subject leaders can lead in to other more sensitive aspects of their role. Perhaps therefore resources can be viewed as a non-controversial starting block from which other role developments can emerge such as discussions about approaches to teaching and learning.

The monitoring role within subject leadership seems to lead to some confusion about what is involved. The TTA talk about monitoring as a means to provide a range of information for evaluation. They also state it involves a variety of activities including "direct classroom observation of teaching and learning" However, their definition of monitoring goes little beyond these general statements. The subject leaders appear less clear about what monitoring entails and see it generally in terms of the assessment and recording of pupils'

work along with classroom observation, should the opportunity arise. The effectiveness of monitoring is perceived as limited and much of the monitoring was conducted by looking at test results, plans, display and pupils books. Although some classroom observation was reported it was less frequent and considered to be a more controversial aspect of their roles. The lack of time afforded to the subject leaders to carry out such a role was raised as a major concern.

The "Other" category included in this data represents administration and maintaining the subject in the columns for what subject leaders do and what they should do. However in the column for effective practice subject leaders listed qualities they felt the effective practitioner should possess. This included characteristics such as the ability to organise effectively, to set and meet goals and to inspire the confidence of colleagues. There was an emphasis on communication, approachability, diplomacy and the ability to share ideas and information. As one subject leader stated when asked what made subject leaders effective,

Sensitivity I think because you're dealing with people and you're dealing with them as teachers and I think you've got to be sensitive to... that you don't go in heavy handed and say this is what you do you're doing it wrong... it's in a supportive role.

This would seem to reflect the beliefs held within primary education about community and the importance placed on relationships highlighted by .

Figure 2, demonstrates the range of issues raised by subject leaders and how the roles inter-link in terms of what they do, should do and see as effective. What is immediately apparent is that in areas where effectiveness, what should be done and what subject leaders do combine, they seem to involve tasks that are relatively easily performed. For example the organisation and audit of resources is relatively easy to perform and is also seen as effective. However the development of resources and ensuring they meet the needs of colleagues is raised purely as a task they do. Likewise, the emphasis on supporting colleagues and keeping subject knowledge up-to-date can easily be understood, given the importance placed on relationships and current pressure to keep abreast of subject change and development. Leading by example and ensuring a good subject knowledge, is however seen as an ideal rather than what actually happens. Subject leaders however indicated a degree of reticence about the notion of telling others how it's done, even if only by implication. As one subject Leader said,

You don't want to go in and say to somebody who's been doing it for ten years, ... 'this is better than the way you're doing it'.

Figure 2: Relationship between what Subject Leaders say they do, what they think they should do and what they believe to be effective practice.

NB: Some of the issues shown in this representation may only have been pointed out by one individual.

Subject leadership: head teachers views

It is clear from the responses that all the head teachers acknowledged that subject leadership involved a tremendous amount of work and they held a much wider view of the post of subject leader than those reported in previous studies. Management of resources, planning for the subject, supporting staff and monitoring of the subject were the most frequently mentioned areas of responsibility. Views of the way in which subject leaders should support colleagues went beyond simply expecting them to suggest ideas, and answer questions from their colleagues. The head teachers made specific mention of the need for subject leaders to intervene more directly in the teaching of the subject through working alongside their colleagues or team teaching. Whilst this has been advocated for some time by Ofsted and others e.g. it has not been given such a high profile in previous studies and is in marked contrast to the findings of Moore (1992).

Although the majority of the head teachers felt that the processes of analysis, skills and overall approaches were applicable to all aspects of the curriculum regardless of subject area, they were very positive in their views that the demands of being a subject leader differed according to the curriculum area for which they were responsible. In particular there was unanimous agreement that those responsible for core subjects (especially English and maths) had a greater work load, were under greater pressure and were required to show greater leadership. The level of priority given to a subject in the School Development Plan (SDP) was also considered to impact on the workload of subject leaders.

Subject leaders are expected to produce policies and schemes of work, maintain resources, support colleagues, lead the planning of the subject and keep the head teacher informed. As one of the head teachers summarised her expectations of the subject leaders,

I expect subject leaders to ultimately, make sure that our children in our school are getting the best possible provision, that's the ultimate thing. And in order to do that I expect them to ensure that we have a good curriculum, that they support and work with staff, and that they also inform me of the current situation within our school, and that assists with the school development as a whole. The sorts of things we mentioned at the start {of the interview} managing, evaluating, resourcing etc. (*Head teacher 4*)

As individuals subject leaders are expected to develop an expertise in the subject and ensure they have an overview across the whole school.

Although time prevented detailed discussion of how these different elements might be carried out, all the head teachers emphasised the importance of the subject leaders working to the school development plan (SDP) which set out the parameters and priorities for work, resources and success criteria. Inevitably this meant that some subject areas were held 'on the back burner' but even for these subjects it was expected that plans were made and tasks carried out during the SDP period. Monitoring and evaluation also featured high on the agenda of expectations for subject leaders to implement and report on the findings to the head teacher and governors. For example,

....Every co-ordinator has to take everything from the mission statement of the school, its got to tie in with the aims, the mission statement and aims of the school. When they've done that policy statement it's usually presented to the Governors. If I showed you the school development plans over the last five

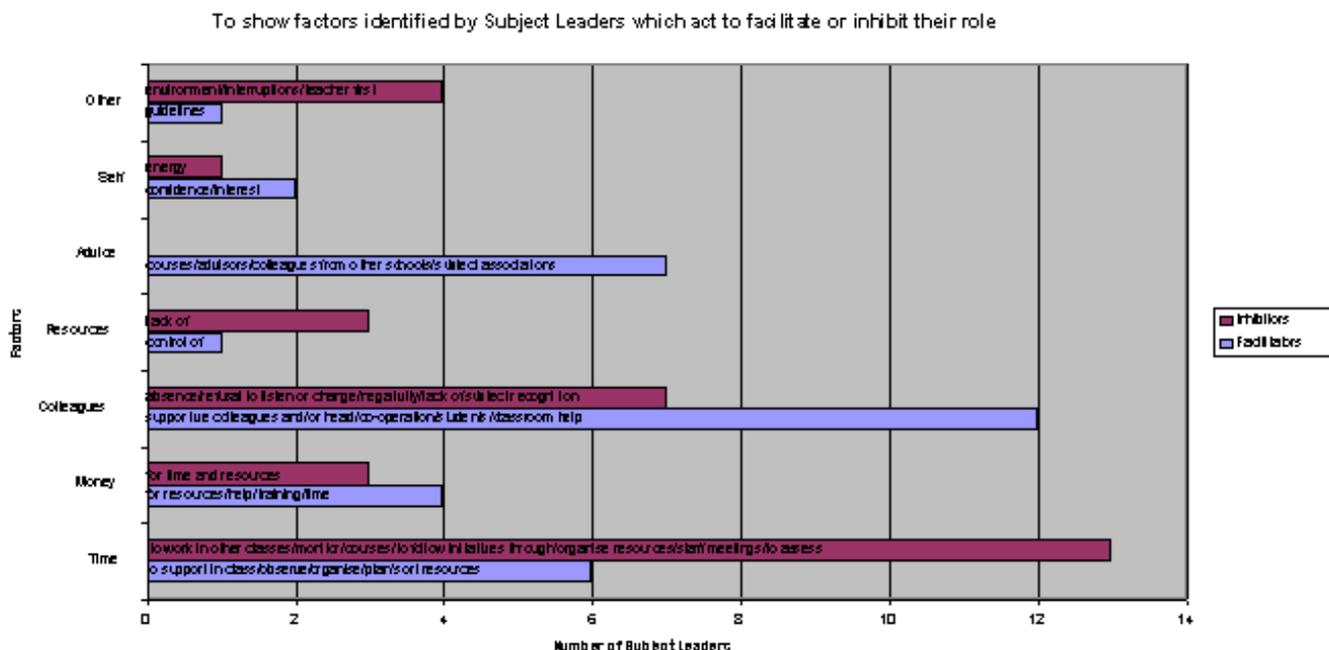
or six years we have identified where science had to have a higher profile or where music was being introduced and where other subjects were on the back burner, and by that we mean you are still to monitor and observe your subject but it doesn't get all the resources and all the in-service for that year because you can't do it. So we expect and , I mean, each co-ordinator has to write me a report a couple of times a year on what's going on in their subject, so that forms part of my head teacher's report to the Governors and it informs a review of the school development plan, and then I want to see evidence of that work. (*Head teacher 5*)

Although no direct comparison has been attempted it is clear that the responses from head teachers have much in common with those of the subject leaders. There are differences in perspective, however, which are worth noting and are to some extent over emphasised by the different approaches to presenting the findings of the interviews used in this paper. In general the subject leaders are more focussed on the day to day tasks while the head teachers are able to have a wider perspective, hence, for example, the reference to making sure that 'our children are getting the best possible provision, that's the ultimate thing.' Similarly the greater prominence given by head teachers to the need for subject leaders to link plans into the SDP. When questioned subject leaders recognised this but it was not uppermost in their mind. Further detailed analysis is required to tease out the issues that have been raised.

Facilitating subject leadership

There is no question that all subject leaders and head teachers recognised the complex nature of subject leadership and the even greater challenges they faced putting it into practice. The clear message coming from these interviews is that subject leadership varies from school to school and within schools and depends on a complex matrix of factors including: the personalities and relationships of the individuals involved; the overall culture of the school, its recent history and shared experiences of the staff; and more tangible features such as the size of the school, its level of resources, financial situation and overall priorities. More specifically, when asked to identify the factors which they felt either helped or inhibited them doing their job, subject leaders reported a range of issues. The factors they identified relate to time, money, colleagues, resources, advice, and themselves. Figure 3 shows the number of subject leaders identifying factors in each category. Each group of factors, depending on the circumstances either facilitated or inhibited subject leaders in carrying out their responsibilities.

Figure 3



The first notable finding demonstrated in figure 3 is that few of the subject leaders referred to money acting either as a facilitator or an inhibitor though perhaps more predictably time was labelled the greatest inhibitor, a factor also emphasised by . The lack of available time for monitoring, following initiatives through, staff meetings and organising resources are among the issues raised. Time was highlighted mainly from the point of view of enabling subject leaders to monitor and develop initiatives with colleagues. also found a similar situation and noted that subject leaders in their study experienced an exponential growth in paperwork that added further pressure on their time. This was further complicated by the lack of time to meet with other members of staff because they also have heavy commitments. have also shown that lack of non-contact time acts as a powerful constraint on the specialist as does the lack of additional "extra" teachers, who could be used to "free up" subject specialists. Problems with colleagues was another issue mentioned suggesting that if colleagues do not co-operate it can pose a real difficulty when trying to develop the Subject Leaders roles. Equally colleagues often proved to be a very real asset. The support of the head teacher was listed as an important factor, as were the benefits of receiving advice from experts or colleagues outside the school.

All the head teachers were very sympathetic towards the position of their subject leaders and were at pains to protect them as far as possible from outside pressures and unnecessary work. In a more proactive mode the head teachers indicated that it was their responsibility to ensure that support was given and available to subject leaders. Several strategies were referred to including: discussions for planning and consideration of issues that arose; direct public statements of support for initiatives and implementation of new practices; and encouragement for new initiatives. Support from colleagues both informal and formal was also reported to varying degrees. All the head teachers referred to the problems of time and wanted to provide non-contact time for their subject leaders on a regular basis but found that this was not always possible. In some situations there are fewer opportunities for non-contact time now than there were in the past. The majority, however, said they were

able to make some, usually very little, time available on an *ad hoc* basis by taking classes themselves or, when the budget allowed, using some supply teaching.

Oh, non-contact time is at the moment non-existent this year. We were doing a system whereby I had somebody in part-time so that I could release people according to the priorities in the school development plan, if we needed to do a piece of work for a particular subject, or needed to go and help someone else. (*Head teacher 5*)

Although finances were difficult in most of the schools head teachers felt that they were able to cover most of the requests for resources and to make funds available for subject leaders to attend relevant courses. The majority of the CPD undertaken by subject leaders was by attendance at LEA courses. Other forms of CPD were not common although in one school where all the staff belonged to one or more curriculum team indicated that significant CPD was taking place via the tasks and discussions which took place.

Now we are only a small staff so everybody, part-time or full-time, has a curriculum area for which they are responsible but they lead a team of other staff. The suggestion came from the staff I said they had to have someone from Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 on the team, and also we had a long talk about whether or not people going on the team should get subjects for which they felt confident and could offer something or whether they should get take this as an opportunity to go and work with somebody who was experienced and go for something they felt they weren't confident in, and most staff have gone for something they aren't confident in. ..(*Head teacher 8*)

Similarly the head teacher who was leading the whole staff through a consideration of what was involved in being a subject leader was providing a significant CPD input as well as encouraging mutual support for everyone.

Head teachers considered the key factor contributing to the success of subject leaders was the strength of the individual subject leaders and their ability to use their leadership qualities, energy and enthusiasm to engage others in the quest for improvements in the subject as part of the overall school curriculum. Such subject leaders were seen to have confidence in their own ability but, at the same time, are willing to learn alongside their colleagues.

It depends on the leader, depends very much on the person and personality of that person, and I would have to be honest, that I would say is the main factor. How keen they are, and obviously, if it's their subject they are more keen. I think if I had to put one finger on the pulse, that would be the main thing, the keenness, the enthusiasm of, and the personality of, the co-ordinator, and that is what drives their subject. (*Head teacher 1*)

Most of the head teachers recognised that they also had to make a significant contribution if subject leaders were to be successful and acknowledged that if things were not going well it might be as a result of something they had, or had not, done.

Well, I think it comes back to the Head, I'd have to say. I'm not trying to make out I'm perfect, but it does come back to the Head, because ultimately if the Head doesn't allow them the opportunities to make an impact, then they won't make an impact, or they will but it will be on the head and it'll be a conflict. (*Head teacher 2*)

Other factors such as resources, time, and money were acknowledged as being helpful but all the head teachers were agreed effective subject leadership ultimately depended on the people involved and the climate that had been created within the school.

It's {work of subject leaders} having a huge impact because in some subjects the co-ordinators have been able to identify, through having gone into the classroom and worked alongside staff within the classroom, they've been able to identify how their subject is not being perhaps delivered in the way that they'd like it to be, or to its best advantage for that particular age group, and they then would have a chat with the class teacher afterwards and suggest, you know, 'I noticed this, how about doing it like this?' You know, we've got a really nice open working climate where staff are quite happy to let one another into the classrooms and observing them actually teaching or doing something, and say, you know, 'That was good but....' and offering ways of being able to improve things, which I think is a huge step forward.
(*Head teacher 6*)

Impact of subject leaders

The interview findings give a general sense that subject leaders were having an impact on the school overall. Subject leaders, however, appeared to find it difficult to make an objective judgement of their impact and tended to under value the contribution they felt they made personally. Although they were keen to point out there were obviously highs and lows head teachers, on the other hand, were clear that subject leaders were having a very positive effect on the way in which the schools were progressing. The effective subject leaders were making things happen, involving colleagues, and bringing about change in their area of the curriculum. Subject leaders were considered to have made significant contributions to the raising of standards and children's attainment in the each of the schools. As one of the head teachers pointed out,

I'd like to think they have a major impact , otherwise it's pointless having them! I'd say they have a very positive impact. Your so-called class teacher irrespective of status in school is working with a group of children, if they've got any concerns they go to their year colleague or they can go directly to the subject co-ordinator. So from that perspective they are having an impact. I know that from the way staff relate to them, so that's supporting the teacher, but more importantly it's actually meeting the needs of the child, because at the end of the day, what are we here for? (*Head teacher 2*)

When asked for the sources of evidence showing the impact of subject leaders the one most commonly referred to was the planning files maintained by staff and the way in which subject leaders monitored these to ensure that the curriculum was covered as fully as possible. Changes in the quality and character of display work were also cited as evidence of the influence subject leaders were having on the work taking place in different classes as well as indicating improvements in progression and continuity throughout the school. Several of the head teachers referred to the reaction of the children to the work they were doing and the enthusiasm, interest and enjoyment that was evident.

Let's take something like health education which we give a high profile to, that has been introduced, and because it's gone over seven or eight years now, its moved the school forward in its thinking, it improved the quality of children's relationships, it's improved behaviour. We have children not afraid to try a new subject, they're not afraid to stay for, um, a IT club, they're not afraid to stay for science, art .. and certainly the secondary schools have

said to us, 'Oh gosh, they love it, you can tell they've had hands-on of' this and this and this. So I suppose those are all positive signs. (*Head teacher 5*)

References were also made to comments made in the inspection reports which indicated the valuable contributions that subject leaders were making to the development of the subjects.

..... it's taken some years to get them to realise what a good job they're doing, and when their subject areas were praised under Ofsted, I mean, they were delighted.

..... And our hard figures that the Government want are very good. I mean we've got an HMI coming in June and he's coming to find out why we're doing so well in such a deprived area. (*Head teacher 5*)

All the head teachers were very positive about how well their subject leaders were doing despite the constraints and pressures on them and unanimously felt that the most important way in which they, as head teachers, could enhance the impact of the subject leaders was by creating time for them to carry out their job.

Well, more time that's the bottom line. I would like them to have at least half a day every single week then I really do think you could expect to see a lot more of this happening a lot more quickly, and of course training. Um going back to the, you know TTA manuals that were produced, actual training on the knowledge and the content of their subject as well as ways to deliver it to primary school children. (*Head teacher 4*)

As the above comment implies the head teachers expected to see positive results from any additional time that they were able to provide and most had a clear view of how such time might be used to improve the teaching and learning that took place.

I would want to give them time to teach their subject and be observed and to observe, not just observe by coming in to watch a science lesson, or something, but to observe with a real understanding of what they are actually looking for. (*Head teacher 5*)

In short the head teachers indicated that they felt the most significant way of improving the impact of subject leaders was to give them the opportunity, skills, and authority to directly address issues related to teaching and learning in the classroom. Improving the consistency of teaching across subjects throughout the school was seen as a major challenge to be faced by the subject leaders with the support of the head teacher.

Discussion

The initial analysis of the interviews with the head teachers and subject leaders indicates a very positive set of views about the value and quality of the subject leadership which is taking place overall. The head teachers value the concept of subject leadership and are more than satisfied with the impact that the subject leaders are having in their schools. This does not mean, however, that all subject leaders are considered to be effective or that they are doing everything that might be desirable in an ideal world. On the contrary the head teachers, in particular, are only too aware of the shortcomings of some of some subject leaders, for example, as one head teacher explained,

I think they {subject leaders} can have a big impact because I think if you've got a good subject leader it has a knock effect which is quite considerable.

We have a very good English co-ordinator, and I think the level and the quality of English that takes place in the school as a result of her leadership, and the staff meetings she's led, and her knowledge of the subject, the quality of the English work has risen. Between you and me, I am concerned that my numeracy, my maths co-ordinator is not strong, and I have concerns that next year we're not going to have the same impact. If I don't feel that it's going the way I think it should at some stage during the year, I might have to take that person to one side and say, 'I'm sorry, it isn't working, I need to take over.' (*Head teacher 3*)

Clearly it cannot be argued that this is a representative sample of primary school head teachers and subject leaders nor that the views expressed present a picture of the quality of subject leadership in all schools. It is possible, however, to argue that the views of subject leadership and expectations of subject leaders have changed significantly in recent years. Whereas previous studies found somewhat restricted views of the post, this has now changed. Monitoring, evaluation and working with colleagues in their classrooms are recognised as having a much higher profile and priority, especially for the head teachers. Indeed the views expressed are much more in line with the argument put forward by Bell and Ritchie that subject leaders should adopt a

.. proactive approach that anticipates events, plans for improvements and creates opportunities in order to increase the effectiveness of teaching in the subject and pupils' learning across the whole school. (p10)

The impact of the National Curriculum in England and Wales and the pressure for accountability linked to the Ofsted inspection system make it more and more imperative that subject leaders do indeed become more proactive in order to ensure that, as far as possible the targets set in the SDP are met. Thus the actions of the subject leaders are influenced by these needs and must take place within the overall framework of the school. Subject leaders, in at least one of the schools, are expected to,

prepare their own SDP contributions for the subject, which will list priorities, list in very broad terms, how the money {allocated to them} is going to be spent, priorities for the year ahead in the sense of development, they'll have costed it, they'll have set up success criteria and targets for themselves. So that's the SDP, and then I sort of co-ordinate all those together because obviously there may be contradictions in it or conflict. (*Head teacher 1*)

The head teachers, however, acknowledge many of their subject leaders still have some way to go in moving towards this level of involvement and many are still unsure and lack confidence to make decisions and take the initiative, for example,

I don't think they're secure enough to be innovative really yet. we haven't got that secure knowledge, the school haven't we aren't at the stage where we can take that on as a whole school issue. Leadership-wise, again, I think we've got a long way to go.

.... they're experienced teachers but haven't been used to being a co-ordinator, so it's something new for them and they are still feeling their way. (*Head teacher 8*)

While all the head teachers were very loyal and expressed support for their subject leaders in some schools there was no structured approach for helping the subject leaders develop their skills for taking on the responsibilities demanded of them. This is not to say that the

head teachers did not recognise the subject leaders limitations nor that they did not provide practical help and sound advice. Rather it is to suggest that in several of the schools the development of the subject leaders was left to chance and depended almost exclusively on the individual's own initiative. In two of the schools, which interestingly had had difficult inspections, the head teachers described clear steps that were being taken to help develop a common understanding of what was expected of subject leaders and to take steps towards meeting the staff develop needs that resulted from this. For example,

I have taken the staff through a whole process of what curriculum co-ordination is and why it's important. we worked towards developing, like, a whole school overview. I also held general meetings so that everyone was aware that I appreciated it's {subject leadership} is a big job and that it's going to take a long time to get to where we want, but this is what we've got to work towards. I gave them assistance in doing a curriculum audit and I gave them an example of an action plan I am working towards them having responsibility for an element of their budget and for them monitoring what's spent and informing me. So right from the beginning they were just informed of the way forward. (*Head teacher 4*)

Although there is a need for a more detailed analysis of the interview transcripts with regard to the processes of school effectiveness and improvement, these initial findings indicate that particularly from the head teachers' perspectives the subject leaders have made significant contributions to both of these areas. The overwhelming view is that subject leaders are having a major impact on raising standards in both teaching and learning. In addition, through the various systems of monitoring and evaluation that have been put in place subject leaders are moving towards situations in which improvements are taking place and, more importantly, being sustained over a period of years despite the pressures and constraints that are placed on them. Head teachers and subject leaders, on this evidence, are now much more aware of the value of subject leadership with steps being taken to support subject leaders and provide opportunities for them to carry out their responsibilities more effectively. Furthermore, the present study indicates that subject leaders are making significant contributions towards raising standards in their schools and are becoming key people in bringing about school improvement. There is, however, still much work to be done both in terms of the day to day practice in school and in terms of research to try and understand more clearly the dynamics of subject leadership in the wide variety of situations found in primary schools.

Bibliography