

**Perceptions of secondary school middle leaders  
on their development and contribution to whole  
school improvement**

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The focus on school improvement has been driven at a national level through Government initiatives and the increasingly high profile of the Ofsted Inspection frameworks and procedures. The latter, in particular, has made schools very accountable for pupil outcomes. This in turn has impacted on leaders in schools, who, as part of the Ofsted Inspection framework, are given a separate judgment for their performance (Ofsted 2015). Since 2012 middle leaders have featured in the Ofsted framework descriptors used to judge leadership and management in a school.

This study explores the perceptions and development of middle leaders, in one North West London secondary school, regarding their development and contribution to whole school improvement. The research suggests that while the vast majority of middle leaders did not have a full understanding of distributed leadership as a construct, they did however, consider themselves to be drivers in the school, described by three as 'the cogs in the engine'. Positive partnerships with senior leaders and school improvement groups, in this institution, were cited by some as key features of middle leaders' contribution to whole school improvement. The analysis of findings highlighted the positive impact of leaders working together and identifies a construct of distributed and inclusive leadership. I carried out the study within my own school as headteacher researcher. A key finding has been the significant benefit for a headteacher to do research as an insider. The experience of headteacher researcher has further ignited my longstanding passion of deepening and extending understanding and knowledge about our roles as leaders in schools.

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# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This study researches the perceptions and development of middle leaders in education within a secondary setting in respect of their contribution to whole school improvement. The research was carried out in a girls' comprehensive school in North West London. It is the school where I have been headteacher since January 2006.

The purpose of the research is to inform other educationalists about middle leader views on their development and contribution to whole school improvement. In addition, as an insider researcher, there is an intention to share with other senior leaders and headteachers my experience and findings of conducting research within your own institution.

In this chapter I will be: conveying professional reasons for initiating the study, providing a background context, a professional context, giving an overview and sharing the aims, methods and structure of the study and identifying the contribution to research.

## **1.2 Background context**

Management and leadership are areas of interest to both the education and business sectors. The notion of leadership has been highlighted as a construct that has developed from management. Within education the journey from management to leadership and management has been well researched (Cuban 1988, Lester & Kunich 1997, Macdonald, Burke and Stewart 2006, Kotter 2014, West Burnham and Harris 2015). Recognition of the importance of strong leadership in education to drive and continually improve has appeared to be a natural progression with the increased focus on leadership.

Different styles and leadership constructs have been explored, with the aim of determining what will have the greatest impact on school improvement. The focus on school improvement has been driven at a national level through Government initiatives and the increasingly high profile of the Ofsted Inspection frameworks and procedures. The latter, in particular, has made schools very accountable for pupil outcomes. This in turn has impacted on leaders in schools, who as part of the Ofsted Inspection framework are given a separate judgment for their performance (Ofsted 2015). Since 2012 middle leaders have featured in the Ofsted framework descriptors used to judge leadership and management in a school.

Within the school in the study I perceived that work between senior and middle leaders had begun to change. There was a drive for continuous school improvement with new structures being introduced to enable all members of the community to be actively involved. Informal discussions with senior leaders indicated that they considered themselves to be in close partnership with middle leaders, particularly with regard to school improvement. This prompted the overarching questions as to what were middle leaders' perceptions of their contribution to whole school improvement and how did they view their partnership with senior leaders.

### **1.3 Professional Context**

During my second year of headship the school was inspected by Ofsted and judged to be good. An area for improvement identified was the development of middle leadership across the school. This prompted senior leaders in the school to reflect on their work and relationship with middle leaders. As headteacher and leader of the senior leadership group, I had a key role to play in developing the relationship between middle and senior leaders. To inform and develop my strategic thinking I extended my reading on leadership in education with a particular focus on different leadership constructs, which features in chapter 2. Through my reading I was able to clarify the rationale and purpose for developing middle leadership further. I recognised the importance of all leaders in schools contributing to school improvement.

Alongside my reading, changes began to take place in the school which included developing middle leaders. The focus of all developments was to continually improve the school and student achievement. At this time the school was working with the Teacher Development Agency (TDA) and trialing the School Improvement Framework with middle and senior leaders. The culmination of this work inspired me to research the perceptions of middle leaders on their development and contribution to whole school improvement. I made the decision to carry out the study in my own school and take on the role of insider researcher.

### **1.4 Aims of the research**

The aim of the research is to provide new knowledge and understanding of the perceptions of middle leadership in secondary schools particularly in relation to their development and contribution to whole school improvement. There is a further intention to explore the implications of a headteacher carrying out research within their own institution.



## **1.5 Research questions**

The two major questions for the study were:-

- What are the perceptions of middle leaders in a secondary school on their development and contribution to whole school improvement?
- What are the perceptions of these middle leaders on middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement?

## **1.6 Research methodology**

The methodology for this study firstly recognised that I was an insider researcher as headteacher of the school where the research took place. This was considered to be a positive aspect of the study. This approach was selected with the intention of contributing to the theory of leadership within an educational setting, particularly on the role of headteacher researcher. My own interest and experience of leadership and developments that impact on student learning provided a platform for researching the role of middle leaders further. As a practitioner I had the benefit of understanding and experiencing different leadership constructs which supported my role researching middle leadership and school improvement.

Whilst recognising the benefits of insider research I wanted to initially collect responses from middle leaders without being involved. For this purpose I asked an Assistant Headteacher to carry out 3 group interviews. These were followed by 8 individual interviews with middle leaders which I conducted. Three of the individual interviewees were not involved in the group interviews. The choice of interviews for the study and the collection of qualitative data is based on my constructivist stance, where I would argue that knowledge is socially constructed through the research process.

## **1.7 Contribution to this field of literature**

The significance of this study is twofold. Firstly in terms of leadership the study recognises inclusive leadership, (Hollander 2012) as a construct that has received less attention in the field of education and could be of benefit when developing the role of followers together with leaders as part of a construct with distributed leadership. Secondly, the notion of insider researcher and the particular benefits of a headteacher carrying out research within their own institution has emerged as a key finding of the

study. The headteacher researcher role is less evident in literature. Professionally, as a headteacher, gaining a deeper understanding of the perceptions of middle leaders with respect to their development and contribution to school improvement, is beneficial in terms of planning professional development.

### **1.8 The structure of the study**

The study continues in chapter 2 where the theoretical aspects of leadership and school improvement are discussed. Chapter 3 focuses on the institution where the study took place and provides the local context. The methodology behind the study is discussed in chapter 4. The findings from the study are reported in chapter 5 and are discussed in more detail in chapter 6. The final conclusions, impact, contribution and areas for further research are drawn together in chapter 7.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This study critically explores the perceptions of middle leaders in a secondary school regarding their development and contribution to school improvement. As a practicing headteacher I am very aware of the national drivers of school improvement and the developments since the Education Reform Act (1998). The initial part of this literature review focuses on the external expectations that have been placed on schools regarding school improvement and aims to set the national context. The second part of the review has been driven by my interest in the development of different leadership constructs in schools. Distributed leadership and the implications for middle leaders are of particular interest. A key purpose of doing the literature review is to identify the gaps in research which I intend to fill. The overall focus of the research is on middle leaders and school improvement from the perspective of a headteacher who is seeking to understand the middle leader's perspectives.

The first two sections provide the perspective for the literature review, and how the literature was identified.

#### **2.1.1 The perspective for the literature review**

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of attempting to explore the body of literature on leadership. Firstly researchers' concepts of organisational processes, including leadership constructs, are constantly evolving. For this reason it is claimed that there is no universal paradigm or theory which is valid for examining organisational behaviour in all contexts (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, Leithwood & Hallinger, 1993). This review focuses on leadership in the secondary school context. The review is demarcated with the year 1980 in recognition of the Education Act in that year which introduced the idea of more parental choice in schooling for their children and with the 1988 Education Reform Act which introduced the Local Management of Schools (LMS). Significantly Local Education Authorities, LEAs, were required to provide parents with information about schools, including exam results. The Conservative Government (1987) introduced parental choice and school performance being linked to pupil outcomes with little consideration of social diversity. This literature review highlights how the following Labour Government (1997) maintained and extended this focus (Whitty, 2008).

Certain literature refers to a school improvement approach that is based on the notion that all schools can replicate the best (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006). This is viewed by others as a significant divergence from previous Labour ideology. It is suggested that this has been cemented further by setting high standards for students, with schools being accountable for clear Government targets (Whitty, 2008). This external accountability for student outcomes has been reinforced under successive Ofsted Frameworks (Ofsted, 2012, 2014, and 2015) where a separate judgement has been made on leadership and management which include the criteria of student outcomes.

### **2.1.2 Identification and selection of studies for review**

The review of literature began with searching journals for research articles and texts on leadership, with a particular focus on school improvement and issues concerning middle leadership. The review focused on middle leadership and these two words were used as a starting point when searching journals and books. This early reading prompted reviewing further the development of leaders and their roles beyond managers. Leadership is considered as setting values and vision and planning for the future, whilst management is seen as ensuring the present works. This led to searching for literature on leaders' contribution to whole school improvement, which in turn then exposed different leadership constructs. Initially the construct of distributed leadership was extensively reviewed and this was considered a key area of the study, however, reviewing literature on other leadership constructs enabled a broader approach.

Four criteria finally guided the selection of studies for the review: articles focussing on the following were explored:

- development of management to management and leadership
- the effects of leadership on school improvement and performance
- different leadership constructs including; distributed, transformational and inclusive leadership
- continuing professional development for leaders

I restricted to those in the UK because the constructs of school leadership in other parts of the world, for example USA, have different cultures of administration and do not compare easily with this country.

### **2.1.3 Emerging leadership themes**

The review of literature generated a range of findings. The findings from the review are built around the framework that proposes leadership as a construct. Within the framework the historical context is set regarding the development from management to management and leadership. The dynamic nature of education and national developments underpin the framework as the findings from literature show that external accountability through league tables, meeting national targets and gaining the highest Ofsted grades have influenced the development of leadership and leaders in secondary schools and elsewhere. The review has focused on middle leadership. A key theme that emerged was the notion of distributed leadership as a development for middle leaders. This has been widely researched (Gronn, 2000, Arrowsmith, 2007, Harris, 2004, 2008, Spillane, 2008, Chou & Glover, 2012) and there is evidence that this is the predominant model that has influenced the change in the role of middle leaders within secondary schools (Harris, 2013). A further theme is the idea of developing middle leaders, through continuing professional development, to prepare for senior leadership. This is also described as talent spotting (Rhodes, Brundrett & Nevill, 2008). The interview questions for this study therefore include the topics of distributed leadership, middle and senior leaders contributing to whole school improvement and continuing professional development for middle leaders.

### **2.2 Management to management and leadership**

This first part of the review explores some of the developments that have emerged as educational management has changed to incorporate leadership.

Educational management was an area of study that was relatively new when the Education Reform Act (ERA) was passed in 1988. The ERA introduced Local Management of Schools which increased the responsibility of headteachers and senior leaders to manage their schools. In the early 1990s educational management became an area of exploration. One view was that the framework of educational management was gained from a non-educational framework which was a weakness. The rationale given was that this was limiting in terms of both conceptual analysis and credibility with school and college practitioners (Bell, 1991, p136). Furthermore, Bell (1991, p136) advocated that research on management in school and college settings was limited and therefore a weak basis for building theories of educational management.

Bush (2008) supports the notion of an increased emphasis on educational management as an outcome of the implementation of the ERA (1988). There is logic to his view that headteachers and senior staff took over responsibilities and many aspects of management that previously lay with the local authority. Literature, before and since the time of the ERA (1988), has explored the distinctions between leadership and management. Leadership is defined as promoting change and influencing others' actions in order to reach existing and new goals (Cuban, 1988, p xx). Management is seen as effective maintenance of current organisational arrangement rather than change (Cuban, 1988, p xx). Management has also been defined as making a school function on a daily basis (West- Burnham & Harris, 2015). Definitions and distinctions between management and leadership have been varied. Two simplistic definitions that have been presented are; leadership is "doing the right thing" and management is "doing things right" (Lester & Kunich, 1997, p18). Drucker (1954, p6) defined management as "the specific and distinguishing organ of any and all organisations." Macdonald, Burke & Stewart (2006, p7) define a manager as "a person who is accountable for their own work and the work performance of people reporting to them over time." They further claim that based on this definition all managers are leaders of people. The debate about leadership versus management has continued and West-Burnham & Harris (2015) argue that improvements can be made through management but leadership can go further:

Effective management will lead to incremental improvement that is useful but may not be sufficient. Leadership, by contrast, offers the possibility of transformation (West-Burnham & Harris, 2015, p19).

In contrast leadership brings about the possibility of transformation. Kotter (2014) argues strongly that management is not leadership, however, values both equally. He emphasises that management as we know it today is a later twentieth century invention although its roots go back further. Management is defined as:

A well-known set of processes that help organisations produce reliable, efficient and predictable results (Kotter J, 2014, p59).

Leadership is defined as:

Creating a vision, empowering and inspiring people to want to achieve the vision and enabling them to do so with energy and speed through an effective strategy (Kotter J, 2014, p60).

Whilst Kotter (2014) highlights the difference between management and leadership, he claims that both are essential for helping organisations to win.

There has been criticism of research conducted on management and leadership in the 1980s and early 1990s. An analysis of 115 studies spanning fifteen years concluded that whilst the research was intended to study leadership that in fact it focused on 'appointment ship' (Baruch, 1998). In this context the term 'appointment ship' refers to candidates appointed to the role of headteacher. There could be criticism of Baruch's (1998) study as the term 'appointment ship' is expanded to mean that 'heads' are appointed rather than leaders. The study recognises that there are many different definitions of leadership yet concludes that there is evidence of a common understanding. The term 'head' is not defined but Baruch (1998) clearly criticises the studies for focussing on appointment rather than leadership. The use of the term 'head' in this study (Baruch, 1998) may be misleading in the context of educational leadership and management.

The shift from management to leadership was emphasised with the autonomy gained by schools through the local management of schools (LMS) introduced by the Conservative Government (1988). It is further claimed that a key introduction by the Labour Government (1997) for leaders and managers in education was the launch of the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) as it emphasised the importance of leadership in securing school improvement (Bush, 2008). The school improvement agenda initially focused on management without any reference to leadership. Schools were expected to be managed effectively to achieve externally driven objectives such as KS3 and 4 targets (DfES, 2002). Initially the concept of managing schools was based very much on applying industrial models (Bush, 2008).

Whilst prior to the ERA (HMSO 1998) little recognition was given to educational leadership it could be argued that the educational management issues at the time (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989 and Bell, 1991) later became leadership issues. For example, Bell (1991) emphasised the need for managers in education to focus on managing change and the curriculum as part of their agendas for the 1990s. Managing schools rationally and focusing on school development planning were areas identified by Bell (1991) for senior staff. There was a clear emphasis on senior colleagues, together with the local education authority, managing different aspects of the school.

The NCSL was the first commitment by central government to leadership rather than management of schools. There is recognition that the NCSL has an extensive role for developing leaders at all levels with a particular focus on middle and senior leaders and headteachers. One of its goals is "To be a driving force for world-class leadership in our schools and the wider community" (NCSL, 2009, p4). The NCSL was considered by

some to be one of the most comprehensive, sophisticated, national models of school leadership development in the world (Bolam, 2004). There is evidence of the development of leadership in schools over the past 15 years which has been supported by the NCSL and now National College of Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) with the development of leadership courses.

One of the aims of this research study is to explore the perceptions of middle leaders on their professional development and the impact this has made on their leadership skills. This in the context of national developments such as the NCTL and their leadership courses as well as provision within the school and borough. A second aim is to gain the perceptions of middle leaders regarding their development and contribution to whole school improvement. The next section reviews literature on school improvement and provides some of the national context.

National policies introduced by the Labour Government were external drivers for school improvement. New Labour, following eighteen years of Conservative rule, was elected in 1997 with Prime Minister Tony Blair's mantra of 'education, education, education'. Blair, The Secretary of State and the DfES emphasised and promoted the link between school leadership and student outcomes in the following years. The standards agenda and externally driven accountability not only continued but were given greater emphasis. However, whilst external pressures, such as league tables, were introduced the Government argued that these clear standards, targets and expectations together with additional resources gave schools the responsibility for school improvement (Barber, 2000). In the years that followed, Government agencies, such as NCTL, promoted school improvement through their courses for leaders. A key focus for the NCTL has been how headteachers and leadership teams can change the performance of their schools (Fullan, 2003).

The development of leadership as part of the School Improvement Agenda was initially supported through the Teacher Training Agency (TTA), established in 1994, which later became the Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA). It was recognised by Anthea Millet, the first Head of TTA, that leadership was a central issue that needed to be tackled as a means of improving schools. Headship was prioritised with the introduction of the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH) (NCSL 1997) with the intention of standardising Headship and identifying those ready to be leaders of schools. Traditionally training for headship was mainly focused on management and run by LEAs, universities and professional associations. The specific courses for leaders and aspiring leaders demonstrated the Government's belief, at the



time, that investment in the development of leaders would raise standards and improve the quality of education. The validity of the assessment process of the NPQH has been questioned with the claim that leadership is centrally about values and questions how values can be assessed (Bush, 2008). There is a clear link between the Government driving policies and influencing values through the NPQH. The question of the NPQH inculcating the right values (Bush, 2008) is interesting and at this stage, one that cannot be dismissed. The emphasis on the qualification has reduced in recent years as it is no longer statutory for headteachers to gain the NPQH (DfE 2011). An extensive range of leadership courses, plus a virtual college, have been developed and the NCTL has been a major sponsor of school research. The rationale for the NCTL was based on the importance of leadership and management and the integration of teaching and learning in securing school improvement and positive student outcomes.

Bush (2008) claims that the development of the NCTL has had a fundamental impact on the leadership and management of schools in England and operates the most sophisticated model in the world. Recognition has been given to the NCTL for being innovative in their approach to training leaders (Bush, 2008). Most importantly the NCTL has provided a national focus for school leadership; this is far beyond any previous provider. Practitioners, current and recent headteachers, lead College programmes

The development of the NCTL is not without criticism. The NCTL is the single national body for school leadership development and it has the monopoly of delivering the NPQH; this lack of pluralism carries risks. There has also been criticism about the NCTL focussing on individual development rather than developing broader training that impacts on school improvement (Bush, 2008). Another critical view of the NCTL claims that it develops a culture of leadership that promotes and endorses Government reform and policy. Furthermore, leaders developed by the NCTL are then proactive in their institutions acting as a conduit for government reform influencing the practice of other colleagues (Wallace, Deem, Tomlinson & O'Reilly, 2011). However, positive evidence is presented following a study of three of the leadership programmes delivered by the NCTL: the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), leading from the Middle (LftM) and Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (LPSH) showing the positive impacts on leadership and school improvement (Simkins, Coldwell, Close & Morgan, 2009).

The NCTL was described as a reflection of new Labour's ideology for the development of leadership and management in school; there is a claim that if the college lost political support the whole architecture of leadership development could be lost (Bolam, 2004). In particular the NCTL had a specific remit from the DfES and it has been argued that

this lost the independent voice for school leaders as there is a requirement to deliver in accordance with the government department (Thrupp, 2005).

Extensive government funding was originally invested in the NCTL for the building, the programmes and staffing. The coalition Government (May 2010) continued to support the national college. Furthermore, new national leadership posts were developed. There is an argument that the development of the NCTL weakened the university sector (Bush, 2008) and has led to some experiencing difficulties recruiting candidates to masters and doctoral programmes. Additional pressure has been placed on universities with reductions in funding. However, certain higher education institutions currently operate as licensees to deliver the most recent leadership courses developed by the NCTL. These include the National Professional Qualification for Senior Leaders (NPQSL), the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders (NPQML) and the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH). It must be noted that in the Government's recent 'Educational Excellence Everywhere' Whitepaper (DfE 2016) there is an intended reform of the NCTL which will include a focus on teacher recruitment together with strengthening leadership programmes.

### **2.3 Leadership and school improvement**

As leadership and management developed, within the context of schools becoming apparently more autonomous, the Government placed expectations that initiated a focus on school improvement. This section provides a critical view of literature on leadership and school improvement and the impact of the Secondary National Strategy for School Improvement.

The link between school improvement and leadership in schools has consistently been made since the late 1990s (Creemers & Reezigt, 2005, Hollins, Gunter & Thomson 2006, Harris, 2004). High quality leadership has been proposed as vital for school improvement and student outcomes (Bush, 2009). Teacher leadership and collaboration within the context of change has been proposed as vital for school improvement:

Successful school improvement is dependent upon the ability of individual schools to manage change and development.....Building the capacity for school improvement requires paying careful attention to how collaborative processes in schools are fostered and developed (Muijs D and Harris, A 2006, p1).

The focus here is on the schools desire to develop, change and improve. The emphasis on school improvement since the 1980s is viewed by others to be inextricably linked to

external pressures from the Government including the development of Ofsted inspections. The expectation is for schools to improve and bring about high student outcomes (Barker, 2007, Whitty, 2008).

Perryman (2010) specifically links school improvement with school effectiveness and argues that the development of Ofsted inspections has promoted the focus on improvement. The Ofsted slogan in 2007 'raising standards improving lives' links improvement with the school's effectiveness in raising standards. The introduction of league tables has added further external pressure on schools to improve with a focus on raising standards. This is explored further in section 2.4.

School effectiveness and school improvement, whilst often linked together, are seen as separate issues by Creemers and Reezigt (2005). They argue that school effectiveness grows school characteristics that enable particular learning outcomes, and school improvement addresses factors and processes that establish these effectiveness-enhancing factors. As a headteacher practitioner I would argue that school effectiveness leads to school improvement and that the two cannot be separated.

Hopkins et al (1994) put forward the following definition of school effectiveness, which again emphasises practice:

A distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change...raises student achievement through focusing on the teacher-learning process and the conditions which support it...improving the school's capacity for providing quality education in times of change (Hopkins, et al 1994, p3).

Within this definition Hopkins et al (1994) highlight student outcomes and achievement. This is supported by Creemers and Reezigt (2005) who again recognise that school improvement may be at school or teacher level, i.e. it can be directed at the school organisation or at classroom management. However, they claim its main goal must in reality be stated in terms of student outcomes. It is also considered that change is a feature of school improvement and that in order for improvement to occur the culture must be favourable and furthermore there must be shared goals (Creemers & Reezigt, 2005). This emphasises whole school improvement being directly related to outcomes, however, effective leadership in turn impacts on those outcomes. There appears to be a gap in exploring the perceptions of middle leaders about their contribution to whole school improvement.

The Secondary National Strategy (SNS) for School Improvement was introduced by the DfES in 2000. The strategy was used as a major tool by the Government for school improvement by working with middle and senior leaders in secondary and special schools. It was initiated as part of the Government's major reform for transforming secondary education underpinned by the Every Child Matters (DfES 2004) initiative and very much part of The New Relationship with Schools (DfES 2005). The National Strategy was heavily supported with Government funding which was used for materials, national and regional personnel and direct funding to schools. Additional funding and support was given to schools in challenging circumstances. To maintain impetus, the Strategy was extended to cover both Key Stages 3 and 4 and schools received updated guidance in 2005/06. The guidance focused on matching the Strategy's principles to school improvement. Clear direction was given to integrate the National Strategy fully into the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning process. The key actions from the National Strategy directed at headteachers and senior leaders included; department self-review; classroom instruction, curriculum and assessment and whole school approaches to development.

While the Secondary National Strategy focused on leaders improving schools Fullan (2008) has argued that there is an absence of evidence that leaders contribute to school improvement. This is further supported by the claim that there is substantive evidence to show that the intake of students and their socio economic status are the most important indicators of student outcomes (Bush, 2008). Student outcomes are interpreted by the DfE, NCTL and Ofsted as strong indicators of school improvement. I would agree with Fullan about the absence of evidence to show the contribution made by leaders to school improvement. I would argue that the gap in evidence to support the notion of leaders contributing to school improvement is an indication that further research is required on the impact of leadership on whole school improvement and student outcomes. I agree with Bush that socio economic status can be one indicator of student outcomes, there is evidence from schools, for example as part of London Challenge (Woods & Brighouse, 2014) to show that continuous school improvement can lead to positive outcomes from all groups of students. There are crucial implications for senior and middle leaders in secondary schools about student outcomes, against national criteria and expectations. The aim of this study is to provide some evidence about the perceptions of middle leaders regarding their contribution to school improvement.

An earlier definition of school improvement is set within the context of improving schools from within by building a community of learners:

School improvement is an effort to determine and provide, from without and within, conditions under which the adults and youngsters who inhabit schools will promote and sustain learning themselves (Barth, 1990, p 45).

Within this context the headteacher becomes the lead learner, modelling the expectations of students and staff, including other leaders (Barth, 1990). However, Harris (2001) argues that leadership of schools and accountability has expanded beyond senior managers, now called senior leaders, to Heads of Department who are now frequently referred to as middle leaders or subject leaders. With the increasing role of subject leaders there have been more links with school improvement (Harris, 2001).

Improving schools through the development of positive school cultures continues to be proposed as a model that creates continuous learning and improved outcomes. In this model leaders create cultures with their understanding of the bigger picture, however, the headteacher shares leadership and builds capacity for others to lead. It is argued that collaborative leadership with shared responsibility for student progress are key factors for school improvement (Kaplan & Owings, 2013).

A further aim of this study is to gain an understanding of whether a culture has been developed where middle leaders are enabled and have a desire to contribute to school improvement. A rationale for focussing on school improvement is the tension that may arise between a school's own identification of areas to improve versus the external pressures placed on schools to improve. This comes from my experience as a headteacher for eight years and the external accountability placed on the school to continually improve. This is reviewed more extensively in the next section.

### **2.3.1 The use of the Training and Development Agency School Improvement Planning Framework to develop middle leadership**

An example is provided here of how one of the national initiatives was used directly by the school in the study. The school had kept abreast of national developments and had focused on school improvement. Whilst not directly involved with the National Improvement Strategy our involvement with the Training and Development Agency (TDA), and in particular the 'School Improvement Planning Framework', (TDA, 2008) had provided professional training on a national development.

TDA consultants worked with the school in 2010 to deliver activities using the Framework. Middle leaders valued the professional development they received during a

one conference with middle leaders from two other high schools, led by TDA consultants. The training focused on middle leaders identifying strengths and areas for development in their schools within the context of the five *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2005) outcomes. This was an initial step for middle leaders to consider whole school development.

In their evaluation of the day, middle leaders conveyed that the TDA Framework was a valuable tool for critically evaluating strengths and areas of development. They also cited the need for more joint continuing professional development (CPD) facilitated by external consultants. Joint CPD has not been followed up by the specific schools involved as there is no longer access to consultants attached to the TDA, which funded, planned and facilitated previous training. In their evaluation middle leaders also requested further CPD focusing on school improvement and for the training to be sustained over a period of time. A weakness was exposed of using short term Government funding and not planning for sustainability without funding in future years. However, since 2008 middle leader CPD has subsequently been addressed by the school with different programmes enabling links with practitioners in other schools. Most recently three middle leaders have embarked on the new cluster CPD devised by the NCTL which involves working on strategically planning school improvement with other middle leaders from four other schools in two different local authorities. The initiation of continuing professional development for middle leaders was part of the increased recognition of the importance in developing their role in a whole school context. An area explored in this study is middle leader views on their CPD.

## **2.4 Leadership and external accountability**

Alongside the development of a national focus on school improvement has been an increased accountability for schools to improve. This has been supported by formal monitoring of school performance through the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). The following sections firstly review literature on the development of Ofsted and secondly on performance tables and the implications for school leadership.

### **2.4.1 The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)**

A new relationship with schools (DfES/Ofsted2005) formalised the Labour Government's vision to give schools greater freedom and autonomy linked to internal accountability. One key aim was to build capacity for schools to improve, using rigorous self-evaluation, strong collaboration and effective planning for improvement. Since 2005 there has been increasing focus on the contribution that the school self-evaluation can make to the

school improvement process, this builds upon earlier models where Ofsted (1999) describes self-evaluation as the key to improvement. Ofsted and the DfES (2005) as part of 'A new relationship with schools' identified school self-evaluation as crucial for school improvement.

The main changes introduced were; using a school's own self-evaluation as a starting point for inspection, using a school's own development plan as the key planning document without the need for other documentation and shorter, sharper inspections with two to three days' notice. Alongside this was the notion of schools having 'a single conversation' (DfES, 2005) with School Improvement Partners about how well the school was performing, developing three year spending plans with fewer ring fenced streams of funding from the Government and academic targets set by every school. The New Relationship with Schools (Ofsted, 2005) and the revised frameworks (Ofsted, 2012, 2014, 2015) have influenced secondary schools in England, particularly in the way school self-evaluation and improvement planning have developed as part of the preparation for an external inspection by Ofsted. A development since 2007 has been to design an integrative model based on the use of self-evaluation where the learning organisation is used to integrate the different processes (Plowright, 2007). The notion of a learning organisation culture where there is strong development of reflective self-evaluation as part of a school's daily practice was put forward by Plowright (2007) and there has subsequently been an even greater emphasis on school self-evaluation with a more detailed document for recording the outcomes, under the later Ofsted Framework (2012). However, it could be questioned whether schools focused more on the practice of self-evaluation or more on the administrative task of completing a very detailed School Evaluation Form (SEF). It has also been questioned whether schools can make judgments and reflect in an unbiased way and then take action based upon their evaluation (Devos & Verhoeven, 2003).

It could have been argued that formerly the main reason for completion of the SEF was to satisfy the requirements of Ofsted. Schools were no longer required to complete a SEF from 2010. Schools have been recommended to continue self-evaluation. It would appear that schools are being given greater autonomy with self-evaluation. Whilst the impact of Ofsted on school improvement has been questioned (Plowright, 2007), there may be issues arising if there is no external accountability even for schools formerly judged as outstanding. Middle leaders in this study continue to do self-evaluations for their departments.

Pocklington and Weindling (1996) argued that school improvement was best achieved by external facilitators working collaboratively with school and local authority staff in contrast with the approach from Ofsted. However, this view is becoming outmoded as the role of local authority changes, with the introduction, by the Coalition Government (2010), of conversion to academy status for initially good or outstanding, progressing to all schools, thus giving each school greater autonomy and independence from local authorities. The number of schools that became academies from May 2010 to January 2011 doubled, with 400 academies established by the end of that period (DfE, 2011). The NCTL played a key strategic role in establishing the provision for leaders to develop further. This was followed by the introduction of National Leaders of Education (NLEs) and Local leaders of Education (LLEs) being established as exemplars to other headteachers. NLEs are those headteachers whose schools have been judged to be outstanding by Ofsted and who then are able to support other schools to improve. The NCTL were clear in their vision for NLEs:

Locally, NLEs are becoming increasingly important providers and contributors to school improvement....In the fast growing world of school to school improvement and in the overall context of public spending constraints, there is less need for local authorities to retain significant school improvement teams of advisers and consultants (Hill & Mathews,p15 2010).

External inspection by Ofsted is not the first reason for school improvement. School improvement may concern the school or teacher level in that it may be directed at the whole school organisation or at classroom level; its main goal must essentially be stated in terms of student outcomes (Creemers & Reezigt, 2005). There is a tension here as whilst there is belief that school improvement should not be based around the expectations set out in the Ofsted Framework, gaining the best judgements under the Ofsted (2015) criteria is crucial for a school.

This study is focused on middle leaders' perceptions of their development and contribution to whole school improvement. There is no intention to explore views on the influence or pressure of external accountability and school improvement. However, it is recognised that the demands on schools to perform well according to the Ofsted criteria are part of the whole school improvement agenda. This external accountability has implications for headteachers, Governors and senior leaders to continuously improve the school. There has been increased focus on middle leadership in the more recent Ofsted Frameworks (2012, 2014, and 2015). In 2007 middle leadership was identified as an area for improvement at our school, where the study takes place. At that time the school was judged to be good.



## 2.4.2 Performance Data and National League Tables

As part of the School Improvement Agenda every school is required to evaluate their performance and set challenging targets. When introduced, analysis of outcomes was emphasised by the Government's publication of individual school data in the Performance and Assessment Report (PANDA) and the Pupil Achievement Tracker (PAT). These have since merged to become the Reporting and Analysis for Improvement (RAISE online). The clear expectation continues for schools to use this as a tool for deeper analysis as part of school self-evaluation and target setting. Increased accountability for schools had already emerged with the introduction of National League Tables in 1992.

League tables are considered as a tool for parents to distinguish effective from ineffective schools (Wilson & Piebalga, 2008). The need for parents to use League Tables to determine their choice of school is questionable, however in reality parents do refer to League Tables as part of their selection process. Furthermore, higher rates of exam success attract what has been described as a socially superior set of residents to the locality of the school. Equally, the already established local population mix, labour market pressures and local education policy affect school level success rate (Gordon & Monastiriotis, 2007). Student outcomes and exam performance are key foci for school improvement. The importance of whole school improvement in terms of exam outcomes is emphasised further with this link to parental choice.

As a driver for school improvement, parental choice regarding schools was extended and strengthened (Education and Inspections Bill, 2006). A further development was a deemed 'improvement' to the National League tables with the inclusion of two new performance measures (National League Tables, 2006). Alongside 5A\* - C the new target indicator identified a sub-group whose five good passes included English and maths (5A\* - C: E& M). The improvement agenda for schools became strongly linked to outcomes for students which were publically displayed as league tables. League tables have continued with the criteria to judge schools changing over time. Significantly, the floor standards set an expectation for all schools to gain above a set percentage of GCSEs including English and mathematics irrespective of students' prior attainment. Schools falling below the floor standards are then quickly inspected by Ofsted to determine whether the school should go into special measures. The publication of national league tables places considerable external pressure upon a school to improve year on year.

There is clearly the notion of the improvement system being very firmly tied into quantifiable outcomes thus being GCSE results. This external accountability, including the public display of performance tables, places additional pressure on headteachers and senior leaders. There is a tension between leaders having the autonomy to be visionary and creative whilst responding to the pressures of local governance, parental choice and central control (Earley P, 2013). The focus for this study is middle leadership and the perceptions of these leaders surrounding the notion of whole school improvement. The question about contributions to school improvement is intended to reflect both improvements within the local and national context.

## **2.5 The discourse of leadership within the context of national development**

The literature referenced so far has provided an outline of some key national developments since the ERA (1988). The focus on school improvement has been emphasised with the introduction of performance data and national league tables, the raised profile of Ofsted with the 'New Relationship with Schools (DfES 2000), the initiation of Specialist School Status and Academy Status for schools, the development of the Secondary National Strategy and the launching of the NCTL. The development of leadership as part of the move from management to leadership and management has been significant. This has also been reflected in the growth of literature on leadership:

The literature began to groan with interest in varying types of leadership and how this might (or might not) relate to practice (Crawford, 2012, p611).

Crawford (2012) highlights the development of the NCTL as a key part of leadership development this century. Furthermore she identifies the discourse moving from management to leadership, however, within the discussions the move from the solo model of leadership to a variety of models of shared leadership. This, she claims, emerged as a result of dissatisfaction with the 'super head' model. I challenge this view and question whether the national developments drove a situation where it was recognised headteachers could not lead a school effectively without working in partnership with other leaders in the school. The outcome being that school improvement is a shared responsibility rather than the sole responsibility of the headteacher.

With the increased external expectations for schools to improve and rise to the challenge of Government targets at all key stages of a child's education, I would argue that middle and senior leaders have been expected to respond and meet expectations through the development of their leadership skills. The recognition of middle and senior leaders

improving schools has been reflected in the Ofsted frameworks since 2012 (Ofsted 2012, 15). The NCTL in previous years promoted the national leadership qualifications for both middle and senior leaders which I suggest gives further recognition of the importance of the role of middle leaders. The continuation of these qualifications by higher education institutions arguably indicates the continued demand for middle and senior leadership national qualifications. This study focuses on middle leaders as previously there was more emphasis on the role of the headteacher and the senior team. This has prompted the overarching question of this study regarding middle leaders' perception of their development and contribution to whole school improvement.

## **2.6 Middle Leadership**

Middle leaders are the layer between senior leaders and classroom teachers. Traditionally this role in secondary schools was filled by Heads of Department and Heads of Year. Over time the number of different middle leader roles has grown and now include posts such as Leader of Literacy, Assistant Head of Year and Achievement Leader. During the last 20 years there has been a relatively limited amount of research purely focused on middle leadership. The main lines of enquiry have focused on; leadership and management, the tensions between middle and senior leaders and middle leaders developing their teams to have an impact on school improvement.

Much earlier research (NCSL 2003) on middle leadership highlighted the tension between the differing expectations of senior and middle leaders:

Between senior staff expectations that the middle leader would play a whole-school role and a common belief among middle leaders that their loyalty was to their department or subject responsibilities (NCSL 2003, p4)

The study found that the focus for middle leaders at that time was to lead and manage their own teams. It was acknowledged that senior leaders expected middle leaders to become involved in the wider school context; however, there was reluctance as many saw themselves as department representatives. (NCSL 2003). At the same time the NCSL were publishing other documents for middle leaders and had established Leading from the Middle (NCSL 2003) as a national training programme. This has since been superseded by the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders (NPQML) which is now delivered through Higher Education Institutions. In a practical guide to middle leaders (NCSL 2003), there was an emphasis on the need for a strong relationship between middle and senior leaders as part of school improvement.

However, there was still a clear distinction between the roles of senior and middle leaders which were documented separately.

A later review of research identified the tensions throughout studies of the expectations of middle leadership in schools going beyond the department; however, this was not always received positively. It was argued that middle leaders needed to feel comfortable with their subject colleagues and wished to protect their team from depredations before playing a role within the whole school (Bennett, Woods, Wise & Newton, 2007). Bennett (2007) identified the complexities of relationships encountered by middle leaders in their communities of practice. The relationships include those with their team and with senior leaders. He argued that clearer understandings of the work of middle leaders could be established through further investigation of their relationships with other members of their communities of practice.

The discussion of relationships between senior and middle leaders and the expectations for middle leaders to lead and contribute beyond their department was a shift change from earlier views. In the 1990s middle leaders were described as middle managers who had a clear focus on their department and team:

In hierarchical terms the head of department is a middle manager. He or she is not part of the senior management team, responsible for the overall strategic development of a school, but someone responsible for the operational work of others, namely classroom teachers (Busher & Harris 1999, p 307).

Busher and Harris (1999) did recognise that middle leaders play a central role in establishing cohesive communities as leaders of departments where colleagues collaborate and give a high level of commitment. They argued that within this middle management there was the potential for change and improvement in the organisation (Busher & Harris 1999).

The NCTL has played a key role in development middle leadership with the imitation of specific courses. Other organisations have also developed specialist courses for middle leaders. Teaching Leaders, a charity established in 2008, have focused on developing outstanding middle leaders to reduce in school variation between subjects in schools in the most challenging circumstances. SSAT (2014) has developed the National Award for Middle Leadership. Promotional documentation for the course describes middle leaders as 'the engine room of school improvement' (SSAT 2016).

More recently it has been argued that middle leaders need to be able to both lead and manage; however, there is little reference to contributing to whole school improvement (Fleming 2014). In providing advice on how to be 'amazing' when appointed to the middle leader role there continues to be a focus on leading a team and improving teaching within that team (Bentley –Davies 2014). There is no recognition of working with senior leaders to improve the school. It could be argued that the particular advice given in the section, 'A Good SMT Link' (Bentley-Davies 2014) presents quite a negative view on relationships between middle and senior leaders:

Don't agree with everything they say! The SMT often go on a lot of training and may come back with a bonkers idea that they've heard in the lunch queue, they think it is the latest thing! (Bentley-Davies 2014, p252)

This I would suggest does not reflect the development of middle leaders over time, where there has been an increased focus on different leadership constructs which apply to both senior and middle leaders. The next section of the review focuses on a sample of different leadership constructs that have developed with the aim of evaluating similarities and differences.

## **2.7 Leadership Constructs**

This section specifically reviews literature on different leadership constructs. Distributed leadership is a construct that is specifically explored with middle leaders as part of the study. The rationale for including other constructs in the literature review is to consider similarities and to identify any gaps.

### **2.7.1 Distributed Leadership**

Within this study middle leaders are specifically asked about their understanding of distributed leadership. The reason for posing this specific question is that it is a construct of leadership that has been particularly linked with middle leadership and has developed extensively over the last 15 years. During this time a range of definitions and understandings of distributed leadership have emerged. Gronn (2002) presented one of the earlier conceptual descriptions of distributed leadership. His theory of distributed leadership is divided into two broad meanings. Firstly where leadership is dispersed rather than concentrated and involves many or all the members of an organisation. Secondly Gronn (2002) perceived leadership as being concertive action in which

leadership is more than the sum of its parts. Gronn (2002) identifies three main patterns: collaborative models of engagement arising spontaneously; intuitive understanding between colleagues; and institutional structural organisation that regulates distributive action.

There is a common theme of shared leadership in the first two patterns. In the initial descriptor leadership is evident in interaction and relationships between colleagues with different skill sets and expertise. The second descriptor highlights the shared role which emerges through the joint close working between colleagues. Gronn (2002) uses a variety of empirical studies to support his theory of distributed leadership. His work is recognised by the National College (2003) in their desk study which reviewed literature on distributed leadership up to July 2002. Gronn's work was judged by the NCTL (2003) as 'the most sophisticated attempt to develop a conceptual description of distributed leadership' (p15). I support this view and would argue that Gronn's theory of distributed leadership continues to be relevant and has formed a solid foundation for studies that have followed.

The NCTL study (2003) was at a time when distributed leadership was in its infancy, however, I suggest there is still relevance for current leadership models. The study, as part of its overview, proposed three distinctive elements of distributed leadership:

Distributed leadership highlights leadership as an emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals.

Distributed leadership suggests openness of the boundaries of leadership.

Distributed leadership entails the view that varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few (NCTL 2003 p7).

I would argue that these are very generic and are open to different interpretations. The study itself is very thorough in its exploration of literature up to July 2003, however, I would question what impact does this study and other research have on practitioners in schools?

Post 2003, definitions and interpretations of distributed leadership have continued and been revisited by some researchers. The concept of distributed leadership has been described as a model of mobilising leaders in schools at all levels and not just relying on leadership from the top. It aims to engage middle and senior leaders in leadership activities in the school with interactions between many leaders rather than action from

an individual leader (Harris, 2005). Distributed leadership is also considered as a distribution of power which extends authority and influence to groups or individuals and is to some degree contrary to hierarchical structures (Arrowsmith, 2007). Further interpretations of the term 'distributed leadership' are varied and include; devolved leadership (Bennet et al, 2003); collaborative and participative leadership (Leithwood et al, 2004); and democratic leadership (Woods, 2004). The range of concepts could suggest that distributed leadership is a complex leadership model. Again I would question whether the theory of distributed leadership is impacting on leaders in schools. Do leaders themselves have an understanding of the term distributed leadership?

Interaction between individuals is included in the framework of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2008). The framework has two core aspects; firstly principal plus, which acknowledges that a number of individuals are involved in leading and managing schools and secondly the practice aspect that prioritises the practice of leading and managing and frames this as emerging from the interaction that takes place between leaders and followers within the work situation. The view presented is that practice is more about interaction than action (Spillane, 2009). This is supported by the notion that from the distributed perspective social interaction is a critical aspect of the leadership role (Harris, 2013). How formal leaders interact with others and the reciprocal nature of leadership is again highlighted as an important practice of distributed leadership. Furthermore the practice of leadership is more important than the precise leadership role (Harris, 2013). This concept of distributed leadership is developed further with the perspective that acknowledges the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership whether or not they are designated leaders (Harris, & Spillane, 2008). Interaction and the partnership between leaders are recognised as important. I agree that this is important within the model of distributed leadership and in other leadership constructs. This prompts further questions about how interactions between leaders manifest themselves in schools. In this study I aim to explore further the relationship between middle and senior leaders. In particular I am seeking the views of middle leaders about their interaction with senior leaders.

Whilst there is a range of differing definitions and interpretations of distributed leadership, Timperley argues that there is one point where different authors agree:

Distributed leadership is not the same as dividing task responsibilities among individuals who perform defined and separate organizational roles, but rather it comprises dynamic interactions between multiple leaders and followers (Timperley H, 2005, p397).

Timperley (2005) may be accurate in her identification of an area of agreement; however, it could be argued that the number of these earlier definitions of distributed leadership may lead to confusion amongst practitioners in schools. It prompts a further question; do leaders in schools fully understand the model of distributed leadership and can they identify this in their practice? This is a key interview question in this research study.

An area of debate that has emerged is whether distributed leadership has a positive impact on school improvement and raised standards of achievement. Hargreaves & Fink (2008) put forward a strong link between distributed leadership and positive student outcome their study provides convincing evidence supported by examples of schools in Finland where there is a strong sense of community and in schools. 'Trust, cooperation and responsibility' (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008) are central to the education system with national and local networks being a strong feature. It is acknowledged that Finland's education system differs from England as the focus is on learning rather than measured performance. This underpins the systemic distributed leadership. The question is raised:

Can distributed leadership be a key principle in a coherent and democratic consensus that joins the entire community in the pursuit of a compelling social vision? (Hargreaves and Fink, 2008, p239).

This may appear to be an idealistic model of distributed leadership; however, Finland has been a world leader in educational performance. For this study it prompts the question of whether middle leaders include any elements, including, 'trust, co-operation and responsibility', in their responses about distributed leadership.

Harris (2004) claims that the link between distributed leadership and school improvement can be implied rather than proven. The links between school improvement and more collaborative and democratic forms of leadership are advocated but clear links with improved outcomes for students are not evident (Harris, 2004). Lynch (2012) claims there is scant evidence to show a direct causal relationship between distributed leadership and school outcomes. In an earlier study Harris (2003) links distributed leadership to teachers collaborating to improve classroom practice for the benefit of students. Arrowsmith (2007) found that interviewees were in favour of distributed leadership as it made them feel valued. However, they viewed the overall responsibility for the school's progress resided ultimately with the headteacher. There is not a unified view on the impact of distributed leadership on outcomes and school improvement. As a practicing headteacher I would argue that responsibility for whole school improvement cannot lay solely with the headteacher. However, I would question whether there is a



leadership model that goes beyond the distributed model and does have a positive impact on outcomes and whole school improvement.

There is a recurring theme across literature that establishing a clear definition of distributed leadership is important (Mayrowetz, 2008, Gronn, 2009, Harris, 2013). However, there are many different definitions presented indicating that the term 'distributed leadership' has been used for a wide range of leadership practice in schools. Harris (2013) emphasises the implications of distributed leadership for formal leaders with respect to how they understand their practice and the way they view their role as a leader. In exploring distributed leadership the work of effective senior leadership teams is considered an important aspect which has received little recognition and empirical work (Bush & Glover, 2012). A study of high-performing leadership teams in English Schools, commissioned by the English National College showed that key characteristics, amongst others, include a commitment to distributed leadership. The nine schools studied showed distributed leadership being used in different ways and to varying extents. The case studies showed that 'distribution is more likely where there are high levels of trust and shared values' (Bush & Glover, 2012, p34).

This seems to be a very valid point and the notion of trust and shared values will be explored with middle leaders in this study with regard to the relationship between middle and senior leaders.

Two further claims from the findings were, despite the focus on distributed leadership, headteachers maintain central control and that headteachers need to find the balance between solo and distributed leadership (Bush & Glover, 2012). The notion of solo leaders figuring prominently within models of distributed leadership is put forward by Gronn (2009) when reviewing the development of distributed leadership. He goes further to claim that the role of solo leaders has not been clarified as part of distributed leadership and their contribution as continued sources of organisational influence is not recognised. Bush & Glover (2012) claim that heads decide what is distributed and how distribution is achieved. They cite Thomas (2009, p2) who suggests that heads show strength as a leader within the framework of a team. I would argue, is this solo leadership? There may be other senior leaders who display strength within the team framework. As a headteacher practitioner I have a keen interest in how middle leaders view the relationship between middle and senior leaders. In particular I am interested if solo leadership by the headteacher is included within responses. Harris (2013) highlights:

Distributed leadership underlines that heads are only part of the leadership practice in any school as there are inevitably many other sources of influence and direction (Harris, 2013, p347).

I support this view point and would argue that being part of the leadership practice in itself eliminates extensively the 'solo role'. Harris (2013) further claims that heads have been restructuring and realigning leadership structures and responsibilities in schools to accommodate distributed leadership. She further suggests that the practice of restructuring will be needed to continue in the future maximise the capacity to lead innovation and improvement through the distributed leadership model. The school in this study has undergone leadership structural change. The impact of the change will be explored through interviews with middle leaders.

Arguing against distributed leadership as a fair and equitable construct of leadership, Lumby (2013) claims that distributed leadership has dominated in schools and higher education in the last ten years and has been used to create 'an apolitical workplace' (Lumby, 2013, p582). She further argues that distributed leadership leads to increased workloads, accountability and the disempowerment and exclusion of some staff within a leadership model. I disagree with Lumby's argument of increased workloads and accountability and suggest that other studies e.g. Arrowsmith (2007) have found that distributed leadership is valued by teachers in schools. Lumby (2013) does not provide any evidence from practitioners working in schools to support her arguments and this reduces the credibility. Upon reflection, it would appear from the variation in how distributed leadership is implemented in the study, that some staff may feel excluded if not actively involved within the model developed in a school. It suggests a gap in the distributed leadership model for developing a more inclusive leadership construct.

Over time there has been a wealth of articles produced in journals on distributed leadership with 68 percent of articles published in education or educational management journals. Bolden (2011) suggests that the growth in articles may have been the influence of the National College which have used ideas from distributed leadership in their own publications. He further questions whether distributed leadership is a new alternative to past concepts of leadership or whether it is the case of 'emperor's new clothes' or a response to society's demand for equity and purpose. I would question the extent to which the literature on distributed leadership has reached leaders in schools and how many leaders and aspiring leaders have been influenced by the research and articles on distributed leadership.

There are clear examples of studies which focus on middle and distributed leadership and the impact on student outcomes and school improvement (e.g. Gronn 2002, Hall, Gunter & Bragg, 2011, Bennett, Woods, Wise & Newton, 2007, Harris, 2004, Rhodes, Brundrett & Nevill, 2008). An area which has received less attention is the perception of middle leaders on their contribution to whole school improvement. Whilst the literature suggests that distributed leadership is a more widespread model of leadership in schools, there has been little attention given to middle leaders' understanding of this model. A specific research question posed to middle leaders in this study is what they understand by the term 'distributed leadership'? This question has been designed with a particular focus on distributed leadership to reflect the amount of literature on this subject. Within the literature on distributed leadership there are extensive references to the role of middle leaders. It would appear from the literature that distributed leadership is a construct that is widely understood and practiced by middle leaders. The question on distributed leadership aims to elicit if there is an understanding of the theory and if this is followed up in practice? If there is not an understanding of the theory does this impact on the practice of distributed leadership in the school?

### **2.7.2 Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is defined as the construct that creates valuable and positive changes in its followers (Chou, Lin, Chang & Chaung, 2013). A further definition which underlines the different perspectives of transformational leadership is a leader's ability to increase members' commitment, capacity and engagement in meeting goals of an organisation (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). In transformational leadership, leaders broaden the interests of employees (Bass, 1990). The key aspect of transformational leadership lies in developing employee commitment which leads to the achievement of organisational goals and objectives (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Chou, Lin, Chang & Chang (2013) explored the transformational style with a focus on cognitive trust and collective efficacy and the impact of these on team performance.

There is recognition based on other research findings (Alvolio & Bass, 1995, Podsakoff, Mackenzie, Moorman & Fetter, 1990) that transformational leaders empower and encourage others to make decision and gain the trust of their followers.

They claim that transformational leadership fosters cognitive trust in both the leader and team members. Furthermore they argue:

As team cognitive trust in the leadership process increased, the collective efficacy of a team was enhanced accordingly, which in turn helped to lead better team performance (Chou, Lin, Chang & Chang 2013, p7).

Their study particularly highlights the cognitive trust beyond the leader to the team members. Cognitive trust may simultaneously emerge during interactions between leaders and team members as well as during team work.

Transformational leaders focus on the vision they are pursuing and invite people to join them on their journey. It is essential during the challenging times of the journey for transformational leaders to keep followers inspired. Four necessary traits for transformational leaders are cited by Bass and Alvolio (1990); charisma, consideration for individuals, the ability to inspire and providing intellectual information for followers. These characteristics ensure that transformational leaders engage with their followers, motivating and inspiring them whilst showing care and compassion. The descriptions of the four characteristics appear to indicate that a leader within an institution there would be a charismatic who would gain a high level of trust leading by example and living by their word (Lynch, 2012). The emphasis is on a single leader inspiring others to follow, whilst stimulating them intellectually and showing individual care. I would question the inclusivity of this model of transformational leadership with regard to developing leaders who work jointly to achieve goals and improve outcomes.

However, supporters of transformational leadership would argue that transformational leadership is a widespread and influential leadership construct that brings about a high level of effectiveness (Lynch, 2012). Transformational leadership enables followers to face challenges and find solutions collegiately without supervision from a leader. In the earlier days of its conception Bass (1985) argued that transformational leadership could inspire staff performance beyond their leader's expectations. The success of transformational leadership is shown through increased performance outcomes and the extent to which followers develop their own leadership skills and potential (Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010). One of the research questions in this study focuses on asking middle leaders about their continuing professional development. The aim is to explore how they have been developed and how they are developing their own leadership skills.

Transformational leadership has been investigated further in terms of a principal's position in their school's social network in combination with a school's innovative climate. The findings indicated that the more a principal is engaged in transformational leadership

and close in relationship with teachers, the more teachers perceived the school's climate to be supportive of innovative practices and risk taking (Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010). Their study focuses on the relationships between principals and their staff and their central position in developing an innovative climate. They further claim that creating an innovative climate can impact positively on school improvement. The study does not explore beyond the principal's engagement in transformational leadership and there is no explanation of the involvement of senior and middle leaders. This again raises the question of the inclusivity of this construct more specifically, are senior and middle leaders included as transformational leaders? It could appear to be in contrast to distributed leadership which focuses on a collaborative model of leadership.

There are aspects of transformational leadership, including motivating and inspiring colleagues whilst providing individualised consideration, that are convincing regarding school improvement. I would argue that this construct leaves a gap for middle and senior leaders; however, the strong elements could be developed further to be a more inclusive construct of leadership. There are, however, some similarities with distributed leadership, such as the importance of relationships, which is reviewed in the following section.

In my roles as headteacher and researcher there is an aim of gaining some feedback on the relationships between senior and middle leaders and the impact this has on school improvement.

### **2.7.3 System Leadership**

This construct is included in the literature review as it has featured between the group of High Schools working together to support students across a local area. The continuing professional development provided by headteachers for middle and senior leaders is considered to be a strength of the Collegiate Improvement Framework and is based on a model of system leadership.

The initial definition of system leadership focused on the headteacher or principal working beyond their own school:

System leaders are those headteachers who are willing to shoulder system-wide roles in order to support the improvement of other schools as well as their own (Hopkins & Higham, 2007, p147).

System Leadership is a key part of the White Paper on Higher Standards, Better Schools for All (DfES, 2005a). The paper specifically refers to developing career paths for National Leaders of Education who would work with schools beyond their own, including those with the most complex challenges. Fullan (2004) identifies the new emergence of leaders who work intensely with their own institution but engage and connect with the bigger picture to work with and support other schools. These initial descriptors of system leadership are very narrow as they focus on headteachers working beyond their own schools to support school improvement.

The concept of system leadership was developed further by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL, 2009) which had responsibility for developing four system leadership roles: professional partners, local leaders of education (LLEs), national leaders of education and national support schools (NLEs/NSSs) and school improvement partners (SIPs). SIPs have since been phased out. The definition of system leaders was equally developed to include 'sharing and harnessing the best resources that the system can offer to bring about improvement in their own and other organisations' (Hill, 2011, p3). Further than this there was recognition that system leaders could influence thinking, policy and practice, impacting positively on the life chances of all young people (Hill, 2010). There continues to be an emphasis on senior leaders supporting other schools to improve. This would appear to be in contrast to distributed leadership where in most models senior and middle leaders work together on school improvement. It raises the question as to whether the model of distributed leadership can be part of system leadership. This would involve senior and middle leaders working in partnership to support school improvement beyond their own school.

Hopkins & Higham (2007) provided a conceptualization of system leadership and mapped the landscape at that time. They identified significant system leadership activity both locally and nationally. The positive features included:

The collective sharing of skills, expertise and experience creates much richer and more sustainable opportunities for rigorous transformation that can ever be provided by isolated institutions (Hopkins & Higham, 2007, p164).

However it is equally recognised that system leadership is not unproblematic; replicating best practice across schools is not easily achieved and there are limitations to headteachers working across schools to avoid not keeping focused on school improvement in their own school (Hopkins & Higham, 2007). I support the researcher's recognition of the challenges of system leadership for headteachers. As a NLE and a

headteacher who works with at least one other school per year, I will analyse responses from middle leaders in this study to identify any references to conflicts of interest for the headteacher as a system leader.

Hopkins & Higham (2007) acknowledged that at the time of their study system leadership was emerging across schools. The links between school improvement and system leadership have continued to be researched. Fullan (2009) argues that leadership is only the beginning to school improvement; to make meaningful gains in student achievement requires whole-system reform. He places great importance on any leadership development being simultaneous with organisational development, as new leaders, no matter how proficient will not generate widespread organisational change across a system.

This takes the notion of school improvement further to being part of the national school system with the aim of developing strategies that affect all schools simultaneously. The White Paper (2010) on the importance of teaching emphasises good schools and school leaders being the drivers of school improvement and encourages professional and school - to- school support. System leadership creates a strong sense of moral purpose where leaders wish to improve outcomes for children beyond their own school. School leaders also become involved because they think it will help them to improve their own school and personal development (Hill, 2009).

The London Challenge has been well researched and is held as an exemplary model of system leadership that has resulted in a significant improvement in London schools. (Woods & Brighouse, 2015). This was a major regional approach where it was considered that; figurehead leadership, a vision showing what the strategy will achieve, a corporate allegiance to the vision and a framework of high accountability where all crucial elements of school led system reform (Ogden in Woods & Brighouse, 2015). System Leadership was identified one of the five DNA of the model:

System leadership through expert school leaders designing strategies and brokering solutions as well as directly supporting other schools in strengthening leadership and teaching (Woods & Brighouse, 2015, p16).

System leadership is highly regarded by senior leaders in the school as part of their work in the collegiate. This is not a construct that is specifically being explored with middle leaders. However, it will be of interest to see if middle leaders refer to school improvement beyond the school in this study, as this may highlight a gap between the thinking of middle and senior leaders in the school.

#### **2.7.4 Parallels between Entrepreneurial Leadership and School Leadership**

Many studies have researched entrepreneurial leadership, in the business sense, but there have not been many that have linked this to school leadership (Lynch, 2012). There are clear comparisons between entrepreneurial leadership and school leadership particularly in relation to small market enterprises/small to medium sized businesses, in respect of the day to day challenges (Lynch, 2012). Motivating staff, managing budgets and resources, ensuring the highest performance and outcomes and dealing with discipline are issues for the entrepreneurial and school leader. However, investigations around the issue of transformational leadership development being part of school improvement has been equivocal with some seeing leadership development as a crucial part of school improvement (Fullan, 2008) and others arguing that there is an absence of evidence that leaders contribute to school improvement (Bush, 2004).

Distributed leadership has been explored in the small business context. Chell & Tracey (2005) put forward the notions that trust and mutual respect provides an important link between the development of entrepreneurial teams and the emergence of distributed leadership. The development of trust and mutual respect could equally be identified as key precursors for distributed leadership within a school. Increasingly there has been recognition that the traditional image of an entrepreneur as a 'lone hero' is no longer the case: successful entrepreneurs build teams around them or belong to a team (Cooney, 2005).

Distributed leadership may be perceived as a leadership construct that is solely linked to education. I have reviewed distributed leadership beyond education to evidence the similarities between leadership in businesses and schools. Whilst reviewing literature on leadership beyond education I became aware of literature on inclusive leadership within the realms of business that I would argue has not reached education in the same way as other constructs.

#### **2.7.5 Inclusive Leadership**

The construct of inclusive leadership in education has been linked to the development of inclusive schools. Devecchi & Nevin (2010) acknowledge the challenge for leaders developing inclusive schools where the vision is to meet the needs of all students; however, standards set by the Government and reported through the school performance tables (DfE, 2013) set a range of criteria for school accountability including attainment. Within this inclusive leadership model the emphasis is on including students



of all abilities and does not necessarily focus on including leaders at all levels in whole school improvement.

In education and business inclusive leadership can be set within the context of leading an inclusive organisation. The expectations of leaders include being collaborative, open to partnerships and consensus building (Jamison & Miller, 2008). The focus in this interpretation of inclusive leadership is on creating a culture of inclusion throughout the organisation. There is, however, the expectation of senior leaders to make a strong impression about the need for change and show a commitment to the change. Seven actions are identified for leading or developing an inclusive organisation which includes; being a learner, being inquisitive, setting a vision, modelling inclusive behaviours, actively advocate change, speak out when necessary and holding each other to account for these actions. The model, whilst emphasising an inclusive culture, highlights that in a multi-layered organisation most people will not have direct contact to senior leaders (Jamison & Miller, 2008).

Another interpretation of inclusive leadership is about relationships and providing an atmosphere of fairness of input and output to all. It shows how followers can be actively involved in leadership.

Inclusive leadership is about relationships that can accomplish things for mutual benefit (Hollander, 2009, p3).

The emphasis is on leaders being inclusive and recognises that whilst leaders may initiate, followers are vital to success (Hollander, 2009). This model highlights 4 Rs of inclusive leadership; respect, recognition, responsiveness, and responsibility between leaders and followers for successful practice. It is claimed that vision alone will not enable inclusive leadership (Hollander, 2009). There is a distinction made between inclusive leadership and transformational leadership which can be autocratic in some situations. Inclusive leadership is a process that emphasises doing things with people, rather than to people', (Hollander, 2012, p38).

Hollander (2012) has carried out extensive research on inclusive leadership across business and education institutions; however, the latter have been colleges and universities in the USA. The emphasis on the positive leader follower relationships highlights the importance of group success. Hollander claims that part of a leader's role should be giving attention to their followers. In turn this benefits the followers:

A leader helps to develop followers' leadership skills by distributing tasks to them and evaluating their performance by giving them feedback (Hollander, 2012, p39).

The model described appears to build upon distributed leadership. Inclusive leadership goes beyond leaders working together and includes a broader set of followers. The focus on followers is refreshing. However, it is recognised that this is not a perfect construct. Sometimes inclusion cannot always be achieved; there can be conflict or disagreement of rules, which can make it difficult for follower engagement.

Bilimoria presents a model of inclusive leadership where she claims:

Inclusive leadership is energizing and motivating; each employee feels authentically valued and respected and is engaged in achieving a shared vision (Bilimoria, 2012, p13).

Furthermore, she argues that two behaviours are required to bring about a sense of inclusion. Firstly to 'authentically value and respect all individuals for their talents and contributions' and secondly to create a culture of 'high engagement' where all employees are encouraged to make an input and initiate.

This model resonates with the ethos and vision of senior leaders at the school in this study. However, the inclusive leadership construct has received less attention in education and has not been explored in detail at the school. Inclusive leadership is not a discrete topic within the research questions for this study. Middle leaders are asked about their contribution to whole school improvement and their relationships with senior leaders. Responses may include references to engagement and input to the school.

There is a gap in the literature regarding inclusive leadership in education. Earlier references to studies on distributed leadership, system leadership and transformational leadership begin to show the extent of research into these constructs within education. This study researches middle leaders' understanding of distributed leadership in the school. A further consideration within the study is whether the data collected from middle leaders provides any evidence of inclusive leadership. Overall the question is raised whether education can develop distributed leadership further to include the best practice from inclusive leadership?

Gronn (2009) puts forward the notion of a hybrid model, connecting individual and holistic leadership. A common theme in the research is that effective leadership is not based on a 'top-down' approach between the formal leader and followers and that there

can be multiple leaders within a group or team (Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006). This raises a further question; is there a gap in the leadership constructs to develop a combined leadership model in schools which develops the best practice from the research evidence for other leadership constructs?

## **2.8 Conclusion**

From the literature review there is evidence of numerous national changes in education since the ERA (1988) to date which have placed increased external accountability on schools and in particular school leaders. Alongside this has been the development of different leadership constructs, as described in this chapter, which refer to both senior and middle leaders. This would appear to be a shift from earlier studies of middle leadership in the 1990s where the complexities of the role are recognised, however, their work is focused on individually managing their team. (Bennett 1999) The role of middle leaders was also viewed as managers who work to build collaborative high performing teams, which may in turn impact on whole school performance (Busher & Harris 1999).

This study focuses on the role of the middle leader and their work with senior leaders in a London secondary school. The literature suggests developments in the role of the middle leader in the last 20 years, particularly in their work with senior leaders on school improvement. The two questions for this study aim to explore the perceptions of middle leaders in a secondary school:

- What are the perceptions of middle leaders in a secondary school on their development and contribution to whole school improvement?
- What are the perceptions of these middle leaders on middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement?

The next chapter sets the context for the study and focuses on the institution where the research took place.

## **CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH CONTEXT**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This section is the Institutional Focused Study section of the study. The research explores the perceptions of middle leaders regarding their development and contribution to whole school improvement. The context for the research is set within this chapter. Information about the institution where the study takes place is firstly given, followed by an outline of how leaders in the school strategically planned. The school's improvement planning processes are described with an emphasis on how leaders worked together during the different stages. Brief explanations are provided of different structures that have been initiated as part of leadership development at the school. This is followed by a brief explanation of middle leader CPD at the school. Finally there is an overview of the external accountabilities placed on the school with a specific focus on school improvement.

#### **3.1.1 The Institution**

The institution is a girls 11-18 comprehensive school in a suburb with one of the most ethnically and religiously diverse communities in London. Specialist school status for mathematics and computing was gained in 2005. In 2010, through the specialist school re-designation process, the school gained science as an additional specialism. Up until 2006 the school was for 12-16 year olds (school years 8 to 11). Changes commenced with the opening of a Sixth Form in September 2006, as part of a collegiate with seven other local schools, and continued with year 7 students joining in September 2010. There are presently six forms of entry with 180 students in each year group. The Sixth Form (Years 12 and 13) is relatively small but growing, with current numbers at 180 students and overall the school is at the national average in size (RAISE online DfE, 2013). The school is the only comprehensive, girls' school in the area, so in a typical year students are recruited from more than 70 feeder primary schools within and outside the local authority. It is a genuinely comprehensive intake with a diverse social, faith, ethnic and cultural mix which is celebrated.

**Table 1: Composition of students in the school in 2012**

Students in 2012	Indicator	Comment
55%	Muslim students	
9%	White British students	
44%	Free School Meals (FSM)	Above the national average (School Census DfE, 2012)
63%	Students have English as an additional language	
7.8%	Special educational needs and disabilities, including statements	In line with the national average (DfE, 2012).
91 students	Refugee and asylum seekers	
86%	Stability factor	Lower than the national average of 92 % (RAISE online DfE, 2012).
77%	5 A*-C including English and mathematics	Significantly above the national average. An increase from 58% in 2011.

RAISE online is produced annually by the DfE for every school in England and contains extensive data on the context of the school, student attainment and progress and the trend in outcomes and progress over a three year period. Access to RAISE online is restricted to individual schools and Ofsted. In 2012 and 2013 the school's value added was 1041 and 1048 respectively which was significantly above the national average.

At the time of the study 77 teaching staff and 66 support staff were employed at the school. There had been a 40 percent increase in the number of staff since 2006 reflecting changes associated with School Workforce Reform (DfES 2002) and growth of the school population. Under my leadership the school appointed 26 of the current 30 middle leaders and all of the senior leadership team between 2006 and 2013.

There are 11 other high schools in the local authority: one community, two special, two voluntary aided and six academies. The school gained academy status at the same time as the other five and continues to work closely with these schools. Each of the 12 schools has been judged good or better by Ofsted with over 50 percent judged as outstanding. All twelve headteachers are extremely collaborative and work closely together. We are committed to system leadership. It is a high performing borough where there is strong competition for students but three schools, not including this school, have

excess student capacity. The school in the study is the only single sex non-voluntary aided school in the borough and therefore attracts students from further afield. Positive marketing is essential for the school to compete effectively with other high performing schools and maintain student numbers.

### **3.2 Strategic planning and decision making processes by middle and senior leaders**

There has been considerable development during the past five years with regard to strategic planning at the school. Formerly, strategic planning was led solely by senior leaders who devoted a weekly meeting to discuss different agenda items regarding strategy. Senior leaders would then present strategic plans at middle leader meetings. These meetings used to involve senior leaders advising middle leaders about the next developments in the school and setting out implementation plans. The half termly middle leader meetings were the only time when middle and senior leaders met together as a group of leaders. Individual meetings took place once every half term between middle leaders and their senior leader line manager. In 2006, as the incoming headteacher I initially maintained this model of leadership and management that emphasised senior leaders taking responsibility for whole school improvement and development, with middle leaders focusing on leading their individual subjects. This model, however, did not support the development of distributing leadership, as described in 2.6.2, which has been emerging across schools since the beginning of the twenty first century.

A trigger point for distributing leadership at the school followed a critical incident which occurred during the summer holidays in August 2007, when a major fire destroyed the top floor of the school. The fire and its aftermath provided a significant test of the skills of senior and middle leaders. A key point occurred a week after the fire when middle leaders were asked to attend a meeting with senior leaders on the penultimate day of the summer holidays. Senior leaders briefed middle leaders on the developments of the week and then asked for all leaders to jointly plan for the short, medium and longer term, emphasising the need for joint leadership to establish a total focus on the core business of the school of teaching and learning. The shared vision, purpose and planning that emerged in response to the critical incident provided a strong foundation for future work.

Senior leaders at the school perceive that leadership has become increasingly shared with middle leaders taking the lead on, and greater responsibility for, whole school developments. They support the notion that distributing leadership contributes to successful improvement in the school.

### **3.3 School improvement processes**

#### **3.3.1 Internal school improvement planning**

Steps have been taken in the last five years at the school to ensure middle leaders directly contribute to establishing a shared vision. This is the first step in the process of whole school improvement planning at the school. The involvement of middle leaders in constructing and recording the language to reflect a shared vision has been a relatively recent change. Previously the vision was constructed by senior leaders and shared with middle leaders, seeking their agreement. This earlier practice clearly placed the responsibility of whole school improvement planning with senior leaders. For subject teachers, whole school improvement was a further step away since the School Improvement Plan (SIP) was presented to them as a document by middle leaders who had no ownership and possibly less commitment.

During the last five years there have also been changes in the process of school improvement planning that have changed the roles of middle leaders and their teams. The first model was where middle leaders received a draft of the SIP which was then discussed at a meeting with the aim of making amendments and changes. However, middle leaders made very few changes and there was still an emphasis on senior leaders being responsible for the SIP, further emphasised by the fact that they were identified as the leads for each area of whole school improvement.

The next model was where middle leaders, in a meeting with senior leaders, evaluated areas of improvement in the previous year and identified major areas of further whole school improvement prior to senior leaders documenting the SIP. Middle leaders were consulted again through sharing the draft of the SIP. Whilst there was more of a sense of sharing the process, feedback from the Ofsted style questionnaire issued to all staff in 2011 indicated that there were still some middle leaders who did not perceive they were involved in whole school evaluation. Senior leaders were keen to respond to these views and improve the school improvement planning process further.

The model at the time of the study was where middle and senior jointly evaluated developments and improvements in the previous year, however, at their annual leadership conference. School Improvement Groups, jointly led by middle and senior leaders, were established to implement actions from the school improvement plan. These are explained in 3.4.1.

Whilst these changes have taken place at the school, the middle leader perceptions' about their contribution to school improvement planning and their relationship with senior leaders whilst jointly working together have not been explored. A key objective of this study is to explore the perceptions of middle leaders about whole school improvement and their contributions.

### **3.3.2 Whole school monitoring, evaluation and review**

Whole school monitoring, evaluation and review was established initially as an annual cycle of department reviews where lesson observations, work scrutinies and student focus groups became part of standard practice. The process has been reviewed and a whole school review procedure has been developed by middle and senior leaders, with an even more rigorous system. This, it could be argued, has been in response to local challenges of being in a local authority where over 50 percent of secondary schools have been judged as outstanding by Ofsted (2012) and where outcomes for students are high. Targeted areas for improvement are based on a detailed analysis of student performance, individual challenging targets are then set for students and progress is tracked by all subject teachers. There is an aim for senior and middle leaders to work together to ensure that improvements impact on student achievement. However, it is not formally known whether middle leaders see whole school improvement as part of their role or whether they perceive their role to be focused more narrowly on subject improvement that will impact positively on school improvement.

## **3.4 Structures developed as part of leadership development**

### **3.4.1 School Improvement Groups**

The development of School Improvement Groups (Appendix 1) at the school, in 2011, jointly led by middle and senior leaders, has provided senior leaders with stronger evidence of the positive impact of distributing leadership. Senior leaders argue that the implementation of action from the school improvement plan has become increasingly owned by middle leaders through their joint leadership of the School Improvement Groups.



An overarching aspect of this study is to ascertain whether middle leaders share the same perceptions as senior leaders regarding their increased ownership of whole school improvement. Views are also gained about the relationships between senior and middle leaders.

### **3.4.2 Leadership meetings**

Significant change management and development over the last six years has resulted in a variety of different models where middle and senior leaders meet and lead together. Strategic planning involves middle and senior leaders working together, a practice that has only developed in the last two years. The developments in meeting structures, along with the introduction of joint middle and senior leadership CPD sessions, have provided practical opportunities for collaborative strategic planning. The first change to take place was renaming middle leader meetings to leadership meetings. The structure of the meetings also changed with middle and senior leaders working together in groups to consider strategic issues, such as curriculum development.

Recognition was given in 2008 to the limited amount of time in meetings to explore and discuss major developments. This resulted in the initiation of middle and senior leaders' annual conferences. Significant decisions, such as changing from a two-year to a three-year Key Stage 4, have been agreed jointly at these conferences. The conferences have further enabled middle and senior leaders to work more strategically and plan together throughout the year. School Improvement Groups (SIG) were introduced as an outcome from one conference.

### **3.4.3 Planning Board**

In 2009, with support from middle and senior leaders I initiated a Planning Board. This forum was developed with representatives from all levels of support and teaching staff and a rotating chair from the group. It was initiated as a key decision-making body for policies and systems in the school and a consultative body for strategic developments involving change. For example, Planning Board had curriculum development as a standing agenda item during the proposed change from a two- to a three-year Key Stage 4. The discussion points raised were fed back to middle and senior leaders for consideration. Planning Board ratified the final decision to change the curriculum timings. This decision was influenced by other high schools in and beyond the local authority changing the start of their Key Stage 4 curriculum. The initiation of Planning Board reflected a desire to distribute leadership beyond senior managers and leaders. The aim of exploring middle leaders' understanding of distributed leadership as a

construct was to see if they understood the theory. Furthermore did they perceive that a shift in leadership had occurred at the school?

### **3.5 Continuing Professional Development for Middle Leaders**

In 2011 the Harrow Collaborative Improvement Framework (Harrow CIF) was developed across all of the twelve local high schools. The notion of collective CPD was addressed through the CIF. In particular, subject groups were initiated and led by middle leaders. Four middle leaders from the school led these groups. CPD for aspiring senior leaders, targeted at middle leaders, was provided by a neighbouring school as part of the CIF. No middle leaders from the school attended this course. System leadership is promoted by the Department for Education and other agencies e.g. NCTL and Ofsted. Middle leaders at the school value working with other schools and there has been evidence of a positive impact on teaching and learning. One example of this is the partnership the head of sixth form established with a school in a neighbouring borough. Visits to each other's schools to share practices and systems, new marketing strategies and more rigorous monitoring and tracking of progress led to an increased number of students joining the 6<sup>th</sup> Form and improved outcomes for Years 12 and 13 in their external examinations.

Generally the school has been supportive of the NCTL in its use of programmes for continuing professional development (CPD) and has utilised 'Leading from the Middle' to develop middle leaders; this programme also involved a senior member of staff developing coaching skills. Overall, there is a commitment to developing leaders as leadership is considered to be important for the achievement of the school's aims.

Seven colleagues were studying for a master's degree in education, subsidised by the school and the Government. Of these seven, four are middle leaders. Government funding has ended with the change to licensees which has implications for recruiting new colleagues. It has yet to be explored whether middle leaders would still be able or prepared to study at master's level without Government subsidy.

It could be questioned whether the school has provided adequate middle leadership development to equip them to contribute to whole school improvement. The view of middle leaders, with regard to the adequacy and quality of CPD for school improvement planning, is an area for further exploration in the study.

### **3.6 External accountability measures**

#### **3.6.1 The impact of Ofsted on senior and middle leadership**

School improvement has clearly been a focus for the school. Whilst there had been clear school improvement plans with specific targets for raising standards of attainment, after the school was judged as 'good' by Ofsted in 2007, the drive was to move to become an outstanding school. The focus on Ofsted criteria led to a further dilemma for the school with the criticism from some staff that too much emphasis has been given by senior leaders on improving the school according to the Ofsted criteria. The extent to which middle leaders were committed to continuous school improvement with the aspiration of being an 'outstanding school' was not fully known.

There is sometimes a tension between meeting external expectations whilst maintaining the aims of the school. The challenge for senior leaders in the school had been to continually improve in line with Ofsted expectations without becoming an 'Ofsted driven' school. Informal feedback from middle leaders and teachers at the school indicated that the main focus of Ofsted Inspections is on accountability rather than improvement.

The school has been influenced by the developments and refinement of the Ofsted frameworks and self-evaluation criteria procedures in school reflect the latest Ofsted frameworks (2012, 14, 15). However, middle and senior leaders, together, continue to convey that school improvement is to impact positively on student learning and progress by maintaining the highest standards of teaching, and not just fulfil the expectations of Ofsted. Within this study I intend to explore further middle leaders' perceptions of working with senior leaders to improve the school.

There is recognition that parents and families at the school are very aware of Ofsted judgements for local schools. Evidence from Year 7 parent/carer questionnaires show that key factors when selecting a secondary school for their daughters were examination results and the Ofsted report. Within discussions in leadership meetings there is evidence of a shared understanding between middle and senior leaders at the school that examination results and Ofsted judgments influence parents in their choice of school. It is unknown how far middle leaders perceive they are jointly driving the school forward to gain the best examination outcomes. The intention is to gain these perceptions with the questions posed about relationships with senior leaders.

### **3.6.2 School performance tables**

The development of the school improvement agenda for the school has included externally imposed objectives and whole school targets that are assumed to measure school improvement such as; examination results, attendance, school exclusions and school performance tables.

One of the major developments for senior and middle leaders has been the effective use of data with the aim of meeting or exceeding targets. A key judgement of school improvement has been the percentage of students achieving 5 A\*-C including English and mathematics (DfE, 2008-13). This became one of the most important targets for schools, the reason being that those schools gaining under 40 percent become part of the National Challenge strategy. It is also the main published league table indicator. Using data to track student progress has been an objective on the School Improvement Plan and this has been a significant area of improvement since 2007.

### **3.7 Overview of the research context**

There are implications for the school from the national developments focused on continuous school improvement. School improvement has been described as a programme that innovates and focuses on change and problem-solving in educational practice (Creemers and Reezigt, 2005). This study focuses on practitioners, middle leaders, their perceptions about whole school improvement and in particular their contribution to this activity. Leadership has been part of an increasing thrust of Government policy both nationally and internationally with the perception that leadership makes a difference to effectiveness when measured in the value added to student outcomes (Zhang and Brundett, 2010). Whilst it is positive that whole school improvement is dynamic rather than static, there are implications for middle leaders responding to the continuous demand to improve further. This was promoted further with a change of Government in May 2010, who, continued to focus on school improvement but with different demands and success criteria.

The school has responded to national developments and whole school improvement has been at the core of senior leader roles. However, there have been significant changes in leadership and meeting models in the school which have enabled middle and senior leaders to work together on areas of whole school improvement. The school has also used the TDA Framework with middle and senior leaders and Governors as part of the school improvement programme. Senior and middle leaders have responded to the

National Strategy for School Improvement. Since 2005 the school gained specialist status and became an academy. Set within this context the study aims to gain the perceptions of middle leaders of a range of subjects on their contribution to whole school improvement.

With the introduction of the English Baccalaureate and the inclusion of five subjects in the national league tables there is greater accountability on other subject leaders. This may influence their perceptions about their contribution to school improvement.

Another aspect arising from the increased demands on leaders is the professional development provided to equip leaders to perform their best. Zhang and Brundett (2010) claim that with the increased complexity of leadership, leaders will require greater individualised and contextualised support. This is relevant to this study in terms of whether middle leaders perceive that they are professionally developed to contribute to whole school improvement.

In summary, there are several relevant areas raised for this study; firstly, that of national developments which create a dynamic context for all leaders and particularly raises the issue of the accountability of a middle leader within their local context. This is impacted further with the criteria used by Ofsted for school effectiveness which makes both senior and middle leaders accountable for school improvement. Secondly, the development during the last twenty years from management to leadership and management has implications for senior and middle leaders. There is practical evidence of senior and middle leaders working together in the school. How do middle leaders view their relationship with senior leaders? Thirdly, performance data and national league tables have undergone continuous change and with the introduction of the English Baccalaureate and new RAISE online criteria there is increased accountability directly linked to whole school improvement for middle leaders. Finally, with the significant changes nationally what are the views of middle leaders in the study regarding the CPD they have received? These aspects are all explored in the study under the two overarching research questions:

- What are the perceptions of middle leaders in a secondary school on their development and contribution to whole school improvement?
- What are the perceptions of these middle leaders on middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement?



## **CHAPTER 4: THE RESEARCH STUDY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The motivation to carry out this study arose firstly from a professional interest in leadership in education as a practicing headteacher. Secondly in 2012 Ofsted highlighted middle leadership as an area for improvement in the school where I am headteacher and this prompted further interest in middle leadership. As a headteacher I made the conscious decision to carry out the research within my own school. This decision was based on a further desire to model the role of teacher researcher. Altricher, Posch & Somekh (1993) emphasise the importance of teachers making their professional knowledge public and contributing to research in education. Equally, my thinking was influenced by Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1993) in their argument that inquiry ought to be an integral part of teaching and a critical basis for decisions about practice. I would argue that it is of equal importance for leaders, including headteachers, to inquire and carry out research. The reasons being; firstly as leaders we are role models for teaching colleagues, secondly, what we learn through doing research enables reflection and review of leadership roles and thirdly leaders in education can make contributions to educational research. Doing research enables teaching practitioners to continuously learn and reflect on the challenges for teachers and leaders within the dynamic context of education and whole school improvement. Most importantly they can make a contribution to the development of the teaching profession and education. Further discussion of the insider researcher role is discussed in 4.2.1.

#### **4.1.1 Purpose of the research**

The purpose of the study is to firstly explore the perceptions of secondary school middle leaders about their contribution to school improvement.

#### **4.1.2 Intended outcomes of the research**

The research is intended to provide new knowledge of middle leadership in secondary education. The intended outcome is to gain perceptions of middle leaders regarding their contribution to whole school improvement. School improvement is a key aspect of leadership in secondary and primary schools. The research will be of relevance to middle leaders who wish to reflect more widely about their role beyond the leadership of a team or department. In particular the study will be relevant to headteachers in respect of both school improvements. Furthermore, as a researcher this study is carried out in

one school where I am also headteacher, therefore there are implications for headteacher insider research. It may also be of interest to other researchers and national organisations such as the National College of Teaching and Leadership (NCTL).

### **4.1.3 Research questions**

Bryman (2004) suggests that it is difficult to spell out the process of formulating research questions. The aim of research questions is to encapsulate what the research is about and to give meaning to the study for the people involved. Good research questions should have clarity, be researchable, linked and neither too broad nor too narrow. They should connect with established theory and have potential for new knowledge (Bryman, 2004). Andrews (2003) suggests a research question must be answerable in terms of having the potential to be answered in the study; however the question may not have a clear answer. The aim of the research questions in this study is to gain the perceptions of practicing middle leaders about their role with particular reference to school improvement.

The two overarching questions for the study are:

- What are the perceptions of middle leaders in a secondary school on their development and contribution to whole school improvement?
- What are the perceptions of these middle leaders on middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement?

## **4.2 Research methodology**

### **4.2.1 Insider researcher**

The method selected for this study commenced with the recognition that I was an inside researcher. Furthermore my role as headteacher placed another dimension to the methodology of an inside researcher. In selecting this approach I was aware that, as an inside practitioner, this study could contribute to the theory of leadership within an educational setting. My own interest and experience of leadership and developments that impact on student learning provided a platform for researching the role of middle leaders further. The benefits of having some understanding and experience of different leadership constructs as a practitioner supports further my role as headteacher researcher.



It can be argued that practitioner research can play a key role in the implementation and evaluation of educational reforms. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2011) argue that practitioner research is instrumental in questioning fundamental assumptions about teaching and learning. They propose that university based research has been relied upon too heavily to create a knowledge base for teaching and that those with the direct responsibility for educating children have become disenfranchised. Their argument to redress the balance is to develop a different theory of knowledge for teachers that includes and values inquiry by teachers themselves. This would recognise teacher research as an important contribution to knowledge about teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011).

A working definition of teacher research that reflects the rationale underpinning my own practitioner research is:

Systematic and intentional inquiry carried out by teachers. (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 2011, p7).

The term 'systematic' is specifically referring to an ordered way of gathering information and making written records of the evidence collected. The second term 'intentional' emphasises that teacher research is planned rather than spontaneous. Finally, the term 'inquiry' refers to teacher research generating questions or interpreting and making sense of teaching experiences. In this way teacher research can play a role, along with university based studies, in the formation of the knowledge base for teachers. Furthermore teacher research has the potential to contribute significantly to 'a way of knowing' in local communities and beyond (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2011).

There is a convincing argument for teacher researchers making their contribution to school based empirical studies. This is supported by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2014) who makes the strong case for:

The development, across the UK, of self-improving education systems in which teachers are research literate and have opportunities for engagement in research and enquiry (BERA, 2014, p7).

The BERA report (2014) goes further and outlines a vision for developing a self-improving education system that is underpinned by a research- rich culture. The rationale given is that this will ultimately impact on pupil achievement. The final recommendation is for a variety of leaders, including those in schools, to support the development of research-rich organisational cultures. This sets the context for this study

where as a school leader I am conducting research from the inside with the aim of making a contribution to our knowledge about middle leadership in a secondary school. It is recognised that insider research can present challenges but equally can bring about benefits (Coughlan, 2007, Cochran-Smith & Lyle, 1993). In this role it is important to gain an understanding of being an insider researcher. Having a pre-understanding of the school including the structures, local terms and language is considered a benefit. Coughlan includes the 'knowledge of everyday life' and 'critical events' (Coughlan, 2007, p296). He claims that this enables the inside researcher to 'see beyond the objectives that are window dressing' (Coughlan, 2007, p296). This has implications for participants interviewed by an insider researcher, as they would be aware of the inside knowledge and understanding of the institution held by the interviewer. However, I am aware that being close to the data being collected can result in the inside researcher assuming they know the answers. There is a need to probe deeper and not just assume you know the information as the insider researcher (Coughlan, 2007).

The research questions posed by an insider researcher are formed using their practice as a teacher or headteacher and their theory and previous research. Cochran-Smith & Lyle, (1993) take this further and claim that theory and practice are not the only basis for the questions that prompt teacher research but, 'the critical reflection on the intersection of the two' (Cochran-Smith & Lyle, 1993, p15). This is considered to be an advantage for insider research. The research questions posed for this study are based on a practicing senior leader's inside knowledge about the development of leadership within the school and from critically reflecting on the literature about different leadership constructs. This is set in context of first-hand experience of national changes in education since the Education Reform Act (1998). I would argue that these are benefits of being an insider researcher.

There is more in the literature about teacher researchers and considerably less about headteachers as researchers. I put forward the strong argument for headteachers to be researchers and make their contribution to the development of leadership in schools. This would again ultimately have the potential to impact on pupil achievement. The methodology for this study is modelled on that of the inside teacher researcher. The study has been systematically planned. There is a clear intention to make a contribution to what we know about middle leaders and their contribution to whole school improvement and questions have been generated in part by reflecting on the knowledge gained from the inside by a practicing headteacher. I fully acknowledge the role of headteacher carries power due to the responsibility that goes with the post. This may present the situation where colleagues, as interviewees, will respond with what they

perceive the headteacher wants to hear. The ethical dilemma as a headteacher researcher is to ensure that the roles are distinct. This particularly tests how good you are as a researcher, in order to elicit quality non-biased responses.

## **4.2.2 Methods of generating data**

### **4.2.2.1 Interviews**

Group and individual interviews were the selected method for generating data in this study. There were 3 group interviews with a total of 11 middle leaders and 8 individual middle leader interviews were held.

Interviews are widely recognised as an appropriate method to generate data. Interviews are described as 'a very malleable research tool' which can be used for an extensive range of research (Dunne, Pryor & Yates, p 28, 2005). Interviewing people is considered to be a way of exploring views that cannot be achieved by other forms of research (Ribbins, 2007). Schostak (2006) gives his 'crude' description of interview:

In terms of individuals directing their attention towards each other with the purpose of opening up the possibility of gaining an insight into experiences, concerns, interests (Schostak, 2006, p10).

He suggests that interviews do not only occur when it is explicitly said 'this is an interview' but there are other forms where there is 'openness' between participants thus creating an interview situation (Schostak, 2006). Mishler (1986) presents the notion that an interview is a type of discourse, a speech event: it is a joint product, shaped and organized by asking and answering questions.

Mishler (1986, p112) claims that interviews bring about alternative interpretations:

The critical issue is not the determination of one singular and absolute "truth" but the assessment of the relative plausibility of an interpretation when compared with other specific and potentially plausible alternative interpretations.

This has some relevance to this study as the interviews are intended to serve as open dialogues and where there is no intention of finding absolute answers to the questions. There is an aim of having a greater understanding about middle leaders' perceptions of certain aspects of their roles.

An important consideration for this study was the relationship between myself as interviewer and headteacher, and the interviewees, middle leaders who are accountable to me. This had the potential to influence the interview context and the discourse. For example within this relationship, complete openness from the interviewees could present a challenge. However, if one accepts the view that interviews are not purely behavioural, and that meaningful conversations take place (Mishler, 1986) the intention would be for the discourse to be of value. The group interviews served as a means of exploring initial views about middle leadership which would then be followed up in individual interviews. These enabled the middle leaders to be open with their views in the absence of their headteacher.

Different types of interviews were considered for this study including structured, conversational semi - structured and unstructured. Structured interviews are usually used to investigate and answer a specific set of research questions and are mostly associated with quantitative research (Bryman, 2004). During semi- structured interview responses can be followed up naturally in a more conversational style. The interviews can be matched to the strengths of the individuals and the questions posed can be very relevant. However, a potential weakness of unstructured interviews can be that collecting a wide range of information from different people with different questions can make data analysis more challenging.

For this research the aim was to carry out interviews that were more conversational style in order to enable participants to feel at ease to go beyond the initial questions posed and add any of their own further reflections on whole school improvement. However, it was important to have an initial set of questions to guide the discussion. For this study semi-structured interviews were selected as a method to gather data from middle leaders. This method was also chosen based on consideration of the relationships between the researcher and the participants. How the researcher and respondents relate to one another in the interview are of paramount importance (Dunne, Pryor & Yates, 2005). Whilst I had prepared questions, there was a great deal of flexibility and further probing to elicit more detailed responses. There was more of a focus on the language than the behaviour of the interviewees (Mischler, 1986). The semi-structured interview was a particularly appropriate method for this study as there was a clear focus and purpose to the study which informed the questions for the interview.

The challenge of being a headteacher insider researcher was considered carefully when planning the interviews. In order to gain trust from interviewees the initial group interviews were specifically planned to be conducted by an Assistant Headteacher. This

was a specific check put in place in order to gather the initial data without my involvement as headteacher researcher.

Dunne, Pryor and Yates, (2005) argue that a researcher will have full transcripts to capture this detail and this will enable accuracy in pinning down what the responses are really about. For the purpose of this study, transcriptions were made from each individual and group interview. The decision for transcriptions emerged after listening to the recordings a number of times. The combination of the written word and listening a number of times to interviews provided a balanced way of systematically analysing data. Furthermore transcribing each interview and getting them checked by the interviewees promoted the trustworthiness of the data gathered. Interviewees were also invited to listen to the recordings of their interviews. Examples from a focus group and an individual interview are in Appendices 3 and 4.

#### **4.2.2.2 Group interviews**

Group interviews were selected as an initial way of generating data from middle leaders about whole school improvement. The advantages of group interviews include the participants may feel safer, more secure and at ease being in a group with their peers. They can also jog each other's memories and are more likely to relax (Wellington, 2000). The strengths of group interviews are that a large amount of data can be gathered in a short period of time, making it very economical. However, a weakness is that they produce less data than the same number of people being interviewed individually. A further limitation is that within a group interview individual may dominate with their responses. Listening to other people's responses may also influence the individual. For this study group interviews were followed up with individual interviews which generated further data and were a means of checking and probing further to ensure that responses were reliable.

The purpose of the group interviews for this study was to ascertain what themes emerged when initially exploring middle leaders' perceptions of their contribution to school improvement with senior leaders. A further aim was to empower middle leaders to speak freely within a group, encouraging group views. However, I developed the model of focus groups further by preparing a set of prompts in the form of questions that could be used to initiate discussion. I also wanted the facilitator of the focus group to be able to contribute. The group interviews for this study were facilitated by an Assistant Headteacher. The senior leader had been in post for three years and was the member of the senior leadership group with the most recent experience of middle leadership. In line with the decision to develop the method of group interviews a little further I briefed the Assistant Headteacher, as facilitator, to engage in the dialogue, to initiate discussion

with prompts prepared by myself and to probe further with follow up questions. It was a clear decision, as the inside researcher and headteacher of the colleagues involved, not to facilitate the focus groups myself. Firstly I was aiming to gain more open responses to inform follow up questions for individual interviews that I would facilitate. Secondly, I was aware that middle leaders may respond to me, as their headteacher, with what I wanted to hear rather than their collective views.

When planning the group interviews I made decisions on a number of different points which included; the size and the number of groups, to allow for people being absent, sampling and ensuring participants had different periods of experience, ensuring participants had something to say and briefing the Assistant Headteacher to balance between being too directive and letting discussion go off the point. As the inside researcher I was fully aware of the different roles and characteristics of the participants for the focus groups, therefore putting the focus groups together was relatively straightforward.

Middle leaders were selected for the group interviews with an attempt to represent the middle leadership group at that time in the school. The following overview provides a profile of middle leadership in the school at the time of the research. The vast majority of middle leaders in the school were female which is not atypical for a girls' school. At the time nearly seventy per cent of middle leaders in the school were between twenty two and forty years of age, which is a fairly young profile compared to national averages. Eighty percent of middle leaders were in their first four years of leadership in the school. The three middle leaders most recently appointed were in their first three years of teaching. The most experienced middle leader was retiring that year and an internal replacement had been appointed. Ten middle leaders had been appointed internally which may indicate that succession planning and leadership training had been successfully implemented at the school. Five of the six heads of year had been internally appointed, which had been a trend over time in the school.

The three middle leaders' group interviews were held by the Assistant Headteachers during a 2 week period. A total of 11 middle leaders participated in the interviews, ten heads of department and one head of year. The majority of subject /faculty areas were represented by the interviewees, with the exception of modern foreign languages and science. These subjects were subsequently represented in the individual interviews that took place four weeks after the group interviews. Only three of the interviewees were experienced middle leaders, holding the post for eight plus years, while four had less than five years' experience and four who had been in post for less than two years. Of

the four least experienced interviewees, two had become middle leaders in their second year of teaching. The proportion of interviewees representing each experience group reflects the experience of all middle leaders in the school, with the majority holding the responsibility for five years and under. The vast majority of interviewees were female which again was representative of the proportion of female middle leaders in the school at that time.

**Table 2: Broad demographic characteristics of interviewees for focus groups**

	<b>Gender/Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Follow up interview</b>
<b>Group 1</b>	F Alice	50+	10yrs+	English	No
	F Julie	35-40	8yrs+	Art	Yes
	F Leonie	45-50	3yrs	SEND	No
	F Paula	22-25	2yrs	P.E.	Yes
<b>Group 2</b>	F Shelley	40-45	3yrs	H&SC	Yes
	M John	30-35	3yrs	Business	Yes
	F Ruhi	22-25	2yrs	ICT	Yes
<b>Group 3</b>	F Nina	45-50	8yrs+	Mathematics	No
	F Brenda	50+	3yrs	HOY	No
	F Rosa	25-30	1yr	Technology	No
	M Jack	25-30	1yr	Geography	No

The same Assistant Headteacher facilitated the focus group and guided the discussion systematically with the following questions:-

- What is your understanding of distributed leadership?
- What is your understanding on the working relationship between middle and senior leaders?
- What is your perception of middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement?

Group interviews were held by the Assistant Headteacher. The middle leaders selected for the group interviews had a range of experience, and comprised of one Head of Year and five Heads of Department from different sized departments. The interviews were audio recorded by the Assistant Headteacher. Audio recording of different discussion

groups and meetings is a method which is extensively used in the school: permission was sought, and no challenges arose. I listened to the transcripts of the discussions prior to selecting middle leaders for individual interviews.

#### **4.2.2.3 Individual interviews**

In order to probe further into some of the areas referred to by the middle leaders in the group interviews individual interviews were subsequently conducted. The areas emerging from the focus groups for further exploration included: the differing understandings of the term distributed leadership; the relationship between middle and senior leaders; the impact of school improvement groups. The questions on the perception of middle leaders of their contribution to whole-school improvement and middle leader views on continuing professional development (CPD) were only asked at the individual interviews. The reason for this decision was that within the group situation it could be a lengthy process for each member to outline their CPD and I wanted the individual middle leader responses about contribution to whole school improvement.

Eight middle leaders were individually interviewed with two from group one, three from group two and one from group three. The aim was to have middle leaders represented from a range of subjects, including two subjects not represented in the group interviews, and a range of experience to see if any differences occurred according to subject and/ or experience. Three middle leaders who had not been in the group interviews were also interviewed individually. These colleagues were included to explore the areas arising from the group interviews with middle leaders who had not been part of initial group discussions. Two middle leaders were selected; one from modern foreign languages and one from science. These subjects were not represented in the group interviews. The third individual interviewee was a Head of Year. She was particularly selected to increase the representation from one to two Heads of Year out of the total of 14 middle leaders interviewed. Individual interviewees were representative of a range of experience as shown in table 3.

The individual interviews were facilitated by myself as the researcher, however, the interviewees recognised me more as their headteacher than a researcher. It was important to clearly establish with interviewees that my interest was to explore the role of middle leaders with a particular focus on school improvement. Establishing trust between the interviewee and me by reaffirming the purpose was important in order to gain trustworthy responses.



**Table 3: Demographic characteristics of individual interview participants**

<b>Individual interviews</b>	<b>Gender/pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Subject</b>
T1	F Shelley	40-45	3yrs	Health & Social care
T2	F Paula	22-25	2yrs	P.E.
T3	F Ruhi	22-25	2yrs	ICT
T4	F Lisa	25-30	3yrs	HOY
T5	F Julie	35-40	8yrs+	Art
T6	M John	30-35	3yrs	Business
T7	F Tara	50-55	8yrs+	Modern Foreign Languages
T8	M Brian	40-45	5yrs	Science

### **4.2.3 Interview questions**

The following questions were posed in each individual interview:

- What is your understanding of distributed leadership?
- What is your perception of middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement?
- What is your understanding of middle and senior leaders working together?
- What is your understanding of middle and senior leaders working in partnership to contribute to whole school improvement?
- What continuing professional development have you received as a middle leader?

## **4.3 Data Analysis**

### **4.3.1 Thematic data analysis**

Miles & Huberman (1994) use three broad stages of analysing data: data reduction, data display and conclusion, drawing and verification. Data reduction involves collation, summary and coding with the outcome of themes, categories or clusters. Data display involves the data that has been assembled represented in a visual form. Conclusion drawing involves searching for themes and regularities and contrasting and comparing units of data. Within their three stages there is importance placed on coding and counting frequencies of occurrence, including themes, ideas and words. Whilst they

search for themes, their emphasis on coding and counting frequencies could be seen as reflecting a content analysis approach. Lincoln & Guba (1985) present the process of thematic data analysis as synthetic, where constructions that have emerged are reconstructed into meaningful wholes. They see this as data induction rather than data reduction.

Wellington (2000) suggests the stages of; immersion, reflecting, taking apart/analysing data and recombining/synthesizing data for analysis. He identifies the 'messy process' of crudely taking all the data in, immersing in it, taking it apart and putting it back together again. The actual steps reflect an iterative process where there is continuous identification of categories that are then repeatedly refined, adapted, merged, subdivided or being omitted. Thematic analysis based broadly on Wellington's (2000) stages of immersion, reflecting, taking apart/analysing data and recombining synthesizing data for analysing data was used to analyse data collected in this study. The actual process was iterative, enabling time to reflect at each stage whilst exploring more deeply the data collected.

Handling a relatively small amount of data raised awareness of the importance of being organised in storing data in order that it can be easily retrieved and revisited as part of the iterative process. Further thought, preparation and planning was required before embarking on the interviews to establish the value of note taking during interviews. The transcriptions of the interviews were extremely time consuming and generated extensive amounts of scripts. Transcribing has been described as 'frustrating' (Schostak, 2006) if the recording system used is of poor quality. High quality recording enabled me to transcribe responses quite easily. The next three interviews were transcribed in the following days to the interview. These showed some deeper understanding of the people studied (Boulton and Hammersley, 1996).

The simplicity of listening repeatedly to the recordings and viewing the transcripts to immerse in unknown and familiar data provided a method of identifying emerging themes. The next logical step to organise responses according to themes led to being able to synthesise the data.

#### **4.3.2 Data analysis**

The data collected from the three group interviews was unfamiliar to me as the researcher because the Assistant Headteacher had facilitated these. All of the groups were audio recorded. It was important for me to listen to the tapes a number of times to

gain complete familiarity with the data in order to grasp additional themes that emerged and to begin to identify themes for further exploration during the individual interviews. Following this I fully transcribed the interviews.

Each group transcript was labelled G1 - G3. The transcripts were then highlighted to identify similar themes emerging across the groups and to identify any themes that were unexpected. I revisited the transcriptions a few days later to reread and to check highlighting and annotations. It was important to reread a few times the responses where there were differing perceptions. This enabled further immersion into the data. The question on distributed leadership showed particularly limited responses. This prompted me to read further literature on distributed leadership (Gronn, 2000, Fullan 2009, Harris, 2005, Spillaine, 2008, and Crawford, 2012) as I wanted to reflect further on how this initial data could inform my interview questions for individuals. During this first stage of analysis the highlighted themes were used to decide upon the questions for individual interviews.

The interviews with individuals were held over a period of 3 weeks. Each interview was recorded. I listened to the recordings and played those 2 or 3 times each. This was carried out systematically each time an interview took place. Full transcripts were made from each recording (see Appendix 1 for an example). Each transcript was labelled T1-T8 for the individual interviews, with the researcher coded as R. The transcripts were then highlighted and annotated according to emerging themes. For example, School Improvement Groups was an emerging theme across individual interviews. Responses were cut and pasted and grouped initially under the research questions posed for the individual interviews.

Alongside each research question the highlighted themes were used as subheadings as a means of coding (see Appendix 5). Responses were then clustered under those headings. At the onset the group and individual data were treated separately. There was evidence of common themes across the focus groups and the individual interviews and it therefore was appropriate to revisit the themes from individual interviews and to combine them with those from the focus groups. The similarities were not unexpected as the individual interviews were intended as further exploration of themes emerging in the group interviews.

Throughout the process there was continuous thought and reflection about the data collected and the implications for school improvement. There was deeper more meaningful reflection with the increasing familiarity of the data. To some extent it

promoted the thought of ensuring that there was a definite end to the analysis phase, as it could have gone on for an extensive period of time. The first stage occurred during data collection where any emerging themes from the group interviews were followed up with semi-structured questions during the individual interviews. Each interview was audio recorded and these were used for transcriptions.

#### **4.4 Reliability, Validity, Trustworthiness**

As an insider researcher one of the challenges is to ensure that the research is reliable, valid and trustworthy. Ensuring reliability, validity and trustworthiness underpins all aspects of this study.

Reliability has been defined as:

The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable (Joppe, 2000, p1).

The relevance of establishing reliability in qualitative research has been challenged and it has even been said to be misleading (Stenbacka, 2001). However, Paton (2001), states that reliability and validity are the two key aspects that a qualitative researcher should be concerned about when designing the research, analysing the results and judging the quality of the study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose a set of four criteria for judging within the qualitative paradigm that have parallels within the quantitative paradigm. The trustworthiness criteria (paralleling internal validity), transferability (paralleling external validity), dependability (paralleling reliability), confirmability (paralleling objectivity) are the criteria, however, the authors recognise that there are difficulties with comparing the two.

The notion behind reliability is that any significant outcomes must be more than a one off finding. It should have degree of repeatability within the study and the same or similar findings should be retrieved under the same research conditions (Robson, 2002). This study was carried out in one institution and may be challenged regarding whether the outcomes would be replicable in a further study in a different institution. Interviewer bias could have affected reliability, particularly in the individual interviews where interviewees could have perceived me to be in dual roles as headteacher and researcher. It could be claimed that the interviewees answered in the way that they considered 'their

headteacher' would want them to respond. However, the group interviews were conducted by an Assistant Headteacher to gather initial responses without any bias towards the headteacher.

Reliability is also referred to as how far an inquirer can persuade audiences that the research the findings from a research study are worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is hoped that the findings of this study are of particular interest to school leaders. The findings about school improvement would hopefully equally gain attention as this has been a driver in education for the past 20 years.

Validity refers to how well the research reflects the reality it claims to represent. It is also judged on how well the research data collected meets the research objective or answers the research question (Robson, 2002). Designing the interview questions, including; clarity, structure and phrasing was important for establishing internal validity. Equally they were important for collecting data to answer the research question. There was a slight difference between what was asked in the group and individual interviews. The probing further and follow up questions differed in each interview. However, this is typical of semi structured interviews. The internal validity continued to be high as the data collection was based on established interview methods with the intention of gathering middle leader's perceptions of their development and contribution to whole school improvement.

Silverman (2006) identifies two types of errors that can occur that can undermine the validity of a study. These are, believing a statement to be true when it is not and not believing a statement and rejecting a statement that is not true. The interviewees were able to check the transcripts from the interviews. They agreed these were accurate transcriptions. The interviewees were invited to listen to the recordings of the interviews but no one took up this offer.

The manner and style for the group interviews were the same. The same Assistant Headteacher held the interviews. I conducted the individual interviews in the same office. Each interviewee knew me in the role as their headteacher and as an insider researcher.

There have been some researchers that have proposed that validity is not relevant to qualitative research, but, it has been recognised that a check on the robustness of qualitative studies is needed. However, trustworthiness, reliability and validity can differentiate the difference between 'good' or 'bad' research in both quantitative and

qualitative paradigms. Therefore I argue that increased trustworthiness, reliability and validity in qualitative research are crucial.

#### **4.4.1 Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a subset of the term 'reflectivity, the subtle difference being that to be reflexive involves reflecting on the self, the researcher, the said researcher. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) cited in Wellington (2000) view reflexivity as explicit recognition that the social researcher and the research are part of the social world being investigated. The extent to which the researcher includes a reflexive account within the research study is open to debate. Wellington (2000) suggests that it is important for the researcher to be reflexive; however, it does not warrant lengthy details and should be brief.

The intention is for me as the researcher to reflect a constructivist stance where epistemological assumptions are rooted in being part of the research being investigated. As the researcher I see my role as part of social reality and therefore will not be totally objective. In taking this stance there is an aim to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge (Mertens, 2009). The research questions reflect the appropriateness of a constructivist paradigm whereby reality is socially constructed by people active in the research process (Mertens, 2009). Equally emphasis is given to the researcher's values being part of the research. My stance is to understand the multiple constructions of knowledge and meaning rather than believing that there is one reality that is known and there to be proven.

The notion of being an 'insider-researcher' could be viewed as a potential challenge, particularly as the role of headteacher can be viewed as a power figure within the school. A particular challenge could be raised about the responses from middle leaders during individual interviews with the researcher who also occupies the role of headteacher. Mercer (2007) suggests that insider researchers:

Usually have considerable credibility and rapport with the subjects of their studies, a fact that may engender a greater level of candour than would otherwise be the case (Mercer 2007 p14).

However, equally it could be argued that people may not share as much information as they may fear they are being judged. Mercer (2007) refers to this as 'wielding a double edged sword' Mercer's (2007) study compares her experiences as an insider and

outsider researcher at two higher education institutions', one of her findings is that she is unsure the extent to which the different degrees of 'insiderness' affect research studies and findings.

Cochran-Smith and Lyle (2011) argue that teacher researchers are in a unique position to provide an insider's perspective that makes it very visible how teachers and learners work together to construct knowledge. They claim that 'research by teachers is a significant way of knowing about teaching' (Cochran-Smith & Lytle 1993, p43). The subject of headteacher as a researcher is not visited by Mercer (2007) or Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993). The nature of the role of the headteacher could be perceived as more open to bias when carrying out research within their school. To limit or reduce bias the initial group interviews were specifically completed by an Assistant Headteacher with the aim of gathering initial data in the absence of the headteacher. However, the data analysis from the group interviews was carried out by me independently of the Assistant Headteacher.

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

Ethics are generally referred to as what one ought to do (Robson, 2002). Research ethics need to be considered throughout the whole period of a research study not just at the outset (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006).

The researcher's role as headteacher in the school identified has specific ethical implications for this study. It may create a dilemma for the participants in their decision to consent as the headteacher stands in a position of power or influence over them (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006). In asking the middle leaders to participate in the study there is an implication of additional time at work and time taken away from their middle leader work. The exploration of their perceptions about their role and their relationship with senior leaders was a planned focus of the research. Whilst there was agreed anonymity, the responses provided may be identified by other colleagues in the school. I fully shared the research questions with senior leaders, who whilst not interviewees, again may be identified by colleagues working at the school. Senior leaders gave their full agreement to these questions being posed as part of the study.

The relationship with participants in the research process was clarified during part of the meeting inviting middle leaders to be part of the research. The full aspects of the research study were shared with participants. Anonymity was guaranteed to interviewees; however, participants may still question how they will appear in the report

(Robson, 2002). Agreement to share the full report before it entered any public domain was given. There was some risk taken as a headteacher researcher regarding the relationships between middle leaders and the headteacher. The probing questions asked during the interviews could be perceived as attempting to change their role as the focus was on contribution to whole school improvement and not solely the leadership of a subject or a year group. A further risk was to include a question about the relationship between middle and senior leaders. Senior leaders could perceive this as the headteacher checking their ability to establish relationships as a senior leader. I reassured senior leaders that the research was focused on exploring the perceptions of middle and senior leaders working together.

The interviewees were provided with the opportunity to opt out of the study. Their initial consent was gained through a notice put in our weekly staff bulletin asking middle leaders if they would like to participate in the study by being part of group interviews. They were able to send their expressions of interest to myself or the Assistant Head teacher. We then met individually with those who expressed an interest to outline the nature of the study. Interviewees were then given a week to reflect before finalising their decision to take part or not. Following the group interviews a sample of 6 individual middle leaders, reflecting a representative sample in gender, experience and subject, were emailed to ask if they would be willing to follow up with an individual interview to explore their perceptions and views further. This was administered by a member of the office team. Interviewees were reassured that it was voluntary. Five agreed to the interviews. One had just returned from an illness and did not feel that she had the capacity. Three of the individual interviewees were not in the group interviews. They were asked by the Assistant Headteacher and then came to meet with me to gain a further outline of the study.

Undertaking research within my own school was a challenge for the Governing Body. Governors wanted the reassurance of anonymity for the school. They were concerned that I may have a conflict of interest in my role as headteacher. Further concern was raised about maintaining the role as headteacher and not to lose any respect that had been built up during the early years of Headship at the school. The Governors' greatest concern was if anything negative emerged in the research this could reflect negatively on the leadership and management of the school, which may then implicate the Governing Body. Reassurance had to be given to the Governing Body about the value of practitioners carrying out research and my own integrity as headteacher in presenting findings from the research.



The practical arrangements for the research were readily accepted by participants. Permission for audio recording interviews was gained with the reassurance that the tapes were stored securely. There was a guarantee to interviewees that I would not take out any data that I did not like in my role as headteacher and that I would remain committed to my role as researcher. Transcripts of the interviews were shared with individual interviewees to gain their comment and agreement for use as part of the data collection. There was recognition that there was the possibility of the researcher finding out negative practices which could present ethical dilemmas (Robson, 2002). The timing of the interviews was carefully considered. Interviewees agreed to use their non-contact teaching time for the interviews. This could have potentially presented a challenge for me as insider researcher if interviewees had perceived the interview time to be additional work. For this reason, each interviewee was individually approached prior to interview and a full outline of the purpose of the research was given. Enough time was given during this discussion for interviewees to clarify my intentions and to check the approximate time of the interview.

#### **4.6 Constraints on the research**

One of the constraints of the study is the time factor of the academic year and the necessity to carry out the research during the school term times. A further constraint is the rigidity of the school timetable which places fixed times for teachers to be teaching in the classroom. In addition, the researcher's role as headteacher places further time constraints in accessing appropriate times for collecting data. I made the decision to carry out the study in the girl's comprehensive school, where I am headteacher, with 12 middle leaders. Focussing on one school makes timing the collection of data easier which is a key area of importance. However, studying a sample of middle leaders from one school may be viewed as a constraint as the numbers are limited. As the headteacher carrying out the study the link between the researcher and the institution may be considered as open to bias. In order to address this, an Assistant headteacher conducted the first focus groups with middle leaders. Whilst I had designed the questions and briefed the Assistant headteacher, the initial collection of data was designed to be in the absence of the headteacher to gain the most open responses. Before conducting the individual interviews, the interviewees were fully informed about the purpose of the research and the role of the researcher. They had the opportunity to convey to the Assistant headteacher if they did not want to continue as part of the study.

## **CHAPTER 5: RESULTS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the results gathered from both the group and individual interview methods of data collection. A summary of the interview questions and the key themes emerging is presented first. Each theme is then presented with direct evidence of the data collected from middle leader responses.

### **5.2 Key themes emerging from interview questions**

A range of key themes emerged from the thematic analysis of the responses to each interview question. I summarise them under each of the interview questions below.

#### 1. Question

What are middle leaders' understandings of the term 'distributed leadership' and whether this influences their role as a middle leader?

Key themes:

Very different perceptions of distributed leadership emerged, which ranged from not knowing the term 'distributed leadership' to studying this leadership construct as part of studying for a master's degree and articulating a good understanding. Delegation was referred to by a number of middle leaders in their explanations about distributed leadership. The brevity of some responses and lack of understanding about distributed leadership were not expected and do not reflect the literature on this construct which widely refers to the role of middle leaders.

#### 2. Question

What are middle leaders' perceptions of their contribution to whole school improvement?

Key themes:

Middle leaders were the drivers of school improvement and were the 'vital cogs in the engine'. Some middle leaders perceived that their role had changed and developed in the last three years.

#### 3. Question

What are middle leaders' views on middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement?

Key themes:

The structure of whole School Improvement Groups, jointly led by senior and middle leaders, was perceived by the majority to be a positive model that enabled middle and senior leaders to jointly lead whole school improvement. There was further recognition that the structure enabled teachers and leaders to contribute to whole school improvement. To achieve more consistency across school improvement groups was recognized as an area for improvement.

#### 4. Question

What are middle leaders' understandings on the working relationship between middle and senior leaders?

Key themes:

Developing a culture where middle and senior leaders shared the same vision. The structure of line management meetings and regular two-way reciprocal communication between middle and senior leaders were considered as an aspect of establishing relationships by the vast majority of middle leaders interviewed. There were aspects of leadership meetings that could be improved to include middle leaders.

#### 5. Question

What are middle leaders' views on Continuing Professional Development?

Key themes:

The introduction of a middle and senior leadership structure which introduced a new layer between the two roles was perceived by some middle leaders as being a positive opportunity for middle leaders to develop professionally. Overall middle leaders were aware of increased CPD specifically for middle leaders during the last three years. However, gaps in professional development were identified, particularly for new middle leaders.

In the following section I will be reporting my findings in detail under each interview question.

### **5.3 Middle leaders understanding of the term 'distributed leadership': Introduction**

Distributed leadership is a construct that has been developed with a focus on the middle leaders (eg Harris, 2004, Mayrowetz, 2008, Gronn, 2009, Arrowsmith, 2007). Middle leaders were asked about their understanding of distributed leadership in the group interviews; this was then explored further in individual interviews. The construct of

distributed leadership was particularly selected as it emerged most frequently during the literature search on middle leadership.

There were different perceptions conveyed by middle leaders in all of the three group interviews when describing their understanding of the term 'distributed leadership'. The questions posed about distributed leadership prompted discussions around; delegation, responsibility, trust and whether distributed leadership was implemented in the school. Each of these discussion points are explored further in the sections below. In the individual interviews the majority of interviewees were very brief in their responses about distributed leadership.

### **5.3.1 Differences between delegation and distributing leadership**

The first theme to emerge in the discussions about distributed leadership was the notion of delegating as part of distributed leadership. The term distributed was also taken literally by one interviewee to mean distributing tasks across a team. Alice, in the first group, thought she would be distributing within the department and that would be delegating:

I would be saying if I was distributing within the department I would be delegating, so with senior leaders they are delegating as well (Alice, G1, p3, 128-29, May 2012).

Julie explained that she had read about distributed leadership whilst studying for her MA and clarified that delegation is when you give someone something to do, but you retain responsibility. She gave her definition of distributed leadership:

Distributed leadership is when somebody is given a job and it's their responsibility and they have creativity over how it's done and when it's done, but it's their responsibility and their head on the line (Julie, G1, p3, 132-34, May 2012).

Julie was questioned by Paula about how this worked in practice and asked whether someone would get paid for taking on this responsibility or whether it was just given to them. Julie confirmed that she would give the responsibility to a member of her team without pay:

Yes so say if I said something like you're in charge of something and nothing happens it's their fault and it's their responsibility (Julie, G1, p4 12-3, May 2012).

And it's down to them how they get it done as well and it gives them the responsibility themselves – the ownership that's what it is (Julie, G1, p4 110-11, May 2012).

Reflecting on this Alice gave her overview and posed a question:

That's important because everybody has a contribution to make and they have ownership of that. But do we feel as middle leaders that we have distributed leadership and we are totally responsible for something? (Alice, G1, p4, l 12-14, May 2012).

The question Alice posed received some brief responses from the group, with Julie conveying that she thought there was distributed leadership and Paula saying that she did not feel she was 'told off' by senior leaders. However, the discussion ended with Julie posing the question again; 'do we have distributed leadership?' This question remained unanswered. Whilst there had been some discussion in this group there was not a clear understanding about the practice of distributed leadership. Furthermore, the group were unsure about whether distributed leadership was practiced in the school.

Group two were briefer in their discussion about distributed leadership. John admitted that he had not heard of the term before but he thought it meant sharing leadership, that the power was not just with one person and it was almost a way of delegating:

I have never heard about it before but if I think about it means sharing leadership, distributing leadership, the power is not within just one person and it's almost a way of delegating (John, G2, p8, l24-26, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012).

Shelley thought distributed leadership was a very trusting thing to do, because "You have to have some serious confidence in your team" (Shelley, G2, p8, l27-28, 16<sup>th</sup> May 2012). The discussion with group two ended quite quickly. This may be due to the interviewer saying thank you after the first two responses and, what could appear to be, closing the discussion.

Group 3 had more to say and were probed further by the Assistant Headteacher. Brenda gave her understanding of the term in detail:

I assume it's a top down management structure. Its leadership at the top which is fed out to say from senior management into middle management and its responsibilities divided up amongst other people. It's this sort of cascading idea of moving leadership down through the hierarchy rather than just holding onto the top of it (Brenda, G3, p11, l11-14, May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2015).

Jack agreed with Brenda's outline and conveyed that he thought distributed leadership happened in the school:

And that happens here I think, my link senior leader doesn't really tell me what to do it's not like a relationship where it's just delegate jobs its more encouraging you to lead (Jack, G3, p11, l15-16, May 2015).

The Assistant Headteacher asked the difference between distributing and delegating. Nina perceived distributed leadership to be where people are encouraged to take on things that they have an interest in and can manage and do not need to be instructed to do. Distributed leadership, Nina suggested, enabled people to develop their own areas as well as themselves. Nina conveyed that distributed leadership was of benefit to all staff:

It's not just telling, it's advising, coaching and helping people to go on a pathway that is beneficial to them and anyone else in the community (Nina, G3, p11, l24-26, May 2012).

Brenda initiated a discussion about delegating work under the guise of professional development. Nina conveyed that colleagues would speak with their line manager if they found they were not able to manage their work. Rosa referred to a situation where delegation, rather than distributed leadership, had led to a colleague to experience work load stress:

I have spoken to a few teachers , well one specifically who is stressed out with the amount of work she is getting, 2<sup>nd</sup> in department and this was last year and she was saying that the head of department is very good at delegating and maybe there needs to be some sort of intervention with that. Obviously it's not my department and she was just letting off a bit of steam really (Rosa, G3, p12, l17-21, May 2012).

The Assistant Headteacher asked group 3 whether distributed leadership also happened within departments. Brenda highlighted that when there are only two people in a department there is more of a shared approach. Nina, as head of a larger department, had many examples of colleagues leading on different aspects of the department's work. She stated that individual interests and performance management, where objectives are set to develop the individual, were both contributory factors to colleagues leading on an area and taking responsibility. Overall, Nina expressed that distributed leadership worked and colleagues gained a sense of fulfilment from their leadership experience:

Another example is our colleague, Helena, she is interested in the Outstanding Teaching/leading Forum and she is able to share across the department because that is what she is interested in. So this is kind of distribution and it's also based on performance management and agree what the school wants, what the department wants and what I as an individual want to develop in and we are able to build upon. It works for the interest of everybody and I think that's why it continues to work because people's interest is being catered for and they feel a sense of fulfilment (Nina, G3, p11, l37-42, p12, l1-3, May 2012).

In group 1 Julie spoke specifically about distributed leadership in relation to subject outcomes. Julie conveyed that as part of distributed leadership she had freedom but also responsibilities:

I think I get the freedom to do what I want, really to be honest. I discuss it anyway but at the end of the day, results wise, that's my responsibility, I have ownership, if they don't get the results it's not my line managers fault, it's my fault (Julie, p4, l19-21, May 2012).

The data gathered from the group interviews showed a range of responses. There appeared to be different understandings of the term distributed leadership with some confusion between distributing and delegating work.

The responses from group interviews about distributed leadership were followed up in individual middle leader interviews. In the section that follows evidence from individual middle leader interviews are given. The aim of these interviews was to enable the Heads of Department and Head of Year to reflect on a personal level. As a practicing headteacher researcher I was able to listen first hand with the aim of gaining greater insight into the practice and understanding of distributed leadership across the school.

### **5.3.2 Individual responses about distributed leadership**

The individual interviews included a specific question on distributed leadership. There was evidence of some reflection having taken place between the group and the individual interview. For example, within the individual interview John gave a more detailed response about his understanding of distributed leadership. He firstly referred to sharing, delegating and empowering, but followed this with:

It's not where everything is centred in one person or one place but basically distributing it among more people and making sure that more people are leading and feeling that they have the autonomy to make decisions and also drive forward the strategy (John, T6, p27, l19-22, June 2012).

John's initial response in the group interview was that he had not heard of the term 'distributed leadership'. It may be questioned whether John had predicted that the

question may arise again in the individual interview and therefore he had found out more about the term. This will be more fully explored in chapter 6.

In the individual interview Shelley included delegation in her definition and again emphasised the trust that she had referred to in the group interview:

It's delegation of responsibility. I think it requires a whole heap of trust to delegate something down (Shelley, T1, p14, l 34-35, May 2012).

Paula also referred to delegation in her response:

I don't really have an understanding, I assume it is a kind of delegation, passing leadership onto other people in order to help things go like the strategic leaders or maybe if you had a school improvement group and there were three strands then giving them to three different people (Paula, T2, p 18, l 4-7, June 2012).

However, Julie was very clear that distributed leadership was not about delegation:

I know it's basically not delegating; it's not just giving people jobs to do. It's sharing responsibility where they take on a role, they lead it and they are responsible for it (Julie, T5, p25, l22-24, June 2012).

Ruhi gave a very brief response indicating that she did not really have an understanding of distributed leadership. Tara indicated that distributed leadership was delegating responsibilities within her team.

Lisa conveyed that she had not heard of the term before however, offered her own definition:

Do you mean by that giving people the sense of feeling that they are leaders and giving them their own place in the school where they can feel that they have got leadership abilities? (Lisa, T4, p22, l20-22, June 2012)

Brian's response was in line with Lisa's as it focused on leaders across the school:

I suppose my understanding is that distributed leadership is simply an articulation of the fact that in a school environment everybody has got a leadership responsibility and everybody is a leader in different ways, so I think distributed leadership is simply an extension of that concept, or articulation of that concept (Brian, T8, p31, l22-25, June 2012).

These individual responses about distributed leadership appeared to reflect the responses given in group interviews. There were views about delegation being part of



distributed leadership by three middle leaders. The response from Ruhi was particularly brief as she conveyed that she was less familiar with the term. John, Julie, Lisa and Brian held similar views about leadership responsibilities. The next section gives a brief overview of the responses on distributed leadership in both group and individual interviews.

### **5.3.3 over view of middle leaders' understanding of distributed leadership**

There was a variation in the discussion generated in group interviews in response to the question on distributed leadership. This was mirrored within individual interviews where the length of responses was varied, with 2 out of the 8 interviewed providing one sentence responses to indicate that they did not understand the term. These responses from middle leaders about distributed leadership indicated some lack of clarity and understanding about the term. There was particular reference to delegation when some middle leaders discussed distributed leadership. Overall there was not a clear indication that distributed leadership was practiced in the school.

## **5.4 Middle leaders' perceptions on their contribution to whole school improvement**

The interviewees' perceptions of their contribution to whole school improvement were explored. Clear views were expressed about the role of the middle leader and their work in relation to whole school improvement. A theme emerged that middle leaders were perceived to be 'the key drivers' of school improvement in the school. Secondly middle leaders perceived school improvement groups to be valuable platforms to enable middle leaders and teachers to contribute to whole school improvement.

### **5.4.1 Middle leaders as drivers of whole school improvement**

Middle leaders had some clear views on their role in driving school improvement. Julie, in her response, referred to middle leaders as 'the engine room':

I see middle leaders as the driving force in the school. They are the engine room, they get things going, make sure things are happening and they monitor. I think with school improvement it is vital. In the past I have seen members of SLG introduce things and ideas and it starts off well, but it needs to be seen and pushed through. It needs to be consistent and checked by middle leaders because they push things and make sure the department is on board (Julie, T5, p24 10, I 31-37, June 2012).

Julie argued that middle leaders ensured that changes introduced were implemented and sustained, as “they will be the one driving it forward day in and day out.” Paula also perceived the role of middle leaders as ‘drivers’ of school improvement:

I definitely think that middle leaders should have quite a big role in school improvement. Everyone should be working together (Paula, T2, p 17, 118-19, June 2012).

Both of these responses reiterate the power of middle and senior leaders working together to drive school improvement. This collective approach could fall within one of the interpretations of distributed leadership and aligns with the notion of leaders and teachers together impacting positively on whole school improvement (Harris, 2004).

The theme of middle leaders driving change and whole school improvement came through strongly from John, who commented:

They are the engine drivers of change, that’s where any strategies for change or any improvements get implemented by middle leaders. They are the ones that oversee what actually happens. They are the ones that are in touch with what happens in the classroom. If you want something to happen or the school to change, obviously it is going to go through the middle leaders and they are going to drive it forward. (John, T6, p26, 1 34-39, June 2012).

John’s previous perception of the middle leader’s role was more focused on administration and “making sure that teachers did their jobs.” He said that he now perceives the role more broadly and has found this to be “more inspiring and empowering.”

The notion of middle leaders being ‘drivers of change and drivers of improvement’ was reiterated by Brian. He considered their role to be fundamental in leading the whole school improvement process. Brian described middle leaders as ‘the coalface of school improvement’ emphasising again that they drive the whole school improvement process:

I think middle leaders are fundamental because middle leaders very often are in a school structure, the drivers of change, drivers of improvement, so obviously the co-operation between senior management and middle leaders and then obviously the people that they lead are fundamental to the whole school improvement process, and that is in fact what drives it and so they are in a way the coalface of school improvement (Brian, T8, p30, 127-32 June 2012).

Brian further stated that, as a leader of a core subject, he had a clear understanding when taking on the role that the day to day head of department role was fundamental to whole school improvement. He expressed the responsibility of leading a core subject had a more overt implication than other subject because of the impact on whole school accountability measures.

Tara conveyed that middle leaders should be contributing to whole school improvement to avoid a 'top down' approach:

I would say that middle leaders are integral to the whole school improvement because I think it should be a bottom up approach rather than a top down approach, you know, everybody should be saying this is what works well and this is what should improve and you look at how to improve it rather than a top down model which is this what we think needs to be done (Tara, T7, p30, l2-7, June 2012).

Paula further conveyed that middle leaders 'should be contributing to whole school improvement.' Whilst Paula stated 'should' this twice, she also included an example of improving literacy:

I think that middle leaders should be contributing to whole school improvement, not only as a whole they should be doing things within their departments to improve for example the literacy thing that everyone did across the departments as it was a new area in the Ofsted criteria so that was a big drive forward (Paula, T2, p17, l13-17, May 2012).

Ruhi gave a different example of middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement. She had not expected to focus beyond her department when she took on the role of Head of Department:

..But mainly thought I would be just working in my department more focused with the subject. I quickly found during the first term I was contributing to whole school improvement as we had the half termly Whole School Review. We did teaching observations, a learning walk and a work scrutiny and as a department we had to complete our report, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement which contributed to the whole school report (Ruhi, T3, p19, l31-36, May 2012).

As a Head of Year Lisa conveyed that all colleagues within this role contributed to whole school improvement:

The role of the Head of Year means that we do a lot in trying to move forward the whole school. We do focus on our own year groups but we work together in the whole school (Lisa, T4, p21, l25-26, June 2012).

Shelley highlighted the infrastructures that were in place and this meant that Heads of Department contributed to school improvement:

I think what you do in your own department is obviously going to contribute to whole school. The guidelines for that and the infrastructure are already there and you are following it (Shelley, T1, p14, 116-18 June 2012).

All of the middle leaders in the individual interviews provided different ways of middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement in the school. However, some of the interviewees conveyed that when starting out in their role that had not recognised that their leadership role would go beyond their department. Their responses are included in the following section.

#### **5.4.2 Changes in the role of middle leader**

When she took on the role of middle leader, Paula perceived that as Head of PE, she would be very much focussed on the department:

When I took on the role I was quite inexperienced, I thought that you would be just working on your department, I didn't think you would be doing anything whole school and that probably stayed with me for the rest of the year. Now I am much more open to it and agree that you should be helping to drive forward whole school. (Paula, T2 p17, 1 36-39, May 2012)

Paula conveyed further that it didn't occur to her when she took on the role that she would be focussing beyond her department.

Ruhi, when taking on the role of middle leader, thought that it would focus on her department:

I didn't think I would have so much involvement with whole school improvement. I thought I would be working in my department and more focused on my subject (Ruhi, T3 p19, 127-28, May 2012)

As described in the previous section, Ruhi then understood the middle leaders' role included contributing to whole-school improvement.

In her role as a Head of Year, Lisa had understood from the beginning that, whilst doing a lot of work with a year group as a team of Heads of Years their roles included "trying to

move the whole school forward.” She believed that “there has been a huge amount where middle leaders contribute to whole school improvement.” As Head of Year 11, Lisa had been very aware of her role in working with the Heads of English and Mathematics to ensure that students met or exceeded their minimum target grades. This she perceived was a direct way of contributing to whole school improvement. When Lisa started the role she was not fully aware of the implications of her role in the context of the whole school:

So I think yes I was aware of it but I wasn't aware of how much that would increase when you get to things like head of year 11. But I also think that it's also about relationships with staff. So I started being head of year I think it was much more of me trying to find my own footing with my team with the year group and it was only when staff appreciated the role that I did that kind of whole school thing took place if that makes sense (Lisa T4, p22, l13-18, May 2012).

Tara expressed the changes that had taken place in the roles of middle leaders during the last eight years. Initially she felt the role was “very much based around managing and leading the department.” There was less involvement in whole school improvement. Tara argued that the role had changed a lot. She considered her role had improved a lot and that middle leaders now had a much broader view of what is going on across the school.

Shelley had a different view that was not positive. She shared that when she was appointed as a Head of Department she thought that middle leaders would have more of a voice and that visions for their departments would be realised. She did not perceive the vision for her department had been realised and this aspect of her role therefore was not happening:

I might have been a bit naïve in thinking we had more of a voice, in that the visions we had for our departments might have actually been realised. Then once you step into the role it's kind of, you learn things, understanding how whole school runs but you also lose a little bit of passion when you realise it can't be realised. So it was just a bit more naïve (Shelley, T1, p14, l28-32, June 2012).

Shelley wanted to develop a new pathway in her subject; this had not been agreed by senior leaders. Shelley argued that this was restricting her and that she could not fully exert her leadership skills. This response raises the issue of if there is not agreement between senior and middle leaders regarding subject developments and whether middle leaders are given the power to lead, which will be fully discussed in the following chapter.

The next section in this chapter focuses on the data collected about middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement.

## **5.5 Middle leaders' views on middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement**

All middle leaders interviewed perceived the structure of School Improvement Groups (SIGs) introduced in 2011 had provided the platform for middle and senior leaders to jointly lead on whole school improvement. Two middle leaders in the group interviews questioned the impact of SIGs suggesting middle and senior leaders worked together on whole school improvement prior to this structure.

### **5.5.1 School Improvement Groups**

SIGs had been in operation in the school for the last three years. Middle and senior leaders jointly led SIGs. Every teaching member of staff belonged to one of the SIGs. Examples of the foci for SIGs included: literacy, numeracy, behaviour for learning, differentiation, 6<sup>th</sup> Form and innovative teaching and learning. SIGs were identified by the vast majority of interviewees as a key structure that enabled middle and senior leaders to jointly lead on whole school improvement. However, initially in the group interviews there were some questions raised, especially in group 1, about the benefit of SIGs and there were some responses that were not as positive about the impact.

In group 1, Paula and Julie questioned the impact of school improvement groups on leaders working together. Julie believed that senior and middle leaders already worked well together:

I don't think it's impacted; the working together was always there wasn't it. You feel like you could go to anybody and ask them about their individual responsibilities and their individual interests but I don't think it's impacted to be honest with you (Julie, G1 p2, I29-32, May 2012).

Paula felt she was someone who would approach and work with senior leaders prior to SIGs. However, Julie reflected further and felt that the development of SIGs may have impacted positively when classroom teachers joined the groups with leaders. Paula spoke positively about the benefit of everyone in the school improvement group talking about the same thing on the same level: 'Because it was a smaller group everyone was

talking to each other on the same level about the same thing.’ Alice thought it was useful to have access to different senior leaders. ‘It has given access to working with a different senior leader that you don’t necessarily work closely with and that has been valuable.’ This group in particular thought there had been some inconsistencies with the experiences encountered by colleagues in different SIGs. There was a range of opinions:

Ours was very full on and I felt involved on the planning of it, it was good (Leonie, G1 p3, l10, May 2012).

Ours felt very full on with planning but then there needed to be more action (Paula, G1, p3, l12, May 2012).

It was the time factor, there was much more time expected from people, extra time outside of meeting schedules (Julie, G1, p3, l16-17, May 2012).

The inconsistencies in SIGs were not referred to in group two. Positive views about SIGs were conveyed by all three members of group two. Shelley commented favourably as she had found the school improvement groups to be a very positive experience for developing leadership skills. She was looking forward to this experience again in the following year. John was equally positive about school improvement groups, reflecting that:

It’s definitely made a difference. It’s definitely made me improve my leadership skills and practices. In my group, working with a senior leader to lead the group taught me skills that I didn’t have before, so I thought it was valuable (John, G2, p 7, l 36-38, May 2012).

The views expressed about SIGs in group two were in contrast to group one:

SIGs are a really valuable experience (Shelley, G2, p7, l39, May 2012).

Yes, I like being able to share with other departments and other middle leaders. Because sometimes what you’re doing in your department it’s good to share like “oh we did this” (Ruhi, G2, p8, l4-6, May 2012).

The group were specifically asked about inconsistencies between each SIG. They suggested that they were unable to comment as they had not experienced other groups. There was reiteration of their positive experiences:

Certainly the impact with me was when I was working with my group (John, G2, p8, l11-12, May 2012)

Group three were also positive in their responses about SIGs:

I think they worked very well. I worked in the school improvement group for subject review and we met regularly enough and the contribution that staff had to make was good (Nina, G3, p10, l17-19, May 2012).

It's nice to have a focus as well. Especially being a new head of department its quite overwhelming the amount of different areas you have to try and juggle whereas if you have got a focus like within the group it helps you channel some of the energy into that one area and you can use your other team (Rosa, G3, p10, l29-32, May 2012).

School Improvement Groups were referred to by individual interviewees as a positive initiative and new structure that had enabled middle leaders to contribute effectively to whole school improvement. Julie spoke more positively in her second interview. She stated that School Improvement Groups were making a change and were enabling middle and senior leaders to work together on a key area of school improvement and to drive forward to make effective change. Julie highlighted the change from senior leaders initiating ideas which brought about little action to the initiation of SIGs:

Middle leaders would think, it's another thing they are making us do, and that's all very well. Yes, these are wonderful ideas, but they didn't move and become action for implementation which is happening now. I think the School Improvement Groups for definite are actually making a difference and making the change. I have not seen schools working this way before. Before perception was different it was like "oh it's another thing I have to think about" but now it is actually this is going to move forward and make a change (Julie, T5, p25, l13-16, June 2012).

Referring to their own experiences of the school improvement group, there were some differing opinions as to how this had impacted on the development of middle leaders' leadership skills. Leonie felt very involved; there was a lot of action planning for improved teaching and learning strategies, and she thought the group worked well. 'Ours was very full on and I felt involved in the planning and it was really good' (G1, p3, l10, May 2012).

Julie felt it was a difficult balance, particularly with time factors and expectations for people to give more time outside of meeting schedules. Ruhi conveyed her positive experience of working in her school improvement group. She particularly felt that it was good to share leadership skills and actions.



Paula didn't believe her group worked as well as others because there was a lot of planning for teaching and learning but then action was not as evident. However, Paula described the CPD included in the School Improvement Group meetings and the twilight CPD session led by two of the School Improvement Groups. She felt that she had developed a deeper understanding of the different areas of school improvement and how she can contribute as a department. Paula also gave an example of how strategies had been shared about developing literacy across the curriculum and how her department had used these to make the instructions of an assignment more accessible for all groups of students:

We have done a lot of CPD on the school improvement groups, developing that and that has given me a much better understanding of the different areas of school improvement and how I can contribute as a department

For example, we had one assignment that we had to go through and changed the literacy to make it easier to understand for all students, which we use now with our students in P.E. (Paula, T2, p19, 12-13 June 2012).

Brian felt that the focus on professional development at the school emphasised the role of the middle leaders and their importance. School Improvement Groups were a clear example of professional development for all staff. The leadership of these groups by senior and middle leaders gave explicit emphasis to middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement. Shelley spoke positively about School Improvement Groups as follows:

I think they are really great. That is something I have really enjoyed and I have felt that we have really contributed and I have seen things that have been implemented and ideas that have been taken seriously, things that have been examined that have been really great. That's, I think, the most contribution we have made in terms of whole school improvement. I think what you do in your own department is obviously going to contribute to whole school. The guidelines for that and the infrastructure are already there and you are following it. (Shelley, T1, p14, 11-18, June 2012).

Ruhi expressed how she liked the School Improvement Group structure because:

You have a focused topic and you get to choose the area. I think everyone working together with other middle leaders and senior leaders is excellent because normally you do not get to work with other middle and senior leaders. (Ruhi, T3 p20, 12-5 June 2012).

Ruhi emphasised the value she placed on middle leaders working together on a shared focus and putting their ideas into practice as members of School Improvement Groups.

Lisa referred to middle and senior leaders working in partnership, leading other teaching colleagues in School Improvement Groups as a really good model that 'has a huge impact.' She believed the introduction of School Improvement Groups as a structure had facilitated middle and senior leaders working effectively together. Middle leaders could now work with other senior leaders, apart from their direct line manager.

Tara outlined the benefit of the School Improvement Groups for her and her department. She felt that her leadership was enhanced as each member was part of a different group and would feedback about the different aspects of school improvement. This enabled the team to think and act upon the key areas of whole school improvement. Tara believed she had learnt beyond her subject area as she is a member of the Numeracy School Improvement Group:

I do think it can make quite a difference and it takes you outside of the department and it actually makes you think about whole-school aspects (Tara, T7, p29, 1 36-37 June 2012).

#### **5.5.2 Enabling staff to contribute to whole school improvement**

The third group spoke positively about school improvement groups. Nina believed that the school improvement groups had worked very well. The one she belonged to for whole school review enabled a group of staff to make a contribution to whole school improvement. 'It really did help; you felt a part of the system and a part of the development.'

Group 2 conveyed the value of each SIG actively sharing their work and developments with all staff through an activity where groups rotated around the hall to find out about the activity of each SIG. They believed that this enabled everyone to have a sense of whole school improvement whilst actively contributing to one area. Ruhi felt that you could see the positive impact that the school improvement groups were having on the school; for example, with literacy and constructive feedback to students.

The new system of whole school review monitored by the school improvement group had focused senior and middle leaders on reviewing teaching and learning every half term. This gave more consistency to self-evaluation for all leaders across the school. Equally staff felt involved as their views were taken on board when evaluating and reviewing the impact of the new review system. Nina suggested that work from the whole school

review school improvement group had contributed to the favourable recent Ofsted inspection.

The focus of each school improvement group and working with a senior leader in a particular group had enabled Rosa to reflect more on whole school improvement when working with her own team. Having a focus on gifted and talented students in her school improvement group was valuable for Brenda, as she felt that middle and senior leaders leading the focus of the group, and working with other staff in the group had an impact across the school on the progress of gifted and talented students.

The theme of all staff contributing to school improvement was recurring across a number of responses. There was indication that not only did school improvement groups impact positively on middle and senior leaders working together but this had extended to other teaching staff.

### **5.5.3 Other structures enhancing the work between middle and senior leaders on school improvement**

Other structures across the school were given as examples where middle and senior leaders could work together on whole school improvement. Lisa referred to the joint senior and middle leader meetings as a positive structure for leaders working together on areas of whole school improvement:

There is a lot of work on school improvement between middle leaders and senior leaders in things like the senior and middle leaders' meetings (Lisa, T4, p21, I33-34, June 2012).

Ruhi was not as positive about the meetings. As a less experienced middle leader, she would appreciate some prior knowledge of agenda items to enable middle leaders to give more informed opinions:

Also sometimes in middle leaders' meetings you get given something to discuss but I don't know whether our views are taken across. It always feels like this is what we are doing, what do you think about how we are doing it? If we knew earlier, we could at the meeting we could have discussed it a bit more openly being given something and having to discuss it. It could be more of a shared decision making (Ruhi, G2, p7, I18-22, May 2012).

Ruhi also made an important point about whether the views of middle leaders were taken into account as part of a shared decision making process.

Lisa referred to Planning Board as a positive forum, as part of the meeting structures at Bentley Wood High School. This is where Head of Department and Head of Year representatives were part of the Board, made up of representatives from across the school, and areas of whole-school improvement formed part of the agenda. Lisa had represented Heads of Year and said that she had made a good contribution to aspects of whole-school improvement.

Brian saw the introduction of Strategic Leader posts on the teaching staff structure as a change in the last two years that had explicitly placed middle leaders in a position of leading on whole school improvement while continuing to lead their own subject area or year group:

The aims of it was to establish professional development apart from anything else, apart from the fundamental school improvement idea which as the school reason in terms of individuals it's enabled individuals particularly non-core departments to exert a clearer whole school role (Brian,T8 p32, 15-9, June 2012).

Brian conveyed that this structural change had been well received and had enabled leaders of non-core departments to exert a clearer whole-school role.

The references to the Strategic Leader role, as a new structure, and Planning Board, as an established structure, were very few.

## **5.6 The understanding of working relationships between middle and senior leaders**

### **5.6.1 Middle and senior leaders working in partnership**

Group 1 emphasised that it was essential for middle and senior leaders to work together and that 'leaders must work together.' If this did not happen schools would not work effectively. All four middle leaders in this group reiterated that this had to happen for schools to work well:

It must happen. Every level, no matter what all the way through the school everyone's got to work together. It's quite an essential part (Julie, G1, p1, 15-7, May 2012).

I agree with that and you need to be to be supported by your senior leader but also they can suggest things that perhaps are in keeping with what's going in the school level (Alice, G1, p1, 19-11, May 2012).

I think it is really good and I think there is a bit more collaboration. But I think it would be good if we had the opportunity to maybe raise the agenda sometimes in some of the meetings (Leonie, G1, p1 120-22, May 2012).

In my opinion we work very well in my department with the senior leaders that we interact with (Paula, G1, p1 127-28, May 2012)

This group emphasised the need for middle and senior leaders to work in partnership in schools. Alice's response suggests a two-way partnership where senior leaders would work with middle leaders on their subject and department areas. Leonie raises the notion shared agenda items by middle and senior leaders. There is a link with Ruhi's comment in the previous section which raised the idea of agenda items being known in advance of the meeting. This suggests that middle leaders would like greater involvement in planning meetings.

Further probing about middle and senior leaders working in partnership prompted two more responses from groups 1 and 2, regarding line management by senior leaders and the support they provide for middle leaders. In group 1, the most experienced Head of Department, Alice, outlined her view that a middle leader should be supported by a senior leader through their line management of middle leaders. Alice, during her ten years as Head of Department had experienced line management by different senior leaders and felt that middle and senior leaders work best together when the senior leader is supportive and the middle leader feels that the relationship is working well:

I have had experience of different line managers and I think the ones who are supportive and you feel that you are working together works well (Alice, G1, p2, 16-7, May 2012).

In group two John felt that he had received support to develop and improve and to do his job through the support and line management provided by a senior leader:

I have always got the support to develop and to improve. I have never felt I have not had the support required to do my job. I am good so far (John, G2, p6, 17-9, May 2012).

These were the only two group members who specifically talked about receiving support from senior leaders which could indicate that other middle leaders perceived their relationship to be on a more equal footing.

Shelley felt she needed time to consider the question about senior and middle leaders working in partnership and asked what the question meant. The Assistant Headteacher expanded the notion of middle and senior leaders working in partnership to having good links and being able to communicate effectively with one another whilst working towards a shared goal. Shelley felt there were opportunities to work together.

### **5.6.2 Relationships between middle and senior leaders**

Relationships between middle and senior leaders, specifically at the school, were extensively discussed by group 3. Brenda stated that the relationships between middle and senior leaders were good and there was a close relationship between middle and senior leaders. She expressed that there was not an obvious divide and there did not seem to be a hierarchy. Furthermore, there was equal treatment for all leaders and staff which resulted in a 'nice atmosphere':

I think there is not an obvious sort of divide either, there does not seem to be that hierarchy in school. Everyone seems to be treated the same which I think is a really nice atmosphere which leads to the nice community that we have in school (Brenda, G3, p9, I21-24, May 2012).

Jack compared the relationship between middle and senior leaders at his previous school with this school. He remembered that there was a distance between leaders at his previous institution. Since being at this school he felt that the close relationship between middle and senior leaders had grown:

I have found it very different to my previous school, there is not a divide between senior and middle leaders, and we work together. We seem to have a common joint purpose on teaching and learning and improving the school (Jack, G3, p10, I11-14, May 2012).

Brenda questioned whether it was the management style of the school or whether it was because of the lack of hierarchy? Rosa conveyed her view that the strong relationship between middle and senior leaders was because of the choice of staff appointed: they were all dedicated to the school:

I think it's because of the choice in the people that have been employed in school. I think that through their personality as well as their dedication (Rosa, G3, p10, l 11-12, May 2012).

All groups made some reference to the close, good relationships between middle and senior leaders at the school. The importance of equality both in the treatment of staff and across staffing structures appear to positively influence relationships between senior and middle leaders. The appointment of the 'right staff', those who are committed to the school, reflects the importance of getting the right team.

The relationship between middle and senior leaders was considered important by all groups. The shared vision and agreement on ways forward regarding areas of improvement was cited by one middle leader as an important part of this relationship.

This highlighted the importance of appointing leaders who are committed to the shared vision and to jointly driving school improvement. All of the middle leaders placed importance on middle and senior leaders working closely in order to drive a school forward and to positively impact on student achievement.

Julie stated:

It is one of those vital cogs in the wheel. I think it is easier to be working together. (Julie T5, p25, l34 -35, June 2012)  
Middle leaders are the stepping stones between the teachers and senior leaders. The middle leaders on a day to day basis know how well initiatives are developing, if they work and the impact they are having on learning. The closer the relationship between middle and senior leaders, the better it is for the development of the school (Julie, T5, p25, l28-42 June 2012).

This middle leader presents a powerful analogy of leaders working together being 'vital cogs' in an engine. This would indicate that it is essential for middle and senior leaders to work together in order to be effective in continually improving and driving a school forward.

Paula, John, Ruhi and Tara referred to the 'open relationships' between middle and senior leaders with the relationships being good. Paula suggested there had been a change in the last three years in the ways that leaders worked together. Previously there had been a 'them and us' situation whereas now 'it is more of a unit'. Paula added that there may be other middle leaders who may disagree and may still perceive a gap between middle and senior leaders:

Yes I think before it was a 'them and us' situation but now I feel like it is more of a unit. I feel quite open to talk to any senior leader about problems that I have or even just about discussing things like sharing practice. I think that the relationships are good from my point of view; I think that some other people may disagree though. I think they do still see it as a 'them and us' situation (Paula, T2, p18, l22=27, June 2012).

Paula considered this change had occurred during the last three years.

John described the 'open door policy', particularly between the middle leader and their senior leader line manager, and the positive impact on his role:

People are investing and believing in me and also challenging me to do better. I feel I have a really good line manager and I trust the manager. She always challenges me to do better and has taught me things I did not know. It has been a refreshing and positive experience (John T6, page 13, lines 17-20).

Ruhi conveyed that there was a good relationship between middle and senior leaders and that there was not a barrier. As a new and relatively inexperienced teacher and leader she was not 'afraid of going to senior leaders with any problems. Her understanding from reading about other secondary schools was that it was not always the case where middle leaders or teachers felt at ease to approach senior leaders.

Brian perceived the relationship between middle and senior leaders as fundamental in enabling the school to move forward. He described the relationship as similar to physics where the force to be exerted has to be aligned. To drive the school forward, middle and senior leaders need to be aligned:

Again, as I have mentioned before it's a fundamental aspect of the relationship and if that relationship doesn't work, then it is very difficult for the school to move forward. If the two don't meet, if there isn't a cohesive unit, a cohesive drive, then obviously it is extraordinary difficult. It's fundamental (Brian, T8, p31, l32-36, June 2012).

Brian reflected further that this relationship is then the model for middle leaders and their team members to be aligned and driving forward together. Brian believed this model was working very effectively at the school.

In her role as Head of Year, Lisa expressed she worked closely with senior leaders, particularly when she was Head of Year 11 as there was extensive intervention with the year group. Lisa cited some of the new structures introduced, including School



Improvement Groups and Management Board had made relationships between middle and senior leaders easier.

Tara perceived working relationships between leaders were 'pretty good'. She and Shelley stated that there needed to be more extensive consultation about specific subject decisions. Shelley was particularly concerned about decisions regarding KS4 courses in her subject. This had placed her in a position where she was a manager, rather than a leader:

Personally I don't see myself as a middle leader, I see myself as a middle manager as I don't really feel like I am leading anything. But I do feel I am managing (T1, p15, I 8-10, May 2012).

In response to; 'what would turn the situation from being a manager to a leader and manager?' Shelley stated that middle leaders should be more involved in the discussions where a request for a significant change in a subject had been made by the Head of Department. Shelley did not consider that other middle leaders were in this situation as they were not introducing new things.

Shelley had indicated in the group interviews that if the individual perceived themselves to be a middle manager rather than a leader they would work well with senior leaders. However, if the individual perceives their role to be a middle leader, the leadership part of the role becomes more questionable:

I think it also depends on the individual perception of what their role is as a middle leader, I think that's going to affect your perception on how effectively you think middle and senior leadership work together. So if you're somebody who sees middle leadership as middle management then you probably see it as very effectively but if you see middle leadership as middle leadership then you may question the leadership (G 2, p7, I 4-9 May 2012).

This response highlights that tensions can still arise within a culture where senior and middle leaders are perceived to be working closely together to drive the school forward. Following this response John agreed stating; 'more decision making power' (Group 2 page line). Ruhi added; 'I don't know whether our views are taken across'. There appeared to be an indication in this part of the group discussion to be the questioning of whether middle leaders were able to work genuinely in partnership with senior leaders in the absence of having equal decision making powers.

Group three, in their discussion on the relationship between middle and senior leaders, referred to a positive culture of leadership that had been grown at the school. Nina shared her views:

It's grown to be a culture really where everybody agrees on the way forward. It does help people to go away and think of their own strategies for managing their own areas and it improves structures across school so everyone knows what expectations are and it becomes the norm after a while. I speak from those who lead that we are all in this together (Nina, G3, p9, 30-34I, May 2012).

Brenda spoke at length about her close relationship with her senior leader line manager. She felt that being physically close in the same building enabled them to communicate effectively on a daily basis. Brenda equally thought that lines of communication with other senior leaders were very open, saying that the line of communication and partnership is not just with your own senior leader line manager, but with other senior leaders that have other responsibilities in the school:

I have a very close relationship with my senior leader as she is physically in the building and I consult her on day to day things which I wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity if she was elsewhere in the school. So that relationship has been there since the very beginning, not necessarily because I am a middle leader and she is a senior leader it is just because of the job that we do (Brenda, G3, p9, 137-39, p10, 11-2, May 2012).

Being approachable and accessible were key qualities which Nina felt promoted an effective relationship between middle and senior leaders:

I just think accessibility is one of the key things because you can find people when you need them and they are not pushing you onto someone else. They will spend the time to ask "what is it, how can I help?" and the spirit in which it is done it says I value what you do (Nina, G3, p10, 17-10, May 2012).

Rosa conveyed that she worked very well with senior leaders and, overall, the culture was of leaders working together in partnership.

### **5.6.3 Line Management Meetings and consistency**

The theme of the line management of middle leaders was referred to by every interviewee and differing views emerged about the consistency of line management meetings in the school, with some interviewees meeting more frequently with their line managers than others. Group one spoke about the different relationships and experiences between middle leaders and senior leaders and suggested that senior

leaders may have different expectations about formal meetings. She stated that having a regular meeting time that can be used to meet worked well:

It's good to have a slot that you can use if you want. I've got one with mine that there if we want it and have got time that both got penciled in but we don't always have to (Leonie, G1, p2, 14-6, May 2012).

Julie supported this and recognised this as the practice she used for meeting with a newly qualified teacher (NQT) in her department. Julie considered further that it could appear that senior leaders worked differently or even inconsistently with some meeting heads of department more regularly. She highlighted the need for more clarity in the expectations for line management meetings:

It is quite effective but what I think is quite interesting is the way different senior leaders work because in discussion with other middle leaders there are some seniors leaders that meet with their people every week and others you don't see from one month to the next and you have to chase around after them, which is kind of interesting the way they work differently and the expectations you get from senior leaders, I think there needs to be a bit more clarity in that to be honest (Julie, G1, p1, 130-33,P2,11-2,, May 2012).

Alice and Paula supported the notion of an ad hoc arrangement Paula expressed that there was flexibility and that she did not need a weekly meeting with her line manager. Alice only wanted a meeting if it was needed:

I don't feel that I need mine to tell me that I need a meeting every week with them but if I needed one then I could go and have one (Paula, G1, p2, 18-9 May 2012).

I think it can sometimes be an inconvenience unless it's actually needed I'm quite happy with an ad hoc arrangement (Alice, Group1, p2, 112-13, May 2012).

John considered meetings as a way of working together with informal conversations The group agreed that consistency in line management could be an area requiring further exploration by middle and senior leaders.

Similar views emerged regarding consistency in communication between senior and middle leaders through frequent interactions. The individual line management by a senior leader was felt to be effective by the least experienced middle leader, Paula, who explained that the interaction with her own individual line manager worked very well, and

that it was easy to interact with other senior leaders John believed that communication between middle and senior leaders were good, saying that:

Communication channels are open. Certainly I have always had a response back and had support. Personally I am very happy (John, G2 p6, I21-22, May 2012)

The notion of communication was also evident when interviewees discussed partnerships and relationships. The importance of communication and interaction between leaders and followers supports the distributed framework that includes two core frameworks- principal plus and practice (Spillane, 2006). The 'principal plus' aspect recognises that multiple individuals are involved in leading and managing schools. The practice is framed as interactions emerging between leaders and followers and these interactions are deemed more important than action (Spillane, 2009).

## **5.7 Professional Development**

In response to the interviewer's exploration of what else needs to happen to enable middle leaders to contribute to whole school improvement, the least experienced post holder, Ruhi, conveyed that there were gaps in the training for middle leaders:

I don't think I have received any CPD helping me improve my role as a Head of Department. We do data, we do separate topics but maybe it would be good doing something like being a successful middle leader (Ruhi, T4, p20, I30-32 June 2012).

She further shared that she would like to have 'short, sharp seminars' for middle leaders. These would be informal and to focus on common aspects of day to day middle leadership:

It is not as formal it is more informal, you see whether other people are struggling as you are or whether they are getting on ok and whether you are having the same problems. Just informal chats because we do talk in the staff room but there is no set time out a way to speak to other leaders to see what they are putting towards their department, something we could learn from (Ruhi, T4, p2041-42, p21, I1-3 June 2012).

The other responses across all of the groups was to continue the shift that had occurred in the last few years where senior and middle leaders were working in close partnership together.

Middle leaders referred to a range of CPD that supported their roles as leaders. Paula, Shelley, Ruhi, Julie and John had attended an 'Aspiring Senior Leaders course' run by an Assistant Headteacher at the school and completed eight sessions run over two terms. External senior leaders had contributed to the sessions. The middle leaders found this beneficial, particularly for thinking beyond their department roles. John felt this had given him confidence to gain promotion as a Head of Faculty in another school from 2013-14.

Paula expressed this had enabled her to be successful in gaining her role as Strategic Leader at the school, where she would be continuing as a Head of Department, but leading on areas of whole-school improvement:

I did the Aspiring Senior Leaders course which I found very beneficial. That actually helped me look into being a senior leader and that helped me get the role as strategic leader which led to me helping with school improvement. We have done a lot of CPD on the school improvement groups, developing that and that has given me a much better understanding of the different areas of school improvement and how I can contribute as a department (Paula, T2, p19, I2, June 2012).

Paula considered the introduction of six new Strategic Leader roles to be a further way of middle leaders being given the opportunity to develop professionally and actively contribute to whole-school improvement.

Shelley stated that she had learnt a lot and developed professionally through her work in the School Improvement Group which had developed a new Whole School Review system.

Lisa referred to a Child Protection course where she had been trained to be a trainer which she considered was very beneficial in her role as Head of Year, but also stated that this was valuable on a whole-school level. She equally valued a school-based training day on observing teaching and giving feedback. Lisa described the importance of support when starting out as a middle leader:

I think one of the things about being a middle leader is about establishing yourself. I think in some ways you can't have training for that because that's about learning from other middle leaders. CPD focuses more on gaining support from the people around you, in my case; this includes other heads of year and senior leaders. (Lisa T4, p 23, I29-33, June 2012)

Lisa placed great importance in learning and developing professionally through relationships developed in different meetings and group structures, where there is a common core purpose of driving the school forward.

Brian outlined how he had received customised professional development as he had already completed 'Leading from the Middle' (NCSL) and 'Future Leaders' (NCSL) courses and he therefore was completing the 'Aspiring Head Teachers' course run by headteachers in the local authority. He felt this was extremely beneficial. Brian also expressed that he had professionally developed through his relationships with senior leaders and that at the school the interaction between middle and senior leaders was a strength and had been very effective:

So I think I feel that I have received customised CPD rather than one size fits all which I am very pleased about. And then obviously I suppose there is a sense in which your professional development also comes from your relationship with line managers, and I have again have had very positive and productive relationships with the two managers I've had since I have been here, and ultimately other members of senior management and the heads (Brian, T8, p32, 118-24 June 2012).

Brian concluded by saying that he had also developed through being part of a SIG and that he particularly valued the customised nature of the professional development provided for middle leaders at the school.

The data collected through the interviews with middle leaders showed that there was recognition of a range of CPD that was perceived to support development in middle leadership. This development included middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement. This is a key part of the study as will be evident in the summary of research and methodology at the start of the next chapter.

## **5.8 Summary**

It is worth noting here that some groups generated richer responses than others and gave greater detail. This is reflective of the composition of each group. Responses from individual interviews were also varied in depth which again may reflect experience both within and beyond the school. A full critical analysis of the data collected from individual and group interviews follows in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The initial part of this chapter returns to the purpose/aims of the study, the research questions posed, the key themes emerging and the main methods used. In the rest of the chapter findings from chapter 5 are discussed critically and in relation to each interview question, the literature review together with other relevant published work. This is used as a framework for the chapter.

#### **6.1.1 Summary of research aim and methodology**

The aim of this study was to firstly explore the perceptions of secondary school middle leaders about their development and contribution to school improvement. Both group and individual interviews were selected as the method to collect data. It was intended to provide new knowledge on the role of middle leaders in respect of whole school improvement. This was timely with the increasing pressures on primary and secondary schools to continually improve. As a practicing headteacher a further aim was to provide new knowledge on the impact of being an insider researcher.

The overarching research questions were as follows:

- What are the perceptions of middle leaders in a secondary school on their contribution to whole school improvement?
- What are the perceptions of these middle leaders on middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement?

The following questions were used for the interviews:

- What is your understanding of distributed leadership?
- What is your perception of middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement?
- What is your understanding of middle and senior leaders working in partnership to contribute to whole school improvement?



- What is your understanding of middle and senior leaders working together?
- What continuing professional development have you received as a middle leader?

The last question was only used in the individual interviews.

A restatement of the key findings:

1. There were differing perceptions of distributed leadership which ranged from not knowing the term 'distributed leadership' to studying this leadership construct as part of studying for a master's degree and articulating a good understanding.
2. Middle leaders considered themselves to be drivers of school improvement. An analogy provided by three middle leaders was that they were the 'vital cogs in the engine' driving the school forward.
3. The structure of whole School Improvement Groups (SIGs), jointly led by senior and middle leaders, was perceived, overall, to be a positive model that enabled middle and senior leaders to jointly lead whole school improvement. However, there were inconsistencies between SIGs and areas for development raised.
4. Middle leaders highlighted the importance of a positive school leadership culture where middle and senior leaders have a shared vision and agree ways of contributing to whole school improvement. Some middle leaders raised the issue of having the autonomy to lead with decision making powers.  
The structure of line management meetings and regular two way reciprocal communication between middle and senior leaders were considered as an aspect of establishing relationships by the vast majority of middle leaders interviewed.
5. Continuing Professional Development to enhance the role of the middle leaders and their contribution to school improvement was considered to be important. There was a variety of experiences across eight middle leaders.  
The development of the leadership structure to initiate a layer between middle and senior leadership was perceived as an advantage by some middle leaders as an opportunity to develop professionally.

## 6.2 Interview question one: what is your understanding of distributed leadership?

**Key finding: Middle leaders in the study had a wide ranging understanding of the term 'distributed leadership'.**

Delegation featured more than once in responses, both in group and individual interviews, indicating an initial misunderstanding of distributed leadership. Interviewees referred to a range of descriptors which overall showed a lack of a secure understanding. For example; John firstly spoke of sharing, delegating and empowering, however, then went on to say it was 'distributing among more people' and enabling more people to lead; 'feeling that they have the autonomy to make decisions and also drive forward the strategy '. This showed the common theme of a mixed and sometimes limited understanding of distributed leadership.

The length of discussion about distributed leadership varied between groups and individuals. I suggest the variation in the length of responses indicated how confident middle leaders were in their understanding of distributed leadership. Clearly those interviewees who did not understand the term were brief as they had little to say, however, Lisa did go on to attempt her own definition. John had a longer response in the individual interview compared with his group interview. He still included delegation in his description, however, he had reflected further on distributed leadership. It could be argued that he thought further because the second interview was with me as headteacher. However, his response continued to be a personal reflection rather than a well-researched answer. There were also other individual interviewees, who continued to convey that they did not understand the term distributed leadership. This would indicate that they had not specifically prepared for the interview with the headteacher.

Overall, the middle leaders interviewed did not display a secure understanding of distributed leadership. This is the opposite of the findings of a study funded by the National College of School leadership (NCSL) where many middle leaders, particularly from the secondary sector, were aware of distributed leadership as a way of fostering leadership skills (Rhodes & Brundrett, 2008). In their responses to other questions middle leaders displayed their practice of contributing to the whole school, engaging in positive interactions and considering themselves to be driving the school forwards. Thus evidencing aspects of distributed leadership highlighted by other researchers (Harris, 2013, Gronn, 2009, and Lynch, 2012). However, in direct responses about distributed leadership there was inconsistency in views about this leadership construct being practiced in the school? Group one posed the question; 'do we have distributed

leadership?’ but this remained unanswered. This was further evidence of the limited understanding of this construct.

Distributed leadership has been recognised as a dominant discourse in school leadership in England that has emerged over the last decade and a model that is understood and used widely in schools (Hall, Gunter & Bragg, 2011). Throughout the discourse there has been recognition that there are many different definitions and theoretical frameworks for distributed leadership (Spillane, 2008, Gronn, 2009, Harris, 2013). It may therefore be understandable that middle leaders in this study experienced difficulties articulating their understanding of the term. However, it could be argued that their distributed leadership skills may be developed further if they were enabled to read relevant research literature. Leaders could then jointly reflect on their practice and consider how they could be further improved. This has implications for the school, which could be criticised for not exposing leaders to the theoretical background to their practice. Furthermore, leaders may be inspired by research on leadership to carry out their own to evaluate their impact on whole school improvement.

In the study, sharing leadership and gaining trust in others in leadership were conveyed as positive concepts of middle and senior leaders working together. However, middle leaders did not perceive this to be a model of distributed leadership. In their attempt to define distributed leadership, the interviewees at the school gave little reference to the characteristics of leading and no reference to distributed leadership impacting on school improvement. The notion of distributed leadership impacting on school improvement has been widely debated amongst researchers. Hargreaves & Fink (2006) put a strong case forward for positive student outcomes, however, Lynch (2012) argues there is little evidence of distributed leadership impacting on school improvement. Harris (2004) claimed there was little evidence between distributed leadership and school improvement, however, from a study in 2009 highlighted the potential for it to change and improve an organisation. I would argue again that gaining a theoretical understanding of the scope of distributed leadership and engaging in the debate about the impact on school improvement may enhance middle leader practice. This in turn may have a greater impact on school improvement.

Whilst there was a clear lack of understanding of the term ‘distributed leadership’ by middle leaders at the school, later analysis of the findings in this study regarding middle leaders and school improvement would indicate that in practice there were aspects of the various definitions of distributed leadership. This included:

Distributed leadership is primarily concerned with mobilizing leadership at all levels in the organisation not just relying on leadership from the top. (Harris 2008, p10).

Middle leaders in the study referred to the importance of enabling and empowering other colleagues to lead and share their expertise as a means of school improvement. This could be considered as some evidence of middle leaders at the school operating within the definition of distributed leadership whilst not being familiar with the term used to describe a particular style of leadership. It could be argued that middle leaders had developed aspects of distributed leadership skills without having a full understanding of the term and different definitions. However, these skills may benefit further from engaging with relevant theory and research.

Whilst I have argued that there was evidence of distributed leadership in practice from responses to the other questions posed, which are discussed later in this chapter, middle leaders were unsure whether distributed leadership was practiced in the school. This suggests that there may be gaps in middle leaders being included in whole school leadership in the school. Lumby (2013) argues that since the initiation of the theory of distributed leadership, about a decade ago, there has been little attention given to how power is enacted. Furthermore, she suggests that opportunities to contribute to leadership are not equal as structural barriers remain. In conclusion Lumby claims; 'the effect of distributed leadership theory is to maintain the power status quo' (2013). Lumby's argument prompts further reflection and raises an important question about when leadership is distributed is power also distributed? This will be revisited later in this chapter.

As the headteacher researcher I had expected middle leaders to have an understanding of distributed leadership. In the literature review I explored different leadership constructs including distributed leadership. I chose to ask middle leaders in the school about middle leadership as this construct I perceived to reflect the developing work of middle leaders. From a headteacher's perspective, firstly this highlighted the importance of developing a greater insight and stronger understanding of middle leader perceptions about leadership constructs. Secondly a gap was identified in professional development regarding the theoretical aspects of leadership. Thirdly I would question whether distributed leadership as a construct, enables equality with opportunities for all leaders to contribute? Is this an inclusive leadership construct?

### **6.3 Interview question two: What is your perception of middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement?**

**Key finding: Middle leaders perceived themselves to be the drivers and the ‘cogs in the engine’ for moving forwards and improving the school.**

Middle leaders responded individually and spoke strongly about driving the school forward. A view held by two interviewees was that without middle leaders a school would not improve and drive forwards. An analogy presented by more than one interviewee was that middle leaders were the ‘cogs in the engine’ that drove the school forward. All of the middle leaders interviewed gave responses about their contribution made to whole school improvement. These responses reflect an argument put forward by Flemming (2014) regarding effective middle leadership:

Effective middle leaders should be aware that they are a vital part of the drive to improve standards in schools, and their motivation, at least in part, comes from a desire to do the best they can for their pupils (Flemming, 2014, p12).

While Flemming (2014) puts forward this argument within the remainder of the chapter on ‘What is Middle Leadership?’ there is little reference to middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement beyond their own subject area. It is acknowledged that middle leaders should have some understanding and knowledge of whole school issues:

Though they will ‘fight their corners’, good team leaders are able to take a wider perspective and should be supportive of the agreed school aims, especially those emphasised in the school’s mission statement (Flemming, 2014, p10).

I would argue Flemming does not go far enough with regard to middle leaders actively working on whole school improvement. While there is recognition that middle leaders should be supportive of whole school aims, there is little emphasis on the contribution to school improvement. Middle leaders in the study emphasised that they drove the school forward on a day to day basis. The language they used during the interviews was strong, individually the interviewees described middle leaders as; ‘the driving force’, ‘driving school improvement’, ‘engine drivers of change’, ‘the drivers of change and school improvement’, ‘integral to whole school improvement’ and ‘we do a lot in trying to move the school forward’. These descriptors and the analogies of being ‘cogs in the engine’ and ‘at the coal face’ I suggest, show how strongly the group of individual interviewees were committed to contributing to whole school improvement.

Furthermore, these responses indicate that these middle leaders perceive driving change and school improvement as very much part of their role. This supports Thorpe & Bennet-Powell's context for their research on the perceptions of middle leaders regarding their needs following a middle leadership development programme:

The importance of middle leaders in bringing about change and improvement in schools is well-recognised and the demands upon them to 'raise standards' (which often translates into getting higher exam results) is ever present (Thorpe & Bennett-Powell, 2014, p 53).

Thorpe and Bennett- Powell (2014) in their study found that, when interviewed, middle leaders identified needing development in areas that they had previously noted, in a questionnaire, as areas of confidence. There is a similarity in the findings from the first two questions in this study. The majority of middle leaders lacked confidence when they spoke about distributed leadership; however, their responses about contributing to whole school improvement were delivered with convincing confidence. It could be argued that the information shared about middle leaders contributing to school improvement provided evidence of distributed leadership in action.

Four of the less experienced middle leaders conveyed that their perceptions about their role had changed since they had been appointed to the post. When appointed they thought their work would be focused on leading the department. This would indicate the lack of clarity in the middle leader job description regarding contributing at a whole school level. Closer scrutiny of the job description, see Appendix 2, shows that there is no expectation set for middle leaders to contribute to whole school improvement. This may have implications for the school in the study, and other schools, to set clear expectations about middle leader roles in job descriptions, including working at a whole school level as part of continuous improvement.

Two of the more experienced middle leaders gave two very different perspectives of their development. Tara, noted how her role had changed in the last eight years and had moved away from just department work to include more whole school work, this was an improvement. Shelley was the single middle leader who perceived that her role did not give her the opportunity to realise her vision for her department and that she was not given a voice. Shelley also commented that she had wanted to lead an improvement in her department; however, senior leaders had not agreed and allowed her to do this. At this point she then considered herself to be a manager and not a leader. This may again reflect the argument put forward by Lumby (2013) where leadership may appear to be

distributed, however, power, clearly stays with senior leaders. From a headteacher perspective, the difference in the development of middle leaders is not unusual. However, having the opportunity, as a headteacher, to probe middle leaders' perceptions more deeply and analyse their responses, I suggest is less usual. I strongly argue that this highlights the benefit of the headteacher researcher role.

The data emerging from both experienced and less experienced middle leaders would indicate that expectations about the role of middle leaders had changed. Middle leaders were very aware of making a contribution to whole school improvement. However, an emerging theme is that this change and development had not been supported with middle leader training to include expectations about their role beyond the department.

The question may be raised regarding whether the middle leaders in these individual interviews were providing the responses that I would want to hear as the headteacher. The question about middle leaders' contribution to whole school improvement was only asked in the individual interviews. I would argue that the repetition of strong language about driving the school forward, by individuals, was convincing. Interviewees had also been open and honest when conveying their knowledge and understanding about distributed leadership and not all of those responses were positive.

As a headteacher researcher I am interested in the difference between the responses about distributed leadership and those about middle leaders' contribution to whole school improvement. Their description of the latter, I suggest, ironically has elements of the distributed leadership construct. However, the emphasis on drive and being 'the cogs in the engine' was powerful as it was repeated by a number of middle leaders.

Middle leaders were individually confident in their individual responses about their contribution to whole school improvement. They were passionate about the drive they provided. From my experience in the individual interviews there was a distinct difference between the responses given to the question about distributed leadership and the one about contribution to whole school improvement. The latter met with enthusiasm. This may indicate confidence in leadership practice and a lack of knowledge in leadership theory.

These responses were the first part of the data analysis about contribution to whole school improvement. The next stage of the analysis explores further the notion of contribution to whole school improvement, however, focuses on middle and senior leaders working together.

#### **6.4 Interview question three: What is your understanding of middle and senior leaders working in partnership to contribute to whole school improvement?**

**Key finding: School Improvement Groups had provided a structure for middle and senior leaders to lead and contribute to whole school improvement; however, there were inconsistencies in the practice and perceived impact of each group.**

One of the main findings from research commissioned by the National College for School Leadership on growing leaders in education (Matthews, Higham, Stoll, Brennan & Riley 2011) was that the biggest contribution to school leadership development was providing rich and varied opportunities to lead, innovate and take responsibility. Interestingly what emerged from the data in this study was the reference to school structures that enabled middle and senior leaders to work together and lead on whole school improvement. One structure referred to frequently was School Improvement Groups (SIGs); this was an area that was particularly followed up in both the individual and group interviews.

Overall, a positive picture emerged from the data about SIGs, however, there were different opinions given which included questioning the impact of SIGs. In group one the data gathered suggested that middle and senior leaders had worked together on areas of school improvement prior to the introduction of SIGs. Julie, who was the second most experienced middle leader, initially conveyed in the group one interview, the lack of impact of SIGs on middle and seniors working together as they already did this previously. However, she did think that teachers may have benefited from the groups. Paula, one of the least experienced middle leaders, also stated in group one that SIGs had not impacted on middle and senior leaders working together on school improvement. This may indicate that their perception prior to SIGs was that middle and senior leaders did work together on school improvement without having a formal structure.

Julie had reflected further and in her individual interview stated that 'School Improvement Groups are definitely making a difference'. This change of view response may be challenged as this individual interview was with me as inside researcher/headteacher. The relationship between this middle leader and me is well established and very open. It is not 'cosy' and there is evidence from her other responses that she has not always been positive about the relationship between senior and middle leaders. I would therefore argue that the responses are honest and valid.



In the first section of this chapter one finding from this was that some middle leaders had a limited understanding of distributed leadership. However, the data collected from the majority of middle leaders about their perceptions of contributing to school improvement would suggest that there is evidence of leadership of school improvement being distributed. The work between middle and senior leaders emerging from the data reflects some of the earliest research on distributed leadership where Gronn (2002) identifies an institutional structural organisation that regulates distributive action. It further reflects the notion of distributed leadership mobilising leaders at all levels in the school, not just those at the top (Harris 2005). However, there were some differing views that emerged from the data where three middle leaders' responses indicated that there were gaps. This would indicate that while SIGs may have mobilised senior and middle leaders to work together there were inconsistencies between the SIGs which may have limited the impact on school improvement.

As a headteacher researcher the responses about SIGs were of particular interest. Prior to this study there had been very positive feedback about SIGs to myself and members of the senior team. I had not expected to hear responses that exposed inconsistencies across middle and senior leaders working together on school improvement. My initial analysis of this data was that it highlighted the need to monitor, evaluate and review new structures where leaders work together. Upon further reflection I would argue that as an insider researcher I found out more about the effectiveness of the working of the new structure of SIGs through the study and interviews than I had in my headteacher role. In the previous section the subtle differences in body language and responses during the individual interviews provided me with a considerable amount of important information about leadership to reflect upon. This confirmed further the benefits of being a headteacher researcher.

In my role as headteacher, before embarking on this research I would have considered distributed leadership to be strength of the school. This view was based on the earlier concepts of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2002, Bennet et al, 2003, Leithwood et al, 2004, Woods, 2004 and Arrowsmith, 2007) and more recent notions where the practice of leadership is considered to be more important than the precise leadership role (Harris 2013). The earlier direct responses about distributed leadership indicated that it was questionable whether middle leadership was practiced in the school. The responses about middle leaders individually and jointly contributing to school improvement provide some evidence of leadership being distributed across middle and senior leaders. These findings are of particular value as a practising headteacher as they provide a deeper

understanding about the perceptions of middle leaders about their work beyond their subject.

A second theme to emerge from the data collected from middle leaders was the benefit of SIGs for other teaching staff. The shift in ownership of and contributions to whole school improvement had gone beyond middle leaders to teachers across the school. Middle leaders at the school perceived that SIGs had benefited classroom teachers and had impacted positively across the school on different practices. This provides some evidence of an inclusive leadership model where respect has been gained and staff are engaged and working towards a shared vision (Bilamoria, 2012).

#### **6.5 Interview question four: What is your understanding of middle and senior leaders working together?**

**Key finding: a combination of leadership constructs could be identified in the joint work of middle and senior leaders.**

The partnership between middle and senior leaders was highlighted in the data collected as a key aspect to building positive relationships at the school. Middle leaders emphasised the positive culture that had been created and the shared goals. In their use of the term culture, it was understood to be a place where 'everyone agrees on the same way forward'. Trust and teamwork have been considered important factors for developing a culture where leadership learning is supported and where the sharing between leaders is inclusive with shared goals (Creemers & Reezigt, 2005). These findings concur with the majority of perceptions of middle leaders in the study and provide some evidence that establishing a favourable, positive culture, where everyone is driving for shared goals, is important for developing a joint approach by senior and middle leaders towards school improvement

Four interviewees made reference to an 'open relationship' between middle and senior leaders which had developed over this time with the outcome being 'a unit' rather than 'them and us'. Responses from another interviewee suggested that this relationship had developed through senior leaders investing and believing in middle leaders and challenging them. I would argue that there are elements of the distributed leadership construct that acknowledges the work of individuals who contribute to leadership practice (Harris and Spillane, 2008). However, there is evidence from the data of a commitment to the investment in the development of middle leaders as followers where there is trust and respect which reflects an inclusive leadership model as described by Bilamoria (2012).

There is evidence from the interviewees at the school that there has been a shift and change in the working practice of leaders. Slater (2007) found that as an organisation became more complex it became more important for every member to take on a leadership role. There have clearly been a number of developments and changes in the school, as outlined in chapter 3, both at a local and national level. It is not possible to assess whether this has created more complexities. I would suggest that increasing complexities is not the only reason for developing leadership in a school.

From the data collected there was evidence that middle leaders perceived a change in the way that leaders worked together. Paula, for example, commented that 'before it was like a 'them and us' situation but now I feel it is more of a unit' (T2, p25, l36, June 2012). Change management is a feature of the transformational leadership construct and considered to be an effective model which is concerned with relationship building (Lynch, 2012). The relationship between middle and senior leaders emerged as an important factor for the overall development of leadership in the school alongside change. There was evidence of change and relationship development in the study which could suggest elements of transformational leadership. In particular, the changes and relationships that had emerged were considered positive. This reflects the transformational model where positive changes emerge (Chou, Lin, Chang & Chaung, 2013). There was less evidence of middle leaders considering themselves to be a team with cognitive trust, however, this probably needed further probing. Without reference to collective trust, there was a sense of collective drive towards shared goals.

The term 'equality' was used by middle leaders in reference to their treatment by senior leaders and to the leadership structures across the school. Whilst being treated equally the support provided by senior leaders as part of their line management also contributed to developing a positive close relationship. There was evidence of leaders doing things together with respect. This reflects the elements of inclusive leadership and the two-way model of leaders and followers having; two way 'respect, recognition, responsiveness and responsibility' (Hollander, 2012). Further evidence of a sense of shared purpose with a common vision which is highlighted as behaviour of inclusive leadership (Bilamoria 2012). Hollander, (2012) claims that 'inclusive leadership is about relationships that can accomplish things for mutual benefit'. I would argue that the relationships described by the middle leaders in this study display many elements of inclusive leadership, as followers there was evidence of them playing an active role in developing the leadership relationship (Hollander, 2012). Middle leader interviewees, conveyed that it is fundamental for senior and middle leaders to work together to drive the school forward

together. This again reflects an inclusive leadership model that values leaders and followers. However, Hollander, (2012) emphasises the importance of giving equal attention to followers and leaders and further claims that followers benefit from their relationship with leaders. The inclusive leadership model goes beyond the relationship between middle and senior leaders and focuses on all leaders and followers working effectively together (Bilamoria, 2012, Hollander, 2012, Jamison and Miller, 2008). The effectiveness of relationships beyond middle and senior leaders was not conveyed through the interviewee responses and is an area that requires further exploration.

A finding from the study is the different elements of leadership constructs evident in middle leader practice that has developed in the school. I would argue that, aspects of distributed, transformational and inclusive leadership are evident. This would suggest a combined leadership construct. A culture where middle and senior leaders work together as a team and enables all to contribute to whole school improvement was a concept that pervaded responses from middle leaders at the school. More than one interviewee referred to the analogy of an engine where senior and middle leaders drove the school forward with middle leaders at the core as cogs of the engine. This experience of working together to drive whole school improvement is a different concept to middle leaders shadowing senior leaders to gain a whole school perspective. Furthermore, it is a shift from the headteacher distributing whole school responsibilities only to senior leaders (Turner & Sykes, 2007). This differs from the findings of this study which has highlighted middle and senior leaders working closely together. One interviewee commented:

Senior leaders spend time with middle leaders, the message comes across that middle leaders are valued. (G1, p1, 16-7, May 2012)

The frequency and the depth of the references to middle and senior leaders working together was far greater than any of the other topics explored in both the group and individual interviews. The vivid analogies of middle and senior leaders working together as cogs in engines and the need for them to be aligned, as for example in physics, in order to drive the school forward provided strong and powerful images. Clearly they perceived driving the whole school forward was very much part of their role. It could be argued that middle leaders are very much the engine drivers, however, the analogy of 'cogs in the engine' could be considered closer to the role of the teacher who as part of a whole team drives the school forward.

The discussion so far about positive relationships between middle and senior leaders reflects the majority of data collected from middle leaders. However, I would argue that some points discussed by the minority of interviewees raise some important issues for

any of the leadership constructs explored in this study. Three middle leaders in this study referred to or alluded to not having power to make decisions. One middle leader reiterated that she considered herself to be a manager rather than a leader because of the lack of her decision making powers. Lumby (2013) suggests that distributed leadership was rebranding from a nebulous leadership to suggest a more inclusive activity. However, she argues that distributed leadership is not inclusive and that it has been developed into:

theory and frequently prescribed practice which promotes a fantasy apolitical world in which more staff are supposedly empowered, have more control of their activity and have access to a wider range of possibilities (Lumby J, 2013 p597).

Lumby (2013) argues further that it is not the case of staff having more possibilities, control of activities or power. She claims that distributed leadership may abuse power. The issue Lumby (2013) raises about distributing power, I would argue, is a very pertinent point within any leadership construct. This reflects Lumby's (2013) argument that distributed leadership literature presents the construct as open and inclusive; however, the power distributed does not go beyond the power to act.

In summary, a key finding from this study is that leaders operate a combination of leadership constructs when contributing to whole school improvement. The benefits of middle and senior leaders contributing to whole school improvement have been evident in the data collected in the study. However, an issue raised by a minority, which I suggest is relevant, is the question of power being distributed amongst leaders. There appears to be some gaps in the research regarding power and leadership constructs. I would argue further that a crucial aspect of this hybrid construct is the drive and enthusiasm by middle leaders to lead beyond their department and to perceive that their work is crucial for whole school improvement.

#### **6.6 Interview question five: What continuing professional development have you received as a middle leader?**

Middle leaders referred to a range of CPD, and specifically said this had increased in the last three years. The introduction of strategic leaders on the staffing structure, as a role between middle and senior leaders was seen by five of the middle leaders as a beneficial way of enabling middle leaders to develop skills for senior leadership and equally beneficial to their role as a middle leader. The development of an extended leadership group can be viewed as a structural development to enable individuals to get on the

leadership ladder and for senior leaders to demystify leadership (Rhodes & Brundrett 2008). The strategic leader model at the school was viewed by middle leaders as a 'bridge' to senior leadership. The role enabled middle leaders to continue their own role whilst taking a major lead in an area of whole school improvement. The interviewees who were strategic leaders were able to describe their development as a leader through joint senior and strategic leader meetings and their joint conference and believed this to be a positive professional development experience. With strategic leaders there was stronger evidence of leadership development being job embedded:

Job embedded school leadership development consists of cultivating, developing and continuously supporting individual leaders in real-on-the-job settings (Fullan, 2009 p 63).

Fullan (2009) links leadership development with school improvement with his claim that the focus is on improving the school and culture together with developing individual leaders. Responses from individual middle leaders at the school support the notion that attempting to separate school improvement and the development of leaders is difficult. This supports the notion that leadership development is a crucial part of school improvement (Fullan, 2009).

Relationships between middle and senior leaders and the opportunities to work in partnership emerged as an important way of developing professionally. This was shown through leading together on School Improvement Groups, having a common purpose of driving the school forward and gaining equality for all leaders. The frequent references to relationships, working together, common values and feeling included, indicates that the inclusive model of middle leaders working closely with senior leaders enables them to develop their leadership skills further.

Attending an 'Aspiring Senior Leaders' locally based, course, was also identified as a positive way of developing leadership skills. Valued aspects of the training, cited by interviewees, were the contribution and shared dialogue with different senior leader practitioners enabling middle leaders to think beyond their own team and subject. . This supported the importance of middle and senior leaders interacting and exploring leadership development in partnership. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was valued by middle leaders and was recognised to be in a variety of formats. New staffing structures introduced to the school such as Strategic Leaders and the group structure of School Improvement Groups were cited as important ways for middle leaders to develop. This would suggest that specific tailored CPD, alongside structures that enable middle

leaders to think beyond their subject, can lead to wider contributions to whole school improvement.

### **6.7 Development beyond Distributed Leadership to include Inclusive Leadership**

Interviewees referred to the influence of middle, strategic and senior leaders on other teaching colleagues which had enabled them to contribute to whole school improvement. This suggests that the leadership model at the school has developed to be a combination of constructs including distributed and inclusive leadership. I would argue that this is a more positive model for empowering leaders at all levels. The notion of distributed leadership in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was where power was redistributed, however, there was little evidence of staff being more empowered, and on the contrary it could lead to or exacerbate inequality (Lumby, 2013). Inclusive leadership is about relationships that can have gains for mutual benefit:

Reaching leadership at this level means ‘doing things with people, rather than to people’ which is the essence of inclusion (Hollander, 2008 p9).

Hollander (2008) proposes that followers can be included actively in leadership with a role in the mutual process. There is strong evidence from the responses by interviewees in this study that relationships between leaders were strong and that middle and senior leaders worked together. There was further evidence with SIGs that other staff were working together with leaders. This suggests that elements of inclusive leadership had been developed at the school.

Inclusive leadership values followers, and recognises that leader attention to the interests and needs of followers is essential to achieve effective leadership (Hollander, 2008p9).

Inclusive leadership has also been defined as:

Energising and motivating; each employee feels authentically valued and respected and is engaged in achieving a shared vision (Billmoria, 2012p12).

This adds a further dimension to the inclusive leader construct emerging at the school. The study focused on middle leaders and their contribution to whole school improvement; however, responses about staff involvement in whole school improvement suggest that all staff are engaged in the shared vision of continuous improvement. This could be an area for further study.

Inclusive leadership has specifically been linked to supporting the concept of inclusive schools which fully embrace reducing barriers to learning and meeting the needs of all groups of students (Devecchi & Nevin, 2010). The vision for the school is based on a total commitment to inclusion and this underpins every aspect of the school community's actions and work. Devecchi & Nevin (2010) propose that in an inclusive school every member of staff must practice being a leader. Distributed leadership is acknowledged as a relevant development for schools; however, the challenge goes beyond that for inclusive schools. The challenge for leaders in inclusive schools is maintaining standards whilst meeting the educational needs of all students.

In this study there is strong evidence of middle leaders being valued and actively driving forward school improvement with emerging evidence of followers being included and involved in whole school improvement.

The notion of inclusive leadership as a construct of leadership in schools has been an important outcome from this study. Whilst Devecchi & Nevin (2010), Hollander (2008) and Billmoria (2012) have put forward definitions focussing upon working together and meeting the needs of all students, this study has provided evidence of taking inclusive leadership to a new dimension. The definition of inclusive leadership emerges:

Inclusive leadership is where leaders at all levels work in partnership to enable all members of a school community to contribute to continuous whole school improvement focused on the highest quality outcomes for all groups of students.

Ryan (2006) describes inclusive leadership as distinct practices that advocate inclusion and educate the whole community about inclusive learning for all pupils. The notion of inclusive practices underpins the definition of inclusive leadership proposed from this study and combines two concepts of inclusive leadership. The very nature of including all members of the school community in continuing whole school improvement promotes inclusive practice. The further aspect of focussing on the highest quality outcomes for all students again supports the notion of inclusion which is widely used to describe including and providing for all groups of students whatever their background, ability or special educational need.

There is recognition in this definition of inclusive leadership that middle and senior leaders working in partnership have crucial roles to play in driving the school forward and enabling other members of the school community to contribute to whole school improvement. The findings from this study emphasise the importance of the partnership



between middle and senior leaders. It could be argued that it is the strong partnership of leaders at all levels working together that drives forwards the highest quality teaching and learning. The experience of jointly leading School Improvement Groups was highlighted by middle leaders as a positive means of enabling those beyond the senior leadership team to contribute to whole school improvement.

The introduction of School Improvement Groups and Strategic Leaders as new structures in the school were referred to by 70% of interviewees. The question that remains unanswered is whether inclusive leadership would have emerged in the school without the introduction of these structures? It can be argued that these structures have impacted positively and enabled middle leaders to contribute to whole school improvement. Furthermore middle leaders perceive that they are actively driving the school forward and have an essential role in school improvement. This supports the argument put forward by Earley (2009) that school culture is likely to change by headteachers putting in place certain processes and restructuring the school with certain systems.

As a headteacher researcher I would argue that this study has provided a means of reflecting closely on the role of the headteacher and their influence in developing leadership in order to impact on pupil progress and outcomes, i.e. delivering the highest quality teaching and learning. Whilst arguing that inclusive leadership is a strong construct that impacts positively on teaching and learning, I would argue that within the construct the headteacher has a vital role to play. It is essential that the vision for leaders to work in partnership and to develop positive relationships across the school community is strongly led by the headteacher. The role modelling of the headteacher in their relationships and partnerships and the support for leaders is essential. Liljenberg (2015) supports this in his study of distributed leadership in three Swedish schools. He identified principal support as vital within the institutions.

Another dimension emerging from the study is the value of being a practitioner researcher. I totally support Frost (2007) who claims that the links between practitioner researcher and educational leadership have been underplayed. Furthermore practitioner research and leadership are vital dimensions of school improvement. The role of headteacher is recognised as being an influential role within the school:

Headteachers are perceived as the main source of leadership by staff, governors and parents. Their educational values, strategic intelligence, and leadership strategies shape the school and classroom processes and practices which result in improved pupil outcomes (Day et al, 2009, 3.0, p3).

Whilst this study has focused upon the perceptions of middle leaders regarding their contribution to school improvement, the notion of improvement is clearly focused upon teaching and learning. As headteacher researcher my aim is to be a lead learner, reflecting the construct of learning-centred leadership whereby leaders focus on teaching and learning (Earley, 2009). My experience of carrying out research within my own school has impacted very positively on the development of middle leaders which in turn has impacted positively on student progress. A culture has developed in the school where every member of the school community contributes to school improvement. Senior and middle leaders work together to ensure that school improvement is well led through school improvement groups.

Underpinning the inclusive leadership as defined in this study is the investment in leaders and teachers and the creating of a professional culture. A professional culture has developed where teachers and teaching assistants share collective responsibility for all students. A professional culture where there is collective autonomy, transparency and responsibility (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The headteacher has a distinctive role within the professional culture described, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that it is a leadership challenge for the principal to identify, develop, select and connect their people but it is doable. I propose that it is of great benefit for the headteacher to be actively engaged in school based research, focused on teaching and learning, with the aim of continuously improving educational experiences and outcomes for young people. As the key leader within a professional culture, role modelling practitioner research demonstrates the commitment to the development of research communities. This is important in the light of teacher research communities playing an essential role in school reform (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993).

The findings from this study have shown the direct impact on student progress and outcomes from leaders working in partnership on whole school improvement. Furthermore there is evidence of how leaders can enable other members of the professional culture to contribute to whole school improvement. I would concur with Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) that distinct roles within the inclusive leadership construct is for the headteacher with senior colleagues to maintain the connectivity within the professional culture. In conclusion role modelling continued learning, through practising insider research, is a dimension of headship that should be seriously considered by all headteachers.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION**

### **7.1 Summary of findings**

The study aimed to investigate secondary school middle leaders' perceptions of their contribution to whole school improvement. This has been an important area to investigate because of the increasing pressure on schools, by the Government, to continually improve their performance. To this end all schools are held to account through the annual publication of the Performance Tables (DfE, 2015) and inspections carried out by Ofsted. In recent years the accountability for outcomes and continuous improvement has included middle and senior leaders in schools.

The research found that overall middle leaders perceived they did contribute to whole school improvement. This was supported by the following key findings:

- Middle leaders viewed themselves as important drivers of school improvement. Some described themselves as 'cogs in the engine' and claimed that without the drive and input of middle leaders the school would not move forward and improve.
- The School Improvement Groups, (SIGs), structure, initiated by leaders in the school, had enabled middle and senior leaders to jointly lead school improvement. This had raised the profile of whole school improvement amongst leaders. Furthermore there were middle leaders who considered that classroom teachers had benefited from being part of a SIG. Some leaders identified that SIGs needed further improvement as there was a lack of consistency across the groups.
- Distributed leadership was not a term that was fully understood by middle leaders. The range of responses indicated that this was not a leadership construct that had been explicitly discussed or promoted in the school. However, middle leader responses to other questions in the interviews showed evidence that might be described as distributed leadership practices.
- A combination of leadership constructs was identified when middle leaders described their work with senior leaders. It was underpinned by a positive culture with agreed shared goals between middle and senior leaders. Elements of distributed as well as transformational and inclusive leadership were evident in

the descriptions of middle and senior leaders working together. However, the issue of middle leaders having the power to make decisions was identified by an interviewee. This reflected the question raised by Lumby (2013) of whether power is given to middle leaders as part of the distributed leadership construct.

- The introduction of a different staffing structure, with a new layer of leadership, was perceived by some interviewees as a way of enabling middle leaders to professionally develop. Leadership and aspiring leadership courses were identified by some as effective continuing professional development (CPD). However, overall, responses about CPD were inconsistent and brief. Middle Leaders did not appear to be inspired to discuss CPD experiences in any depth.
- There was great benefit for me, as a headteacher, being an insider researcher. Most importantly, within the context of leader development, it enabled me to have a greater understanding about the dynamics of leadership in a school and the implications for school improvement.

## **7.2 Findings from this study in relation to previous research**

### **7.2.1 Middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement**

The finding in this study about middle leaders actively contributing to whole school improvement differs from one earlier perception in the field. Fullan (2008) claimed that there was an absence of middle leaders contributing to school improvement. However, there was recognition, even prior to this, that teacher leadership could empower teachers which could lead to school improvement (Muijs and Harris, 2006). Since that time there has been further recognition of middle leaders contributing to school improvement:

The importance of middle leaders in bringing about change and improvement in schools is well-recognised and the demands upon them to 'raise standards' (which often translates into getting higher exam results) is ever present (Thorpe and Bennett-Powell, 2014 p53).

The link between leadership and securing sustained school improvement has been evidenced by several research studies (Harris, 2004; Hopkins, 2001; West, Jackson, Harris, & Hopkins, 2000). The contribution of middle leaders to whole school improvement has been covered quite extensively in research studies on distributed leadership. Day et al (2011:75) highlight the impact of distributed leadership on schools; 'leadership distribution was perceived to be an important influence on teaching and schools'. Furthermore, they found that the changes in processes in leadership indirectly

impacted on improvement in pupil academic outcomes. (Day et al, 2011:75). Harris (2014) argues that evidence shows that a way leadership is implemented and shared in an organisation will influence its outcomes. Middle leaders have been central to the debate on the distribution of leadership and the impact on school improvement. Increasingly, evidence has been presented that in the right conditions purposeful leadership distribution can impact positively on school performance (Leithwood et al, 2009).

### **7.2.2 School Improvement Groups enabling leaders to contribute to whole school improvement**

It is a challenge to find any previous research on school improvement groups enabling leaders to contribute to school improvement. Harris, Day, Hopkins, Hadfield and Hargreaves (2003), share their findings about school learning communities where school improvement groups are viewed as an essential feature of sustained school improvement. The school improvement groups they outline were similar to the ones cited in this study as they were made up of leaders and teaching staff from across the school. However, they were temporary school improvement groups and were made up of small groups of six people with their focus being enquiry and development. A distinctive feature of the school improvement groups in this study is that they involve all members of teaching and support staff and they are continuous throughout each year. A further distinction is that they are led jointly by middle and senior leaders.

There appears to be a gap in the literature on school improvement groups within the school context. The effectiveness of school improvement groups and the impact of this model on school performance is an area that would warrant further research.

### **7.2.3 Middle leaders understanding of distributed leadership**

Middle leaders in the study had a range of understanding of the term 'distributed leadership'. It was referred to as delegation in one instance and in other cases interviewees were honest in stating that they were not clear what the term meant. When the middle leaders were specifically asked about their understanding of the term, distributed leadership, there was very little consensus amongst the responses. This is in direct contrast to the findings of Hall, Gunter & Bragg (2011) who claim that distributed leadership has become a dominant discourse in schools. It has, however, been argued that distributed leadership in practice has been masked with activities such as 'top down performance management systems, and is concerned more with accomplishing

organisational tasks by delegation rather than the authentic distributive strategy (Hartley 2010) However, there is the view that distributed leadership, despite misconceptions of the term, is very much evident in schools:

Regardless of these conceptual difficulties and very different understandings there is compelling evidence that at a discursive level distributed leadership has emerged strongly in English schools (Hall, Gunter & Bragg, 2011, p33).

The finding in this study does not support the notion of distributed leadership being at a strong discursive level. There were indications from the joint work of middle and senior leaders that elements of the distributed leadership construct were evident in practice, however, this was not always recognised by middle leaders.

#### **7.2.4 A combination of leadership constructs when middle and senior leaders work together**

The notion of a hybrid model of leadership is not new. Gronn (2009) suggested that a hybridity of leadership manifests itself in different ways in organisations. In reality he claimed that distributed and individualised patterns of leadership co- exist. Individual leaders in this model are equally as important as collective forms of leadership. Furthermore Gronn (2009) argues there will be a constantly shifting leadership mix or configuration.

Outcomes from this study evidenced middle leaders describing their work with senior leaders where there was a shared vision and common purpose. This spread to involve other teaching colleagues as valued followers in school improvement groups. Some more experienced middle leaders highlighted the changes that had occurred in the previous three years from a top down model to a shared leadership approach. These examples highlight the different leadership constructs working together. I would not suggest that a hybrid model was evident, however, aspects of inclusive, transformational and distributed leadership could be identified within a combination of constructs.

#### **7.2.5 Middle leaders' inconsistent experience of continuing professional development**

The importance of continuing professional development for teachers has been widely recognised (Allison, 2014). The direct link to school improvement and the school's responsibility to deliver quality professional development is recognised by Ofsted. The Ofsted School Inspection Handbook (2014) state that inspectors will assess:

How professional development has improved the quality of teaching'; 'the extent to which leaders' monitoring of teaching has identified needs and provided targeted pedagogical guidance and support for teachers (Ofsted 2014,p 13).

The responses given by middle leaders in the study about their experiences of continuing professional were varied. The responses raised the question of the consistency of professional development for all middle leaders in the school. Bennett and Thorpe-Powell (2014) found that middle leaders identified areas where they had greatest confidence as areas for further development. This was seen by the researchers to be ambiguous. Middle leaders in this study described a range of professional development experiences but did not speak in great detail. This was slightly ambiguous and raised a further question of whether middle leaders had been enthused and motivated by their professional development experiences.

### **7.2.6 The benefits of headteacher researcher**

Exploring the notion of headteacher researcher was not one an original aim of the study. As the study developed the benefits of carrying out research as a headteacher emerged. Previous research on the insider researcher has focused on teachers and leaders with little attention given to headteachers in this role. It has been argued that research methodology literature tends to 'gloss over the intricacies of insider research conducted at one's place of work (Mercer 2007, p3). Mercer (2007) argues further for the need to investigate insider research carried out by academic managers in a range of powerful hierarchical positions:

If this were done, the ever-increasing number of educationalists researching the leadership and management of their own institutions might be better prepared to meet the unique challenges they face (Mercer, J, 2007, p27).

Coghlan (2007) has contributed to the debate on the value of insider research; his focus on senior executives highlights the benefit of having a preunderstanding of the organisation and seeing beyond objectives that can appear to be 'window dressing'. He does however, raise issues for executives in their dual role as researchers, claiming that this can be confusing (Coghlan, 2007).

I would argue that the strong rationale presented for teacher insider research can be transferred to headteacher insider research. One example is the notion of teachers building knowledge in their school communities, through their daily teaching, which has the potential for sharing through larger research communities (Cochran-Smyth and Lytle 1993). The same can be replicated for headteachers through their daily leadership.

### **7.3 Original contribution**

There has been extensive research both on middle leadership and school improvement. The link between middle leadership and school improvement has particularly been investigated within studies of distributed leadership. A distinctive feature of this study is my role as headteacher. The benefits of being an insider researcher have been noted in earlier sections. As yet research on middle leadership has not been conducted by the headteacher of the institution and more particularly in a girl's school.

In the role of headteacher researcher I was able to analyse the responses in greater depth as I had some understanding of the situations being described. This was particularly true when interviewees were outlining the different experiences they received in school improvement groups. This enabled my analysis to include the importance of the drive and tenacity of leaders when driving school improvement.

Inclusive leadership, with a focus on followers, (Hollander, 2012) is less well known in education, particularly when compared with literature on distributed leadership. I propose that the inclusive model of leadership can be developed further and with greater strength through colleagues working in partnership in secondary schools.

### **7.4 Limitations of the research**

The study is focused on middle leadership in one school. I would argue that the findings are of relevance for other secondary schools; however, the next step would be to carry out similar research on middle leadership and contributions to whole school improvement in other schools.

Middle leaders were interviewed about their relationship and work with senior leaders. This provided valuable data; however, interviews with senior leaders to gain their perceptions of working with middle leaders would provide a wider perspective of this joint work. A question that may be raised is did senior leaders share the same perceptions about this work?

The responses given by middle leaders about their continuing professional development were brief. Reflecting upon the data collected, further probing and asking questions about learning as a professional within the school situation may have yielded more extensive responses.



## **7.5 The implications of the research for the field of school leadership, myself and the school**

Distributed leadership has been a dominant construct in the field of research in relation to the development of middle leaders and enabling leaders to impact on whole school improvement. Less attention has been given to the hybrid model initially identified by Gronn (2009) and to inclusive leadership (Hollander 2012). Considering the high profile of distributed leadership in education in the secondary school in the study middle leaders had a limited understanding of the term. This raises the question of whether we include leadership theory as part of the professional development of middle leaders.

Middle leaders were brief in their responses about continuing professional development. There was an inconsistency between middle leaders regarding their recognition of the range and variety of professional development. As a headteacher researcher I am aware of the different professional development provision in the school. The training provided by the NCSL and specific middle leadership courses are recognised as valued continuing professional development for middle leaders. It is important to explicitly convey to middle leaders the variety of professional development, beyond formal courses, that impact positively on the development of their leadership skills.

The school where the study took place introduced school improvement groups as a means of all staff contributing to school improvement. School improvement groups were referred to by Hopkins and Harris (2003), however, there appears to have been little follow up to this model in schools. Positive impacts on school improvement, through school improvement groups, were indicated by some middle leaders; however, the requirement to monitor, evaluate and review the consistency of action and impact would appear to be essential. Further research is required to gain a more in depth analysis of the impact of school improvement groups on leader performance and on school improvement.

As a headteacher the experience of researching middle leadership within my own institution has been of great significance. During the study changes occurred in the way middle and senior leaders work together. Continuous reflection on the roles of middle and senior leaders has continued. Very importantly the dialogue about school improvement and the contribution by all leaders has widened to teachers, students and support staff.

The impact of the focus on school improvement is measured externally through the DfE performance tables (2015). Based on this measurement the school has continued to improve, a major strength is the progress of all groups of pupils.

As a senior leader I have role modelled being an insider researcher. We now annually have 15 teaching and support colleagues who undertake research related to an area of school improvement addressed by one of the school improvement groups. Annual honorariums are awarded for each research study. The focus on school improvement through research is powerful in a school community as it creates a genuine interest within a theoretical context.

Recognition has been given to the increasing number of teacher researcher communities across the country. Cochran-Smyth and Lytle (1993, p58) argue 'teacher research has the potential for transforming the university generated knowledge base'. Increasingly, there has been recognition given to the contribution that classroom practitioners can give to educational research, particularly with a focus on teaching and learning. My experience as a headteacher researcher has confirmed my argument for headteachers to become a research community working with universities. Through this model, practices in education to continually improve could be developed based on well-founded quality research studies.

Most importantly, as part of this, headteachers would role model reading educational articles, studies and books as part of their professional development.

Reading educational literature has been one of the most valued part of my research experience which is almost now addictive. Of particular benefit is maintaining a broad view of education within national changes. The recent Government White paper 'Education Excellence Everywhere' (DfE 2016) has a number of wide ranging implications for leaders in schools, with the vision:

An education system in which all schools are academies will necessarily mean changes in the way many schools are held to account (DfE 2016, p 104)

The changes envisaged are that high performing multi academy trusts will support underperforming academies to deliver good outcomes for pupils. Implementing major Government, I would propose, presents challenge for headteachers and leaders. This presents a strong argument for reading beyond Government papers. 'Leadership in the public sector' (RSA 2016) was released at a similar time to the White Paper (DfE

2016), the message regarding change in schools is different. The authors claim that the current changes and reform are not developing the learners, teachers and institutions that are needed for the future. They put forward more radical changes and transformation to come from within education systems globally which will depend on the emergence of a different kind of innovative leadership:

This will be leadership which has authentic conviction about the potential for education as humanity's best hope; and which can both assemble a compelling case for change and communicate it. (Haligarten, Hanon & Beresford 2016).

Maintaining the broadest views within and beyond education through reading high quality literature to ensure that school leaders are delivering the best education, I would argue, is a key finding that will hopefully be of benefit to all headteachers and those aspiring to headship.

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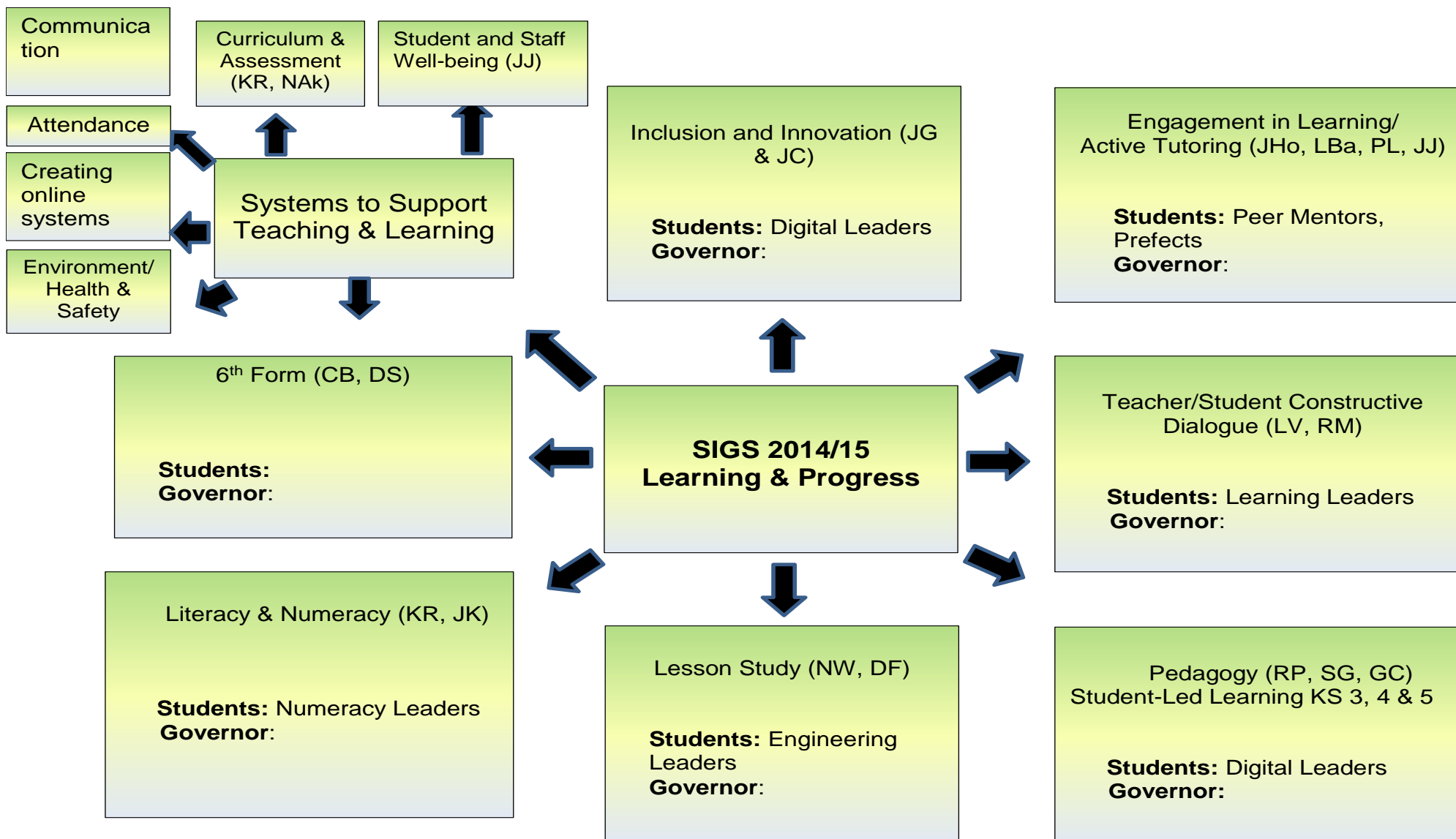
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## APPENDICES

**Appendix 1: Diagram showing the concept of School Improvement Groups**



## Appendix 2

### Middle leader job description

## MIDDLE LEADER JOB DESCRIPTION

At the heart of subject leadership is the provision of professional leadership to secure high quality teaching and learning, effective use of resources, improving standards of achievement for all students, and the promotion of students' personal development and well-being. A Subject Leader must provide leadership and direction for the subject and ensure that it is managed and organised to meet school and subject aims and objectives. A Subject Leader plays a key role in supporting, guiding and motivating teachers of the subject. **Subject Leaders evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning, the subject curriculum and progress towards targets for students and staff in order to inform future priorities for the subject. The policy and practice of monitoring within a department provides the information for evaluation and action.** A Subject Leader identifies needs in their own subject and recognises that these needs must be considered in relation to the overall needs of the school. It is also important that a Subject Leader has an understanding of how their subject contributes to school priorities and to the overall education and achievement of all students.

Throughout their work a Subject Leader ensures that practices improve the quality of education provided, meet the needs and aspirations of all students and help to continue to raise standards of achievement in the school.

### **JOB PURPOSE**

To lead, manage, develop, and be accountable for \_\_\_\_\_ at KS\_\_\_ and in order to ensure the highest possible standards of student achievement, personal development and well-being.

### **REPORTING**

The post holder will report to the specified Leadership Team member.

### **RESPONSIBLE FOR**

The post holder will be responsible for the teaching and support staff allocated to the subject area.

### **WORKING TIME AND CONDITIONS**

These will be as specified in the latest School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document

## **DIMENSIONS**

The post holder will be responsible for the following, with reference to the national framework for middle leaders:

## **ACCOUNTABILITIES**

### **The strategic direction and development of the subject**

1. To ensure that the departmental culture, policies and practices follow and contribute to those of the school
2. To contribute to a whole-school culture and climate which enable staff and students to develop and maintain positive attitudes towards \_\_\_\_\_.
3. To promote \_\_\_\_\_ and the development of extra-curricular activities to students, parents, staff, governors and members of the local community.
4. To evaluate the performance of the department in line with the whole school self-evaluation process and to complete the department SEF.
5. To play a key role in the annual subject review, working with the subject line manager to evaluate the department.
6. To create an annual subject development plan, which contributes to the achievement of the School Improvement Plan, and which involves all the subject staff in its design and evaluation. This will reflect the school's commitment to continuous improvement, high achievement, effective teaching and learning, and inclusion.
7. To set expectations and goals for colleagues and students in relation to standards of achievement and behaviour.
8. To contribute to whole school planning, review, monitoring and evaluation.
9. To monitor, evaluate, and review, teaching and learning, and student achievement against school, local, and national standards, including by regular lesson observation, sampling work, interpreting data; to report annually on the above.
10. To represent the department in the wider school community and liaise with the rest of the school, governors, partner schools, the Local Authority, further and higher education, industry, outside agencies, examination boards etc.
11. To keep up to date with national developments in \_\_\_\_\_ and teaching practice and methodology.
12. To actively promote the ethos of the school and its equal opportunities policy.

### **Teaching and learning**

13. To lead the team in the creation, consistent implementation, and improvement of courses/schemes of work which meet school and national requirements, and are accessible to and provide suitable challenges for all students, including key skills
14. To lead the development and implementation of effective teaching and learning strategies, including ICT-based developments.
15. To lead the development and implementation of effective departmental assessment policies, within the framework of those for the whole school and at a national level
16. To promote and support extra-curricular activities, which enrich and support the learning and experience of all students, and increases their participation in school life.



### **Leading and managing staff**

17. To build a team in which good practice is shared, and meeting time is used effectively to raise achievement, and support student personal development and well-being.
18. To monitor the performance of staff in the department and take responsibility for any necessary action arising.
19. To support/challenge and professionally develop staff so that they are effective in their role(s) and provide high quality teaching and learning; the above to include participating in and leading the school's programmes of staff training and development.
20. To ensure that Performance Management (PM) is carried out according to school and national regulations and that staff receive regular feedback, which supports progress against their PM objectives.
21. To communicate effectively with staff so that they are properly informed of developments across the school and that their views are represented.
22. To ensure that staff understand and effectively implement school policies.

### **Student progress and standards of achievement**

23. Within the framework of whole-school and national policies, to set and monitor appropriately challenging subject targets for students, which will make a measurable contribution to the fulfilment of those for the whole school; to manage interventions to maximise student progress.
24. To maximise achievement by ensuring that examination entries are at an appropriate tier and non-entries are minimised; to assist with the management and conduct of examinations
25. To promote, manage, and be responsible for high standards of student behaviour.
26. To implement creatively the school's systems for rewarding good student performance and to ensure all staff use them effectively.
27. To ensure effective communication with parents/carers, so they are kept up-to-date with curriculum developments and their children's progress.

### **The efficient and effective deployment of staff and resources**

24. To manage efficiently the available resources of staff, space, finance, and equipment within the limits and guidelines laid down.
25. To assist in the recruitment of staff.
26. To be responsible for the effective deployment of staff and to make appropriate arrangements in their absence.
27. To ensure that the department's accommodation/ area, resources and equipment are maintained in good order, including the management of a) health and safety, and b) security.
28. To provide a stimulating environment, including maintaining displays that promote interest and learning.

### **Other Specific Duties**

29. To undertake the above responsibilities in addition to those held by a standard scale teacher at the school.

30. To undertake any other duty as specified by the STPCD not mentioned in the above.

31. Whilst every effort has been made to explain the main duties and responsibilities of the post, each individual task may not have been identified; therefore employees will be expected to comply with any reasonable request from a manager, including ad hoc projects, to undertake work of a similar level that is not specified in the job description.

The job description is current at the date shown, but, in consultation with you, may be changed by the headteacher to reflect or anticipate changes in the job commensurate with the grade and job title.

## **MIDDLE LEADER**

### **PERSON SPECIFICATION**

The person appointed will:

1. be an experienced, well qualified and outstanding teacher of \_\_\_\_\_;
2. be able to demonstrate high quality leadership skills;
3. have successful experience of developing teaching and learning strategies to meet the needs of all students and their continuous improvement;
4. believe in the importance of effective team work and a collaborative approach, and be able to build supportive working relationships with colleagues both within and outside the department;
5. have successful experience of curriculum innovation and development;
6. be committed to inclusive education;
7. have a sound understanding of school self-evaluation and how this can impact upon raising standards of achievement;
8. be committed to their own professional development and that of other staff within the department;
9. make an active contribution to whole school initiatives and developments;
10. be inspirational, enthusiastic, dynamic, creative and strategic;
11. be committed to the comprehensive ideal and to the principles and practice of equal opportunities.

## Appendix 3: Recording transcription Group 3:G3

### Group 3: 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2012

Interview with middle leaders

AHT, Brenda, Jack, Nina and Rose

AHT Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview, it is very much appreciated.

AHT **What are your views on middle and senior leaders working together at the school?**

Brenda I think it has evolved quite a lot from the last three years I think, from what I remember of middle leaders, there is certainly more of a presence I have found. After working quite closely with C, so in relation to that, we have got quite good relations with the SLG team and senior management through extracurricular activities.

Rose I think your right; I think it wasn't something I was actually aware of in my last school, a band of middle leaders. There was heads of department and there were senior managers but I don't think there was much of a relationship between the two it was quite a distance. So I think your right I think it's grown a lot here and I think it's important to have them in schools particularly for things like progression, middle leaders who want to move onto things like senior management its gives you a taste of what middle management and senior management is about and I think it also accesses a huge wealth of experience and knowledge that middle managers have that perhaps senior managers have not got, that day to day experience that middle managers do within the school so I think that sort of feedback is important in schools.

Brenda I think there is not an obvious sort of divide either, there does not seem to be that hierarchy in school. Everyone seems to be treated the same which I think is a really nice atmosphere which leads to the nice community that we have in school. Because our line managers and SLG. I speak to most of them from day to day about various things and they are very approachable and that's really nice.

Rose Do you think that is because it's that management style of this school or do you think it's because of the middle manager and senior management hierarchy?

Brenda I think it's because of the choice in the people that have been employed in school. I think that through their personality as well as their dedication.

Nina It's grown to be a culture really where everybody agrees on the way forward. It does help people to go away and think of their own strategies for managing their own areas and it improves structures across school so everyone knows what expectations are and it becomes the norm after a while. It speaks from those who lead that we are all in this together.

AHT **What are your thoughts on how effective middle and senior leaders work together to contribute to school improvement at Bentley Wood?**

Brenda I think like Rosa I have a very close relationship with my senior leader as she is physically in the building and I consult her on day to day things which I wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity if she was elsewhere in the school. So that relationship has been there since the very beginning, not necessarily because I am a middle leader and she is a senior leader it is just because of the job that we do. But certainly with other members of senior leadership like you I have no problem in accessing or approaching them about improving the 6<sup>th</sup> form. That line of communication is open to not just with your own senior manager but with other senior managers that have got other responsibilities in the school.

Nina I just think accessibility is one of the key things because you can find senior leaders when you need them and they are not pushing you onto someone else. They will spend the time to ask "what is it, how can I help?" and the spirit in which it is done it says I value what you do. You get the sense we are improving the school together.

Jack I have found it very different to my previous school, there is not a divide between senior and middle leaders, we work together. We seem to have a common joint purpose on teaching and learning and improving the school. I have valued working with a senior leader to lead a school improvement group

AHT **How have school improvement groups impacted on leaders working together this year because they are new?**

Nina I think very well particularly in school improvement groups. I worked in the school improvement group for subject review and we met regularly enough and the contribution that staff had to make was good. The senior person in our group had an external contact and there was regular updates and we were able to sit and think, readjust and reflect on, put something in place and take it back and evaluate it and peoples input had a great impact on the final decision. It really did help; you felt a part of the system and a part of the development. Having gone through the period of Ofsted were it did turn out to be something that was useful and they saw the ongoing review as something that was quite good. If we had this year what we had in years past some subjects had not been review then it would have impacted on what happened. But because we had this ongoing review I think it did help overall and staff did have quite a bit to do with it and their views were taken on board.

Rose It's nice to have a focus as well. Especially being a new head of department it's quite overwhelming the amount of different areas you have to try and juggle whereas if you have got a focus like within the group it helps you channel some of the energy into that one area and you can use your other team.

Nina We have a constant review because we have this area about action points so you are able to look back in the next review at your action points of the last

one and see we did what we said we were going to do and event your own teachers in your department get the focus as to what we are about.

AHT **Was anyone in any different groups?**

Brenda I was in gifted and talented which has now been renamed differentiation.

AHT **I don't think it has been renamed.**

Brenda I think that the gifted and talented bit has been moved into the differentiation one because we are going to be looking more at different groups in the school. So I worked in that one with a senior leader. I think what was useful was looking at the impact of gifted and talented students on the school and its success rate and that if we recognise these students early enough and give them enough challenge and a challenging enough programme they will do what we want them to do which in my interest is to get them into 6<sup>th</sup> form. We did a little bit of that when we had the gifted and talented and higher achiever evening when we had the Oxford and Cambridge and London universities came that was attended 100% because those girls are the sort of girls that we obviously want to keep in the 6<sup>th</sup> form who are currently still leading some of those out. That was the focus that had some impact.

AHT **Finally, what is your understanding of the term distributed leadership?**

Brenda I assume it's a top down management structure. Its leadership at the top which is fed out to say from senior management into middle management and its responsibilities divided up amongst other people. It's this sort of cascading idea of moving leadership down through the hierarchy rather than just holding onto the top of it.

Jack And that happens here I think, L doesn't really tell me what to do it's not like a relationship where it's just delegate jobs its more encouraging you to lead.

AHT **How is distributing different from delegating?**

Nina People are encouraged to take on things that they have an interest in and they think they can manage rather than being instructed all the time. I mean there are some things that come with the job and you've got to get them done then there are some things in you can take on in leadership because it suits your interest and it suits the path that you want to go on. And people have been able to go on a study, do their theses or something like that for their own personal development. It enables one to develop their own areas as well as to develop themselves as persons. It's not just telling, it's advising, coaching and helping people to go on a pathway that is beneficial to them and anybody else in the community.

AHT **And do you think that happens in your department as well from the top down? Have you got any experience of distributed leadership?**

Brenda Coming from a department of one, me and the head of department. We just do it together I mean obviously he has the ultimate responsibility for all sorts

of bits and pieces but as far as the day to day work is concerned we just do it together really.

Nina In my department we have people who are interested in something, I know for example G and V work on the students who are less able and V has this kind of interest where she just gets up and gets things done and she seeks for information here, there and everywhere. For her it is something that she just does naturally and its one of those things you just allow her to do and it feeds into department and feeds into the whole school because she goes across school to get it done. Another example H is interested in the Outstanding Teacher Leader Forum and she is able to share in the department and across the department because that is what she is interested in. So this kind of distribution and it's also based on performance management where people are able to sit in their performance management and agree something that the school wants, the department wants and what I want as an individual to develop in and we are able to build on that. It works for the interest of everybody and I think that's why it continues to work because peoples' interest is being catered to and they feel a sense of fulfilment.

Brenda Do you think everybody feels that at middle management or do you think that some people, and I am just being devil's advocate here, people just see it as a way of dumping work onto middle managers under the disguise of professional development. I don't see it like that here but do you think there is feeling that that sometimes happens?

Nina I don't know, I don't know if I dialogue enough with people to get that out of them and I don't see people stressing over getting things done or not or not being able to manage. If they aren't able to manage something that they took on they are able to say in a particular way I need some support. It's not been stressful to the point where I'm "I have to do that, I have to do that at all cost". I mean there are some things that we have to do at all cost and we would rather not do some of them but then I don't think that is part of the leadership that we are talking about that just comes with the job.

Rose I have spoken to a few teachers , well one specifically who is stressed out with the amount of work she is getting, 2<sup>nd</sup> in department and this was last year and she was saying that the head of department is very good at delegating and maybe there needs to be some sort of intervention with that. Obviously it's not my department and she was just letting off a bit of steam really. So maybe that needs to be investigated. I know she needs to instigate that happening but I know some people find it difficult if they are in that role they feel they should be doing that work like you were saying that it comes with the job and the territory but then sometimes you can't always handle it can you and it's not always the case and there is not enough hours in the day as we know to complete all tasks.

AHT **I guess it's about your department or in your school having a kind of culture where people can actually say they are feeling stressed about things. It's about the balance of giving people responsibilities where**

**they want to take them on and allowing them to develop themselves but also being open if they are saying it's getting too much.**

Rose Do 2<sup>nd</sup> in departments have access to the line manager, do they have meetings, and can they set up meetings?

AHT **I don't see why not**

Rose Does that happen?

AHT **It would probably be good practice I don't know if it happens in all department areas.**

Rose What the 2<sup>nd</sup> in department having meetings with their line manager?

AHT **Yes – N do you have meetings with your 2<sup>nd</sup> in department?**

Nina We do when we need to.

Rose But does H have meetings with your line manager?

Nina It's not necessary but if it's necessary the avenue is open

AHT **She could do it if she wanted to, she has never requested it?**

Nina No because we are normally able to manage what is happening and if she brings something that needs to be taken to the line manager then I usually do and it then comes back down but we have never had a situation where I am not able to be the middle person and she finds the need to move across. At the moment it does work.

AHT **I guess that's an avenue you go to if you felt you couldn't approach your line manager you could go to their line manager or someone else in the school I hope.**

AHT **Is there anything else you wish to add?**

**Thank you all for giving up your time and for making such valuable contributions**



#### **Appendix 4: Transcription of individual interview with teacher**

##### **Interviewee Teacher 5 (T5) Julie**

**R Julie thank you for coming along to this interview for research, I have some questions to pose to you. Do you want to start by telling us how long you have been a middle leader?**

Teacher 5 I have been here 8 years but previous to that I was a middle leader 2-3 years as at one stage I was a Deputy Head of year as well.

**R What is your perception of middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement?**

Teacher 5 I see middle leaders as they are the driving force in the school. They are the engine room, they get things going, make sure things are happening and they monitor. I think with school improvement it is vital. In the past I have seen members of SLG introduce things and ideas and it starts off well but it needs to be seen and pushed through. It needs to be consistent and checked and the people that do that are the middle leaders because they push things and make sure the department is on board. It's about change and making sure it happens and stays and that it doesn't go back to the old way. I think it is important to get them on board because they will be the one driving it forward day in and day out.

**R I hadn't quite thought of it in those terms and it is quite interesting.**

Teacher 5 Yes because SLG are always introducing new ideas but who is going to make sure it actually happens, who's going to make sure it moves forward and stays there and it is not just a flash in the pan and won't go back to what there was before, which I think you see a lot in teaching.

**R On reflecting back what was your understanding of middle leaders contributing to whole school improvement when you took on the role of middle leader?**

Teacher 5 Well again it is the answer I've just given you, it is about making sure it happens more than anything just day in day out. I think initially when I first became a middle leader, which was in a different school; I think I had the ideas. I have got to say in this school recently it has changed a lot and it has stayed changed and it's improved, whereas before it may not have happened. It was like middle leaders were like "oh it's another thing they're making us do and another" and it was all very well - yes these are wonderful ideas but they didn't really move on and become the thing that is happening now. I think the school improvement groups for definite are actually that is making the change. I have not seen schools working this way before. Before perception was different it was like "oh it's another thing I have to think about" but now it is actually this is going to move forward and make a change.

**R What is your understanding of distributed leadership?**

Teacher 5 When I had the group interview with C I said I knew about this because of my MA. I know it's basically not delegating, it's not just giving people jobs to do. It's

sharing responsibility in where they take on a role, they lead it and they are responsible for it.

**R You say learnt about it on your MA, have you read any articles?**

Teacher 5 Very quickly, it was part of one of the sessions and we were looking at different types of leadership roles. We were also looking at the motion contracts, there were different ways of things that were understood. It was just one session we looked into it and I thought it was quite interesting.

**R Was there one particular researcher that you were introduced to?**

Teacher 5 No.

**R What is your understanding of the relationship between middle and senior leaders working together?**

Teacher 5 It is one of those vital cogs in the wheel. I think it's easier to working together. As I said in the past, other places I have worked in it has been very much a 'them and us' sort of thing. And I think that actually the closer your working relationship is the more things get pushed on and they are more driven. Rather than this is my new idea and you are going to do it. Middle leaders are the stepping stones between the teachers and senior leaders. The middle leaders on a day to day basis know how well initiatives are developing, if they work and the impact they are having on learning. The closer the relationship between middle and senior leaders, the better it is for the development of the school

**R What is your perception of middle and senior leaders working together on school improvement?**

Teacher 5 In the last three years we have been working together on school improvement rather than "this is the idea, this is what we are going to do, do it" there is much more of a discussion about it now. I think sometimes middle leaders are much more realistic about things whereas SLG have these wonderful ideas whereas middle leaders probably say well "this might work, this might not work" because they are much more involved in the classroom day in day out. It's about building relationships and coming closer together, it very different to what I experienced in my previous school. It has been happening very gradually and slower, I think change is better when it is slower and reflective is quite key. Not to try and change everything tomorrow, that is quite key. Many people I have spoken to in other schools and in my previous school where it is right we have to change everything tomorrow and it's got to be done within this week. I don't think that that is a viable method especially when you are working with lots of different personalities. It's grown slowly and I think that's the way it's worked and it has been quite successful.

**R What CPD have you received regarding your role as a middle leader?**

Teacher 5 It is quite interesting as if you had asked me a couple of years ago about CPD I would have said that I had had very little as a middle leader. However, I have done the Aspiring Senior Leaders course. I have also learnt a lot from observing teaching and doing whole school work scrutinies. The whole school review system has brought about CPD for leaders and teachers. I lead the Heads of Art meetings across the local authority and I think we all develop professionally from sharing best practice at these meetings.

R

**Thank you Julie for agreeing to this interview. Your time is very much appreciated.**

## Appendix 5: Example of data analysis and coding

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
<p>What are middle leaders' understandings of the term 'distributed leadership' and whether this influences their role as a middle leader?</p>	<p>Not knowing the term 'distributed leadership</p>	<p>Delegation</p>	<p>Understanding/growing understanding of the term 'distributed leadership'.</p>
	<p><b>G2p8 Ruhi:</b> I have never heard of it.</p> <p><b>G2p8 John:</b> I have never heard about it before</p> <p><b>T218Paula:</b> I don't really have an understanding,</p> <p><b>I3p20 Ruhi:</b> I am not too sure about that.</p> <p><b>I4p22 Lisa:</b> I have not heard the term before but that's how my phonetic terminology would see it.</p> <p><b>I6p27 John:</b> I had never heard of it before I became a middle leader or when I became a middle leader</p> <p><b>G1p3 Leonie:</b> It must be something to do with sharing is</p>	<p><b>G1p3 Alice:</b> I would be say if I was distributing within the department I would be delegating so with senior leaders they are delegating as well.</p> <p><b>G1p4 Alice:</b> I think I am not 100% responsible for it although I am very professional and conscientious and do take responsibility for it obviously.</p> <p><b>G2p8 John:</b> If I think about it, it means sharing leadership, distributing leadership, the power is not within just one person and it's almost a way of delegating.</p> <p><b>G3p11 Brenda:</b> I assume it's a top down management structure. Its leadership at the top which is fed out to say from senior management into middle management and its responsibilities divided up amongst other people. It's this sort of cascading idea of moving leadership down through the hierarchy rather</p>	<p><b>G1p3 Leonie:</b> They all have responsibility for different areas as well don't they?</p> <p><b>G1p3 Julie:</b> Now I know this because I did this last week.</p> <p><b>G1p3 Julie:</b> Delegation is when you give other people jobs to do but you are still responsible for it, distributed leadership is where somebody is given a job and it's their responsibility and they have creativity over how it's done and when is done but it's their responsibility and it's their head of the line. That's the difference – delegation is still the senior leader in charge.</p> <p><b>G1p4 Alice:</b> That's important because everybody has a contribution to make and they have ownership of that. But do we feel as middle leaders that we have distributed leadership and we are totally responsible for something?</p> <p><b>G1p4 Julie:</b> think I get the freedom to do what I want really to be honest. I discuss it anyway but at the end of the day results wise, that's my responsibility, I have ownership for if they don't get the results , it's not my line managers fault it's my fault. It does happen</p>

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
	<p data-bbox="524 245 792 272">it? Cascading down.</p> <p data-bbox="524 304 954 501"><b>G1p4 Leonie:</b> How much authority have the senior leaders got, I mean does it all have to go through the head for any big decisions that are made?</p> <p data-bbox="524 533 954 596"><b>G1p4 Julie:</b> Do we currently have distributed leadership?</p> <p data-bbox="524 628 954 1086"><b>G3p12 Brenda:</b> Do you think everybody feels that at middle management or do you think that some people, and I am just being devil's advocate here, people just see it as a way of dumping work onto middle managers under the disguise of professional development. I don't see it like that here but do you think there is feeling that that sometimes happens?</p> <p data-bbox="524 1155 954 1385"><b>T6p27 John:</b> No the first time I ever heard about distributed leadership was in the group interview with C when the term first came about and I thought ok and it made sense was it was and I knew that I had done it.</p>	<p data-bbox="978 245 1420 272">than just holding onto the top of it.</p> <p data-bbox="978 304 1462 576"><b>I1p14 Shelley:</b> It's delegation of responsibility. I think it requires a whole heap of trust and to delegate something down. To say yes you will have overall responsibility and are in charge of everything but you would hand certain things over for somebody else to do.</p> <p data-bbox="978 612 1462 879"><b>T2p18 Paula:</b> I assume it is a kind of delegation, passing leadership onto other people in order to help things go like the strategic leaders or maybe I you had a school improvement group and there were three strands then giving them to three different people.</p> <p data-bbox="978 916 1462 1385"><b>T6p27 John:</b> But when I was first asked about it I realised I had done it, it's basically about sharing leadership, delegating and empowering. Its distributed leadership that's what you're asking. So it's not where everything is centred in one person or one place but basically distributing it among more people and making sure that more people are leading and feeling that they have the autonomy to make decisions and also drive forward the strategy.</p>	<p data-bbox="1487 304 2159 400"><b>G1p4 Leonie:</b> You think you can have creativity in your department and make decisions; you don't have to go to your line manager to ok anything?</p> <p data-bbox="1487 432 2159 528"><b>G1p4 Julie:</b> And it's down to them how they get it done as well and it gives them the responsibility themselves – the ownership that's what it is.</p> <p data-bbox="1487 560 2159 687"><b>G1p4 Julie:</b> I think within senior leadership group there is distributed leadership, I do think so. Delegation is just like you giving a job for someone else to do.</p> <p data-bbox="1487 756 2159 852"><b>G2p8 Shelley:</b> It's a very trusting thing to do, you have to have some serious confidence in your team.</p> <p data-bbox="1487 884 2159 1027"><b>G3p11 Jack:</b> And that happens here I think, L doesn't really tell me what to do it's not like a relationship where it's just delegate jobs its more encouraging you to lead.</p> <p data-bbox="1487 1059 2159 1251"><b>G3p11 Nina:</b> It enables one to develop their own areas as well as to develop themselves as persons. It's not just telling, it's advising, coaching and helping people to go on a pathway that is beneficial to them and anybody else in the community.</p> <p data-bbox="1487 1283 2159 1362"><b>G3p11 Nina:</b> In my department we have people who are interested in something, I know for</p>

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
		<p>Distributed leadership goes beyond middle leaders. Just as senior leaders distribute leadership to middle leaders you try to distribute leadership amongst your team as well, so that yes you are delegating things but you are also giving people opportunities to be responsible for particular areas or to run particular initiatives so that they then are developing their skills for the time when they want to move up, the ladder.</p>	<p>example G and V work on the students who are less able and V has this kind of interest where she just gets up and gets things done and she seeks for information here, there and everywhere. For her it is something that she just does naturally and its one of those things you just allow her to do and it feeds into department and feeds into the whole school because she goes across school to get it done.</p> <p><b>G3p11 Nina:</b> Another example H is interested in the Outstanding Teacher Leader Forum and she is able to share in the department and across the department because that is what she is interested in. So this kind of distribution and it's also based on performance management where people are able to sit in their performance management and agree something that the school wants, the department wants and what I want as an individual to develop in and we are able to build on that. It works for the interest of everybody and I think that's why it continues to work because peoples' interest is being catered to and they feel a sense of fulfilment.</p> <p><b>T4p22 Lisa:</b> Do you mean by that giving people the sense of feeling that they are leaders and giving them their own place in the school where they can feel that they have got leadership abilities?</p> <p><b>T5p25 Julie:</b> When I had the group interview with C I said I knew about this because of my MA. I</p>

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
			<p>know it's basically not delegating, it's not just giving people jobs to do. It's sharing responsibility in where they take on a role, they lead it and they are responsible for it. As I say being that link person, so disseminating information to your team to your department but also being the person that, you know, someone can come to, to talk through ideas or talk through problems and issues. And really making sure, particularly at a middle leader level that your area of the school is working well and is developing your area of responsibility, if you like, you need to make sure is running okay.</p> <p><b>T8p31 Brian:</b> I suppose my understanding is that distributed leadership is simply an articulation of the fact that in a school environment everybody has got a leadership responsibility and everybody is a leader in different ways, so I think distributed leadership is simply an extension of that concept, or articulation of that concept. It's simply the fact that sometimes it can be more explicit and other times it can be more implicit, but I think it is creating a culture where people take responsibility at all levels, whether they be students, whether they be staff or they be support staff</p>
Interview question	<p><b>Theme 1</b> School improvement groups have enabled other teachers to contribute to school improvement.</p>	<p><b>Theme 2</b> School improvement groups have not impacted</p>	<p><b>Theme 3</b> The structure of school improvement groups jointly led by middle and senior leaders has impacted positively.</p>
What are middle leaders' views	<p><b>G1p2 Paula:</b> I am someone who will approach people</p>	<p><b>G1p2 Paula:</b> There is School Improvement Groups. We did work</p>	<p><b>G1p3 Leonie:</b> Ours was very full on and I felt involved on the planning of it, it was good.</p>

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
<p>on middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement?</p>	<p>anyway, someone who is maybe a bit shy might have felt that actually they got to know that middle leader or senior leader in that group which made me feel more comfortable around them.</p> <p><b>G1p2 Julie:</b> It might have been because eventually when the normal classroom teachers got involved in school improvement that it was good for them in that way.</p> <p><b>G1p2 Paula:</b> Because it was smaller groups so everyone was talking to each other on the same level about the same thing.</p> <p><b>G1p2 Alice:</b> I suppose it might give to access to a different senior leader that you don't always necessarily work with and that's always useful.</p>	<p>together before but I don't think it's impacted.</p> <p><b>G1p2 Julie:</b> I don't think it's impacted; the working together was always there wasn't it. As you said you feel like you could go to anybody and ask them about their individual responsibilities and their individual interests but I don't think it's impacted to be honest with you.</p> <p><b>G1p3 Paula:</b> I like the group but I would like more action</p> <p><b>G1p3 Paula:</b> We had two leaders but it didn't seem like anything was happening.</p> <p><b>G1p3 Paula:</b> Ours felt very full on with planning but there needed to be more action.</p> <p><b>IG1p3 Julie:</b> t was the time factor, there was much more time expected from people, extra time outside of meeting schedules.</p> <p><b>T1p15 Shelley:</b> Here, I think that middle leaders are more of a managerial role rather than a leadership role. Personally I don't see myself as a middle leader I see myself as a middle manager as I</p>	<p><b>G1p3 Leonie:</b> Because we did the training sessions we had to be full on.</p> <p><b>G2p7 Shelley:</b> I found that a very positive experience with middle and senior leaders working in the school improvement groups.</p> <p><b>G2p7 John:</b> It's definitely made a difference; it's definitely made me improve some of my practices in my own department. Especially in my group it taught me a few skills that I didn't have before so I do feel that that was valuable.</p> <p><b>G2p7 Shelley:</b> Really valuable.</p> <p><b>G2p8 John:</b> SIGs have given us confidence with our teams on school improvement</p> <p><b>G2p8 Shelley:</b> I am looking forward to being in the next one.</p> <p><b>G2p8 Ruhi:</b> Yes I like being able to share with other departments and other middle leaders. Because sometimes what you're doing in your department it's good to share like "oh we did this." Certainly the impact with me was when I was working with my group.</p> <p><b>G2p8 Shelley:</b> I was very fortunate because I was in a group with the HT leading with a middle leader so therefore what we looked at was implemented. So that was in the captain's group.</p> <p><b>G2p8 Ruhi:</b> You can view behaviour and</p>



Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
		<p>don't really feel like I am leading anything. But I do feel I am managing.</p>	<p>constructive feedback SIGs making an impact on the school so you can see it all.</p> <p>And the literacy SIG has made an impact.</p> <p>I think that the Ofsted inspection outcome had a lot to do with the outcome of the groups.</p> <p><b>G3p10 Jack:</b> I have found it very different to my previous school, there is not a divide between senior and middle leaders, and we work together. We seem to have a common joint purpose on teaching and learning and improving the school. I have valued working with a senior leader to lead a school improvement group</p> <p><b>G3p10 Nina:</b> I think very well, particularly in school improvement groups. I worked in the school improvement group for subject review and we met regularly enough and the contribution that staff had to make was good.</p> <p><b>G3p10 Nina:</b> It really did help; you felt a part of the system and a part of the development.</p> <p><b>G3p10 Rose:</b> t's nice to have a focus as well. Especially being a new head of department it's quite overwhelming the amount of different areas you have to try and juggle whereas if you have got a focus like within the group it helps you channel some of the energy into that one area and you can use your other team.</p>

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
			<p data-bbox="1487 245 2168 507"><b>G3p10 Nina:</b> We have a constant review because we have this area about action points so you are able to look back in the next review at your action points of the last one and see we did what we said we were going to do and event your own teachers in your department get the focus as to what we are about.</p> <p data-bbox="1487 544 2168 805"><b>G3p10/11 Nina:</b> So I worked in that one with a senior leader. I think what was useful was looking at the impact of gifted and talented students on the school and its success rate and that if we recognise these students early enough and give them enough challenge and a challenging enough programme they will do what we want them to do which in my interest is to get them into 6<sup>th</sup> form.</p> <p data-bbox="1487 842 2168 1104"><b>T2p18 Paula:</b> The school improvement groups have enabled senior and middle leaders to work together on whole school improvement. They have given the opportunity for middle leaders not just to work with the senior leader who is there line manager but to work with other middle and senior leaders. I have seen different leaders becoming quite driven about the area they are leading.</p> <p data-bbox="1487 1177 2168 1374"><b>T2p18 Paula:</b> Yes it is very positive. We are working together and deciding jointly how to lead and engage others in an area of whole school improvement. Colleagues have said that there have been different experiences in different SIGs. The next step is to ensure consistency across the</p>

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
			<p data-bbox="1480 245 1581 276">groups.</p> <p data-bbox="1480 312 2163 646"><b>T3p20 Ruhi:</b> I like the school improvement groups because you have a focused topic and you get to choose a topic. I am very happy with the group I have been put in for next year and taking part in that. It is very informal but we do get a lot done within that short time. I think everyone working together with other middle leaders and senior leaders is excellent, because normally you do not get to work with other middle leaders and a senior leader together.</p> <p data-bbox="1480 683 2163 884"><b>T3p20 Ruhi:</b> Coming together with other middle leaders and being given a focus and putting together your ideas on sugar paper and seeing what other people are doing in the classroom. Setting some targets with short term and long term goals from that, it is a fantastic idea.</p> <p data-bbox="1480 920 2163 1121"><b>T4 p21 Lisa:</b> There is a lot of work between middle leaders and senior leaders in things like the senior and middle leaders meetings but also the school improvement groups which I think is really good because it is middle leaders working with everyone, I think that has a huge impact.</p> <p data-bbox="1480 1158 2163 1391"><b>T7p30 Tara:</b> I would say that now middle and senior leaders joint work is integral to the school improvement because I think it should be sharing from a bottom up approach rather than a top down approach, you know, everybody should be saying this is what works well and this is what should improve and you look at how to improve it rather</p>

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
			<p>than a top down model which is what we think needs to be done.</p>
			<p><b>Theme 4</b> Other structures/situations enhancing middle and senior leaders working on school improvement.</p>
<p>What are middle leaders' views on middle and senior leaders working together to contribute to whole school improvement?</p>			<p><b>T1 p15 Shelley:</b> In the ideal world, in my naïve world, that if there are massive decisions that are going to be made about a department and I know that you often say you are going to take it to SLG and I think well ok and then you are kind of like you are sitting outside the head mistress's office waiting for an answer maybe middle leaders could be party of those discussions and could be trusted to be professional enough.</p> <p><b>G3p9 Brenda:</b> I think like Rose I have a very close relationship with my senior leader as she is physically in the building and I consult her on day to day things which I wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity if she was elsewhere in the school. So that relationship has been there since the very beginning, not necessarily because I am a middle leader and she is a senior leader it is just because of the job that we do. But certainly with other members of senior leadership like you I have no problem in accessing or approaching them about improving the 6<sup>th</sup> form. That line of communication is open to not just with your own senior manager but with other senior managers that have got other</p>

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
			<p data-bbox="1485 245 1861 272">responsibilities in the school.</p> <p data-bbox="1485 309 2163 544"><b>G3p10 Nina:</b> I just think accessibility is one of the key things because you can find senior leaders when you need them and they are not pushing you onto someone else. They will spend the time to ask “what is it, how can I help?” and the spirit in which it is done it says I value what you do. You get the sense we are improving the school together.</p> <p data-bbox="1485 580 2163 783"><b>T3p20 Ruhi:</b> I don’t feel that in this school there is a barrier as such as I feel everyone is quite easy to get on with. Things like saying hello in the corridor makes it less formal and less like “there’s the boss”. You are not too afraid of going to them if there are any problems within this school.</p> <p data-bbox="1485 820 2163 951"><b>T6p21 Lisa:</b> I think there has been a huge amount where middle leaders contribute to whole school improvement, especially in joint middle leaders and senior leadership groups.</p> <p data-bbox="1485 987 2163 1118"><b>T4p25 Lisa:</b> The role of the head of year means that we do a lot in trying to move forward the whole school. We do focus on our own year groups but we work together in whole school</p> <p data-bbox="1485 1155 2163 1390"><b>T6p28 John:</b> Generally in this school I felt that my own world I felt that was never the case and that’s why I felt it was quite refreshing to work here as middle and senior leaders work together on school improvement, particularly through their joint work in school improvement groups. I think in any organisation, business, government or school, yes</p>

Interview question	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3
			respect, as ultimately someone has to be accountable, ultimately someone has to make decisions and there is a reason that person is in that position. But the narrower you make that gap the more efficient you become at improving and getting where you want to be.

