

Firing on all cylinders:

What makes an effective middle leader?



Sam Baars, Meena Parameshwaran, Loic Menzies and Charleen Chiong

2015-2016



Sam Baars is a Research Associate at LKMco. He has particular interests in youth research, area-based inequalities and social science impact, and has experience using a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, from film-based work in schools to rapid research reviews and large-scale survey analysis. Sam believes that robust, innovative social research is the key to tackling the barriers that prevent some young people from making fulfilling transitions to adulthood, and he channels this belief into a range of research projects at LKMco. Sam holds a PhD in Social Change from the University of Manchester.



Meena Parameshwaran is a former Research Associate at LKMco. She is a sociologist with research interests in educational inequality, social class, ethnicity, and compositional effects. She is a quantitative researcher and has published work on identity, diversity and social cohesion. Meena has worked as a researcher at The Runnymede Trust and Teach First, and has held academic positions at the universities of Manchester and Oxford. She is a qualified maths teacher, school governor and student mentor, and is now a researcher at the FFT Education Datalab. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the University of Oxford.



Loic Menzies is Director of LKMco, a Tutor for Canterbury Christ Church University's Faculty of Education and a trustee of the charity Changemakers. He was previously Associate Senior Manager and Head of History and Social Sciences at St. George's R.C. School in North West London. Before that he was a youth worker involved in youth participation and young person-led community projects. He now specialises in education policy, youth development, social enterprise and school-based teacher training. He holds a degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from Magdalen College, Oxford.



Charleen Chiong is a Junior Researcher at LKMco whilst working on her PhD at the Faculty of Education, Cambridge University. Her PhD is exploring how the socio-cultural and political contexts of schooling in different countries shape learning opportunities for children of varying socio-economic backgrounds. Her interests span comparative education, children's psycho-social well-being, social justice and educational inequality. She also holds a Masters in Comparative and International Education from Oxford University.



This report was written by the education and youth development 'think and action tank' LKMco. LKMco is a social enterprise - we believe that society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

www.lkmco.org.uk / [@LKMco](https://twitter.com/LKMco) / info@lkmco.org

This report was written for the education charity Teaching Leaders. Teaching Leaders' mission is to address educational disadvantage by growing a movement of outstanding middle leaders in schools in challenging contexts. We design and deliver leadership development programmes for those leaders on the front line in the most challenging schools: middle leaders. Our high-potential and whole-school middle leader programmes transform the impact that leaders can make on pupil outcomes, retain them in their schools and build a talent pipeline for the future.

www.teachingleaders.org.uk // [@teachingleaders](https://twitter.com/teachingleaders) // enquiries@teachingleaders.org.uk // 0203 846 5808

Firing on all cylinders:

What makes an effective middle leader?

Contents

Foreword	4
Executive summary	5
The research.....	5
Findings	5
Building blocks of effective middle leadership	7
1 Introduction.....	8
2 Literature review	9
2.1 Between two worlds: the role and priorities of middle leaders.....	9
2.2 The broad consensus from Ofsted and academic research	10
2.3 Personal characteristics and behaviours	11
2.4 Enabling factors and barriers.....	11
2.5 Summary.....	13
3 Data and methods	14
3.1 Stage 1 data and methods.....	14
3.2 Stage 2 data and methods.....	15
4 Findings	17
4.1 Stage 1 findings.....	17
4.2 Stage 2 findings.....	25
5 Summary and recommendations.....	32
6 Literature review references	33
Appendix 1 Online survey for fellows and alumni.....	35
Appendix 2 Interview schedule for middle leaders	40
Appendix 3 Interview schedule for colleagues.....	41
Appendix 4 Department meeting observation rubric.....	42

Foreword

James Toop: Chief Executive Officer, Teaching Leaders



Teaching Leaders believes that middle leaders are the key to closing the achievement between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. It matters much more who teaches you than which school you go to. 75% of the gap comes from variation in pupil performance within the same school. To close the gap, we need to reduce the variation within the school and the way we do that is through consistently excellent teaching and learning in every department of the school. It is our middle leaders, the engine room of the school, who deliver that. You cannot have a great school without great middle leadership.

We commissioned LKMco to write this report because we wanted to get inside the ‘black box’ of middle leadership: to understand what the best middle leaders do to deliver maximum impact for pupils. By using the results of this report we can ensure middle leaders focus their time on the aspects of their role that deliver greatest impact and that our programmes disproportionately develop these skills. We were inspired by Doug Lemov’s *“Teach Like A Champion”* which has identified the key skills that teachers can practise and master. This report starts the same conversation about middle leadership.

If we are to truly eradicate the inequity of outcomes in our education system, we need our best middle leaders firing on all cylinders. This report gets to the heart of what differentiates good from great middle leadership.

Executive summary

In this report we identify the behaviours, characteristics, enabling factors and barriers that contribute to or hinder a middle leaders' success.

Identifying these is crucial since, as Mike Cladingbowl¹ argues, leadership of teaching may have "the biggest single impact on standards" (2013: 5).

The research

The research was funded by Teaching Leaders and carried out by LKMco. It took place in two stages: the first drew on GCSE attainment data and combined this with data on the performance of 209 fellows according to the Teaching Leaders Leadership Competency Framework and survey responses from 123 Teaching Leaders fellows and alumni. Taking this large scale data as its starting point, the second stage involved more detailed qualitative analysis of data from interviews with twenty four teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders in eight schools. These elements were supplemented with a detailed literature review.

Findings

Stage one

Factors affecting middle leaders' effectiveness highlighted in stage one fell under three broad headings:

1. Team and interpersonal
2. Organisation, planning and resources
3. Vision and purpose

Two sets of factors were found to have a particular influence on middle leaders' effectiveness:

Effective middle leaders are particularly good at managing their team

Departments that did particularly well relative to other departments in the same school (in terms of GCSE results) tended to be led by middle leaders who were rated particularly highly in terms of their ability to manage a team by their line managers. Meanwhile, when asked an open survey question about the personal characteristics and behaviours that helped make them effective, middle leaders also identified team competencies and team-level factors as some of the most important factors in underpinning their effectiveness.

Effective middle leaders attach importance to planning and resource management

Leaders of (relatively) high performing departments tended to attach particular importance to planning and resource management. It is notable that resource pressures were also one of the most commonly cited barriers to effective middle leadership.

Stage two

Detailed interviews with middle leaders, their line managers and those working in their departments backed up findings from stage one (relating to the particular importance of managing teams and resources) and added valuable detail. They also highlighted a third important area.

Team and interpersonal

Three characteristics and behaviours in this area were particularly salient:

1. Being open, consultative and collaborative
2. Communication and diplomacy
3. Knowing, developing and building a team

Organisation, planning and resources

¹ Mike Cladingbowl was previously Ofsted's national director for schools and is now Executive principal of Knutsford Multi-Academy Trust

In terms of organisation, planning and resources, stage two highlighted the particular importance of 'procedures and systems' in ensuring that middle leaders were able to get the best out of their departments.

Professional practice

As well as underlining the importance of team-level factors and leaders' organisation and management abilities, stage two also highlighted an additional set of behaviours and attitudes which we describe as 'professional practice' which includes being professionally informed and leading by example.

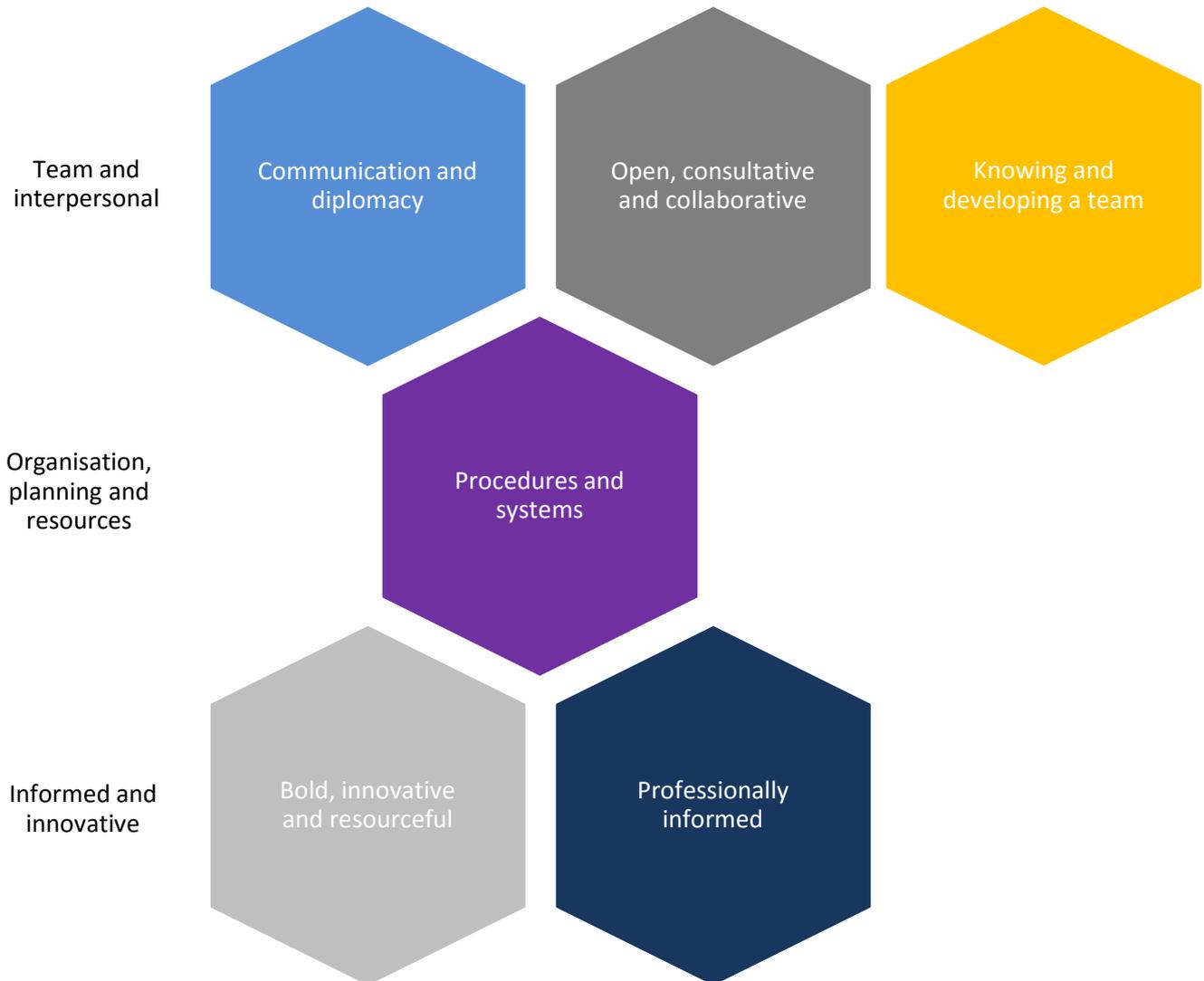
Not everyone has the same perspective on middle leadership

Stage two exposed subtle differences in the notions of 'effective middle leadership' between teachers in different roles.

- Teachers were more likely to focus on the importance of delegation whereas senior leaders focused more being results-driven.
- Middle leaders of relatively high performing departments were particularly likely to exhibit characteristics relating to being professionally informed and being bold, innovative and resourceful.

Building blocks of effective middle leadership

This report highlights 31 characteristics of effective middle leaders. Of those, the following appear to be particularly salient and distinctive to high performing middle leaders. That is not to say other features are not important, indeed, middle leaders may not be effective without those features too. However the following features stand out as being most pronounced amongst effective leaders.



1 Introduction

“If England is to compete with the very best, then strong leadership is absolutely critical.”
Ofsted 2012: 9

Middle leaders are “those who have responsibility for leading subjects, key phases, pastoral care, or other aspects of the school’s work” (National College 2013: 5). The National College for Teaching and Leadership distinguishes between Middle Leadership and Senior Leadership by describing senior leaders as those who have broader, cross-school and whole-school responsibilities, while middle leaders have more specific, localised responsibilities within the school. Types of middle leadership roles include:

- Subject/curriculum leader;
- Head of key stage;
- Head of department;
- Pastoral leaders, for example, head of year or head of house;
- SENCO;
- Gifted and talented co-ordinator;
- Assessment co-ordinator, and
- Careers co-ordinator.

NCTL 2013

From nearly 25,000 inspections carried out between 2011 and 2012, Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw concluded most of Ofsted’s inspection findings were attributable to strengths and weaknesses found in the leadership of educational institutions (Ofsted 2012: 9). Cladingbowl argues that the leadership of teaching has “the biggest single impact on standards” (2013: 5) and that all of the most recent Ofsted subject survey reports emphasise the centrality of effective leadership in achieving success. While quality of teaching most strongly affects student motivation and achievement, it is the quality of leadership that influences the quality of teaching and teachers’ motivations. As such, effective leadership has an indirect yet powerful influence on school effectiveness (Fullan, 2001; Segiovanni, 2001).

Much research has assumed the ‘great man’ theory of leadership, where ‘leadership’ is defined as headship of an entire system or school (Murphy, 2000). Recently, there has been increasing recognition that leadership more broadly defined, or ‘distributed leadership’, is the most powerful engine for change (Harris and Muijs, 2015). Consequently, there is a small but emerging literature on the role of middle leaders and the factors that influence their effectiveness. The next section of the report reviews this literature.

2 Literature review

There are many ways of framing what ‘effective middle leadership’ looks like. This section reviews the existing literature base and defines ‘effective middle leadership’ from four angles. These are:

- 1) The role and priorities of middle leaders
- 2) The broad consensus from Ofsted and academic research
- 3) Personal characteristics of effective middle leaders
- 4) Wider contextual factors behind effective middle leadership – what we call ‘enabling factors and barriers’

While these four angles have been drawn out from literature, it is crucial to recognise that the dispositions, skills and contexts that support effective middle leadership overlap and reinforce each other in complex ways.

2.1 Between two worlds: the role and priorities of middle leaders

2.1.1 The role of middle leaders

While there is only a small existing base of academic literature on the role of middle leaders, think-pieces by leadership training organisations often describe the middle leader’s position as being caught in the ‘cross-fire’ between the expectations of different levels in the school hierarchy (NCSL, 2003; NCSL, 2013). The effectiveness of middle leaders hangs on their ability to navigate and negotiate these tensions (NCSL, 2013). For instance, tensions exist between:

- being active contributors to strategic and policy discussions, versus being merely implementers of policy (NCSL, 2013);
- spending time on administration and management, versus spending time teaching (NCSL, 2003);
- focusing on managing ‘upwards’ to senior management, versus managing ‘downwards’ with team members (NCSL, 2013);
- loyalty to the whole school, versus loyalty to their own department (Bennett et al, 2007), and
- line managing departmental colleagues and holding them to account, whilst retaining a collaborative team ethos (Bennett et al, 2007).

Ambiguity stems from different views across schools on where middle leaders should position themselves in relation to these binaries. Some of these tensions have emerged from conflicts between the traditional role of middle leaders as advocates for their department, and external national policy pressures (such as from Ofsted) to take on a whole-school focus (Bennett et al, 2007).

Despite ambiguity and variation across schools, middle leaders overwhelmingly perceive their role to be ‘buffer and bridge’ (NCSL, 2003). In other words, middle leaders are responsible for the translation of school policies into practice. This involves forging and maintaining connections between their department and the wider school community by filtering external demands and representing their department’s needs and expectations (Harris and Muijs, 2015; NCSL, 2003). Generally, terms such as ‘advocacy’ and ‘brokering’ are used in describing the job of middle leaders (Harris and Muijs, 2015; NCSL, 2003; Wise, 2001; Glover et al, 1999); middle leaders tend to be ‘mediators’ rather than ‘originators’ of school culture and policy (NCSL, 2003; Adey, 2000).

In addition to important management tasks, middle leaders also tend to have significant teaching commitments. They are “close to teaching and learning and may hold the greatest subject expertise” (NCSL 2013, p. 5). Beyond this, the following additional responsibilities of the middle leader are identified as:

- **Curriculum management:** maintaining an up-to-date understanding of developments in their subject, drawing up programs of work, decision-making concerning which resources to use and for which level, evaluating and improving the curriculum.
- **Administration:** creating orderly and secure environments for teaching to take place.
- **Supervising and monitoring:** monitoring colleagues for policy implementation, and consolidating and reporting on students’ assessment records to keep track of pupil performance.

- **Cultures of professionalism:** Role-modelling best practice to maintain professionalism in the field they oversee.

NCSL, 2003

2.1.2 Priorities of middle leaders

One way of defining the middle leader's role is by surveying their own assessments of their priorities, and the way they spend their time. Wise (1997) and Wise and Bush (1999) find that 'teaching' is identified as a top priority; Toop (2014) also suggests that middle leaders place high priority on the teaching and learning process, ranking "leading teaching and learning" as their second most important task. Wise's (1997) study finds the ranking of priorities to be as follows:

- 1) Teaching
- 2) Managing the curriculum
- 3) Implementation of school policy
- 4) Supervising and monitoring colleagues to ensure policy is implemented
- 5) Monitoring pupil records
- 6) Whole-school planning

Across the literature, the least prioritised functions tend to be staff development and liaising with agencies beyond the school (NCSL, 2003; Wise, 1997), and whole-school management (Toop, 2014). However, turning from middle leaders' stated priorities to the ways in which they report spending their time, Toop (2014) found that the top three activities middle leaders spent the most time on were:

- 1) Managing data
- 2) Assessment
- 3) Planning/resource management

In terms of time priority, 'leading teaching and learning' came only fourth. Taken together, the academic literature on middle leadership – though limited – may reflect the growing impact of managerialism and accountability on middle leaders' roles.

2.2 The broad consensus from Ofsted and academic research

Cladingbowl (2013), in a review of remarks on leadership in Ofsted reports, argues there is no single 'best' or formulaic way of achieving effective middle leadership. However, the literature does converge on five common features of effective middle leadership:

- 1) Effective middle leaders have a **clearly thought through, clearly communicated and ambitious vision** (Ofsted, 2013b; Ofsted, 2012; Bennett et al, 2003; Harris, Jamieson and Russ, 1995) and provide a "clear sense of direction and purpose" (Ofsted 2012)
- 2) Vision-setting is underpinned by **accurate and careful evaluations on areas for development** (Ofsted, 2012). One Ofsted report alluded to "constructive use of performance data" and "well-developed assessment strategies as the foundation for good planning and realistic but aspirational target-setting" (Ofsted 2012, p. 34). These evaluations were substantiated by:
 - self-evaluations (Cladingbowl, 2013);
 - a range of measures to closely monitor staff and student performance (Cladingbowl, 2013; Bennett et al, 2003);
 - lesson observations (Ofsted 2013a);
 - views of pupils, parents, staff, carers (Ofsted, 2013a), and
 - a clear understanding of contemporary developments in their field (Cladingbowl, 2013)
- 3) Effective middle leaders are both **knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their field** (Cladingbowl, 2013; Ofsted 2012). Robinson, Hopeha and Lloyd's (2009) meta-analysis found that departmental leaders' expertise

in pedagogic methods related to their subject distinguished high-achieving schools from low-achieving schools that had similar student background characteristics

- 4) Effective middle leaders **encourage exploration and innovation**, both in curriculum planning (Ofsted 2012) and amongst their team members (Cladingbowl 2013)
- 5) Effective middle leaders are **strong leaders**. They have an ability to confidently delegate tasks as a ‘leading professional’ and build a culture of collegiality (Ofsted 2012), where there is frequent dialogue sharing professional information and best practice. This leads to professional development (Cladingbowl, 2013; Harris, Jamieson and Russ, 1995), the respect of staff (Rhodes et al, 2008) and high trust between colleagues (Harris, Jamieson and Russ, 1995)

2.3 Personal characteristics and behaviours

There is little existing research on the specific personal characteristics and behaviours behind effective middle leadership (Bennett et al, 2003). However, two prominent themes emerge from the literature:

- 1) Effective middle leaders have strong relationships with their team members
- 2) Effective middle leaders are both knowledgeable and able to implement their knowledge appropriately

2.3.1 Relations with team members

Rhodes, Brundrett and Nevill (2008) find a shared view between classroom teachers, subject leaders and head teachers that the most important characteristics of effective leaders are good people skills and good communication skills.

Interpersonal and team-building skills are also seen as most important in studies by Bennett et al (2003) and Bennett (2006). Skilful management of human relationships leads to greater relational trust between team members (Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009; Bennett et al, 2003) and consequently, an overall culture of innovation, collaboration and trust (Bennett et al, 2003). The ability to build relational trust is comprised not only of integrity and personal regard for others, but also competency in teaching and leading, as incompetence can lead to corrosion of relational trust (Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009). A further component to relational trust is ‘openness’– that is, leaders tactfully but honestly sharing their views and encouraging teachers to raise concerns (Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009). Rhodes et al. (2008) find that the skilful management of relationships is ranked most highly by all teachers and leaders as a characteristic of effective middle leadership. Related characteristics and behaviours, such as having the respect of teachers and pupils, is rated next most highly after good people and communication skills.

2.3.2 Implementing knowledge

A ‘pedagogical focus’ involves knowledge about effective pedagogy (i.e. how students learn and what quality teaching looks like), and the ability to implement this knowledge. Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) find that generic leader-follower relationships and a ‘pedagogical focus’ in leadership are closely related, but pedagogical focus – while not as frequently perceived by middle leaders to be important – leads to greater effect sizes on student outcomes than generic interpersonal skills. Underlying a ‘pedagogical focus’ is the ability to solve complex problems (i.e. possessing creative thinking and ‘cognitive flexibility’), and a willingness to seek external help where necessary (Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd, 2009).

2.4 Enabling factors and barriers

The research base also considers how middle leaders’ effectiveness is shaped by factors beyond their own characteristics and behaviours. Relatively few studies have sought to account for contextual factors, and even fewer have sought to rank contextual factors in terms of importance. Nonetheless, the literature identifies five broad contextual factors:

- 1) Head teachers and senior management team
- 2) Institutional culture
- 3) Team members
- 4) Professional development

5) Time pressures

2.4.1 Head teachers and senior management

NCSL's (2004) overview of Ofsted inspection findings notes that the general "quality of leadership at a senior level has a strong influence on the quality of leadership at middle leader level" (p. 17). Failures of school-level leadership tend to percolate down to middle-level leaders. Hence, the NCSL (2004) recommends strengthening of relationships between head teachers, senior management and middle leaders, to allow the effective functioning of accountability and support for middle leaders. Thus, there are certain characteristics of senior management teams that are particularly important to cultivating effective middle leadership, namely: a collaborative culture and leadership style, and the extent to which expectations are clear (Bennett et al, 2003).

2.4.2 Institutional culture

Many studies argue that a 'collaborative' and 'collegial' culture is instrumental to effective leadership (Muijs and Harris, 2007); conversely, the inhibiting effect of strongly hierarchical structures (Bennett et al, 2003) and the dominance of 'top-down' leadership models in schools (rather than 'dispersed leadership') has been well-documented (Harris and Muijs, 2015).

The precise definition of a 'collaborative' or 'collegial' culture varies across studies, however. On the one hand, some research points to the primacy of professional autonomy and value given to ideas of middle leaders, even to the extent that 'collegiality' is a term that actually implies freedom of speech and action, autonomy and individuality (Bennett et al, 2003). On the other, different studies emphasise the idea of collective responsibility and accountability. Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) argue that a context of collective responsibility is critical in achieving school effectiveness for several reasons:

- 1) Figuring out what works pedagogically is difficult and requires input of a team
- 2) Students' learning is contingent on what is learned not just in one class but across classes
- 3) A sense of group responsibility is an unobtrusive, helpful way to build accountability

On the whole, the literature argues that the optimal conditions for effective leadership is a context whereby there is a balance between building collective responsibility and maintaining a degree of openness and idea-sharing, underpinned by trust (Muijs and Harris, 2007).

2.4.3 Team members

Research persuasively suggests that departmental effectiveness depends crucially on the cohesiveness of the team (Bush, 2002; Harris, 1998). This is because middle leaders find their affirmation as leaders more often from team-members, rather than from their formal title or position (Bennett et al, 2003; Bennett et al, 2007) or from heads and senior management (Bennett et al, 2007).

2.4.4 Professional development

The literature identifies that professional development can occur through both external means to the school (e.g. being part of a professional leadership network, attending workshops), and internal means (whether formal, such as mentoring, or informal, such as seeking advice from senior management). Mentoring and coaching can play a significant role in helping middle leaders gain confidence and knowledge in their leadership role (Muijs and Harris, 2007).

2.4.5 Time pressures

The diversity and number of tasks and activities middle leaders are expected to handle places great time pressures on them (NCSL, 2013; Bush, 2002; Wise and Bush, 1999), and they often cite lack of time as one of the greatest problems in their role (NCSL, 2013; Bush, 2002). Bennett et al (2003) argue these time pressures are strongly related to policy pressures to perform, such as the National Curriculum and Ofsted inspection framework, which have both tightened the degree of departmental accountability, forming a hindrance to professional autonomy and thus effective leadership.

2.5 Summary

- **The role of an effective middle leader is not clear-cut and identical across schools.** However, most middle leaders see their role as **'buffer and bridge'** – as a mediator between senior management and their team members.
- While middle leaders see **teaching and learning as of high importance**, research suggests that **most of their time is taken up by administration and management.**
- Broadly, effective middle leaders tend to:
 - Have a clear, ambitious vision
 - Draw on careful evaluations of departmental needs and potential
 - Be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their field
 - Encourage exploration and innovation
 - Be strong leaders who can build a collegial culture
- The two most important **personal characteristics** of effective middle leaders are an ability to build strong relationships with team members, and being knowledgeable and able to implement that knowledge appropriately in relevant contexts to achieve effective teaching and learning.
- **Contextual factors** that can help or hinder effective middle leadership include:
 - Characteristics of senior management teams
 - The nature of institutional culture
 - The supportiveness of their team members
 - Internal and external professional development
 - Time pressures.
- Contextual factors and personal characteristics, skills and dispositions interact in complex ways in producing an effective middle leader, and **there is no one strict formula for effective middle leadership.**

3 Data and methods

The research was conducted in two stages. Stage 1 was based on analysis of the Leadership Competency Framework (LCF) scores and survey responses of a sample of Teaching Leaders fellows and alumni, alongside departmental performance data. Stage 2 consisted of in-depth case studies based on interviews with a small sample of middle leaders and their colleagues.

3.1 Stage 1 data and methods

The first stage of the research had two aims.

1. To generate some hypotheses about the characteristics, behaviours, enabling factors and barriers to effective middle leadership that could be investigated further during Stage 2 of the research.
2. To identify a sample of the most effective middle leaders on the Teaching Leaders programme who could be studied in more detail during the second stage of the research. Analysis consisted of three components which are considered here in turn.

3.1.1 Leadership Competency Framework scores

Firstly we analysed 209 middle leaders' Term 1 Leadership Competency Framework (LCF) scores, drawing on self-assessments and line manager assessments of competencies for middle leaders who are currently in a Head of Department role in a core subject and for whom we were able to calculate a 2013 relative department performance score (see section 2.1.3). Figure 1 and Figure 2 outline the composition of our sample by cohort and subject. We excluded the 2008 and 2009 cohorts from our analysis due to insufficient sample size.

Figure 1 – Distribution of fellows by cohort

Cohort year	N=	%
2010	12	5.7
2011	16	7.7
2012	41	19.6
2013	62	29.7
2014	78	37.3
	209	

Figure 2 – Distribution of fellows by subject taught

Subject taught	N=	%
English	80	38.3
Science	70	33.5
Maths	59	28.2
	209	

Due to changes to the LCF between 2008 and 2014 we conducted separate analyses for the 2010-2013 cohorts and the 2014 cohort. Our analysis of the 2010-2013 cohort did not include line manager assessments for the 2010 cohort as this data was unavailable.

3.1.2 Survey responses

Secondly, we designed a survey to capture the views of Teaching Leaders fellows and alumni on:

- the aspects of their role they feel are most important;
- the activities they spend most time on;
- the personal characteristics and behaviours they feel are most important to their effectiveness, and
- the broader school- or system-level factors that help and hinder them in being effective.

We received responses from 123 fellows and alumni, including subject leaders and pastoral leaders, and were able to match departmental performance scores to 49 of these respondents. We derived our ‘categories of activity’ from existing research conducted by Teaching Leaders². The survey was administered online and the full text of the survey is provided in Appendix 1.

3.1.3 Department-level performance data

Finally, we used departmental performance data as a measure of middle leaders’ effectiveness by calculating a ‘relative performance’ score for a given middle leader’s department. This relative performance measure compares the 2013 average points score for a given core department with the average of the points scores of the other two core departments in the same school in that year. By comparing the scores of core departments within the same school, our measure of departmental performance controls for pupil-level variation in order to attribute as much variation as possible to differences in middle leadership.

Relative performance served two purposes in our Stage 1 analysis.

1. We measured the association between departmental performance and different behaviours, characteristics, supporting factors and barriers. This allowed us to identify the factors that appear to be most strongly associated with effective middle leadership. We used individual identifiers to link LCF scores and survey responses to department performance data.
2. We identified core departments led by a TL fellow with the highest relative performance, in order to compile a shortlist of ‘high performing’ middle leaders to approach for the case studies which constitute Stage 2 of the research.

We screened selected middle leaders to ensure that those we approached had been in place on or before the 2012/13 academic year in order to support some degree of inference between their leadership and the department’s relative performance. However, we acknowledge that this method of identifying high performing middle leaders has a range of limitations:

- the performance of a department may be affected by the preceding middle leader, particularly where a change of middle leader has taken place relatively recently;
- a department’s performance is affected by the quality of its teaching team as well as the middle leader in charge, and
- a high or low relative performance may be more attributable to the performance of the other two core departments in a school than the performance of the core department in question.

For these reasons, we used a department’s relative performance in 2013 as a starting point for our analysis and are suitably cautious when we draw any distinctions between our high performing and random sample.

3.2 Stage 2 data and methods

The second stage of the research set out to conduct a more detailed analysis of the personal characteristics, behaviours, enabling factors and barriers to effective middle leadership identified in the first stage of the research. Ranking Teaching Leaders fellows and alumni by their 2013 relative departmental performance, we identified two sets of middle leaders: one containing the highest performing middle leaders and one containing a random sample of the remaining fellows and alumni in our data. We conducted case studies with four teachers from the high performing set and four from the random sample. Case studies consisted of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews and in order to triangulate to the fullest extent they included:

- the middle leader;
- a senior leader with responsibility for the middle leader, and
- a teacher within the middle leader’s department.

² Toop, J (2014) *The Changing Face of Middle Leadership*. Available at: <http://www.cfbt.com/~media/CfBTCorporate/Files/Resources/inspiring-leadership-2014/workshop-James-Toop-Middle-leadership-is-changing.pdf> [Accessed 1st September 2015]

Where possible, we also conducted an observation of a departmental meeting led by a middle leader. Interview schedules were designed to explore teachers' views of the key features of effective middle leadership as well as the behaviours and characteristics of the particular Teaching Leader fellow.

Interview schedules and meeting observations were structured around a core set of themes based on the three broad types of behaviours and characteristics identified in the first stage of the research. However, they were also designed to highlight any additional behaviours or characteristics, enabling factors and barriers not identified in our stage 1 analysis. Interviews lasted an average of 22 minutes and were recorded, transcribed and analysed in NVivo. Interview schedules and a meeting observation rubric are provided in Appendixes 2 to 4.

4 Findings

4.1 Stage 1 findings

Our analysis of LCF data and the responses to our survey identified a wide range of factors that appear to facilitate effective middle leadership including particular competencies, priorities, activities, individual characteristics and behaviours, as well as wider supporting and hindering factors both inside and outside of school. Drawing together insights from all our first stage findings three particular elements stand out:

1. The relationship between middle leaders and their team

Line managers' assessments of middle leaders' team competencies correlate significantly with a department's relative performance. Meanwhile team competencies and team-level factors were also identified by middle leaders as one of the most important factors underpinning their effectiveness.

2. Planning and resource management

The level of importance middle leaders attach to planning and resource management correlates significantly with relative departmental performance, and effective middle leaders tended to report that they spend a large proportion of their time on this element of their role. Meanwhile, resource pressures were one of the most commonly cited barriers to effective middle leadership in our survey.

3. Performance management

Although the level of priority middle leaders attach to performance management appears to be significantly correlated with their department's relative performance, in general middle leaders attach only a middling level of priority, and relatively little time, to this aspect of their role.

4.1.1 Leadership Competency Framework (LCF) analysis

Line managers' assessments of fellows' organisation, personal characteristics, behaviours and team competencies were significantly correlated with their department's relative performance and the two strongest predictors of a department's relative performance were the 'behaviours' and 'team' competencies. Other factors from the LCF were not significantly correlated with relative departmental performance.

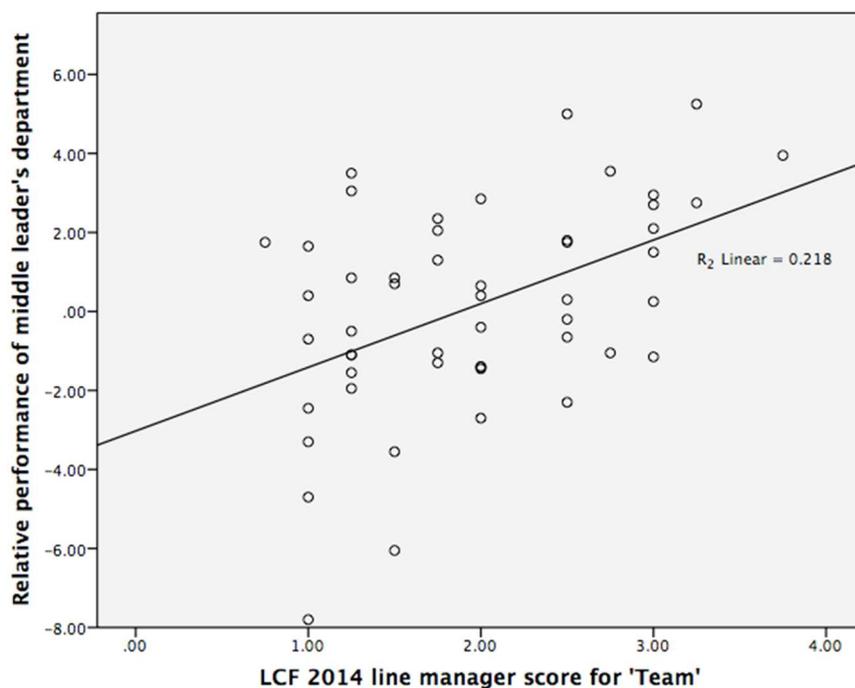
We analysed the correlations between line manager and self-assessed LCF scores and department-level performance for the 2010-13 and 2014 cohorts. The only significant correlations were attached to line manager-assessed factors from the 2014 cohort, as outlined in Figure 3. Of the 2014 LCF competencies we found to have the strongest correlation with departmental performance, all were significant at the .05 level. We cannot reliably infer a causal link between 2014 LCF scores and relative departmental performance, in part because our measure of performance is taken from the preceding year. As a result, the analysis here is best interpreted as an indication of the LCF competencies that appear to be linked most strongly with a department's performance.

Figure 3 - Summary of LCF elements significantly correlated with department performance

Cohort	Factor	Correlation with department performance (r)	Significance
2014	Line manager: 'organisation'	.346	.013
2014	Line manager: 'personal characteristics'	.300	.032
2014	Line manager: 'behaviours'	.365	.009
2014	Line manager: 'team'	.467	.001

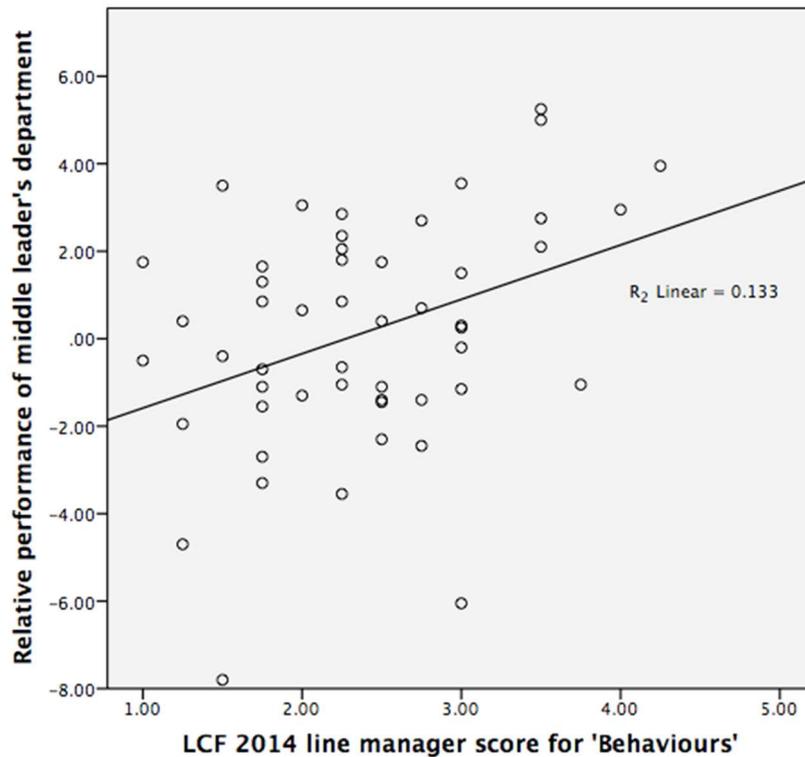
The 'team' competency has the strongest correlation with department performance, and this association is illustrated in Figure 4. The correlation is moderate-to-strong, and just over a fifth of the variation in departmental performance can be accounted for by line managers' assessments of this competency.

Figure 4 - Scatterplot of departmental performance by line manager's assessment of 2014 LCF 'Team' competency



The 'behaviours' competency has the second strongest correlation with departmental performance. The correlation is moderate in strength, and as Figure 5 shows, line managers' assessments of this competency account for just over 13% of the variation in middle leaders' departmental performance.

Figure 5 – Scatterplot of departmental performance by line manager’s assessment of 2014 LCF ‘Behaviours’ competency



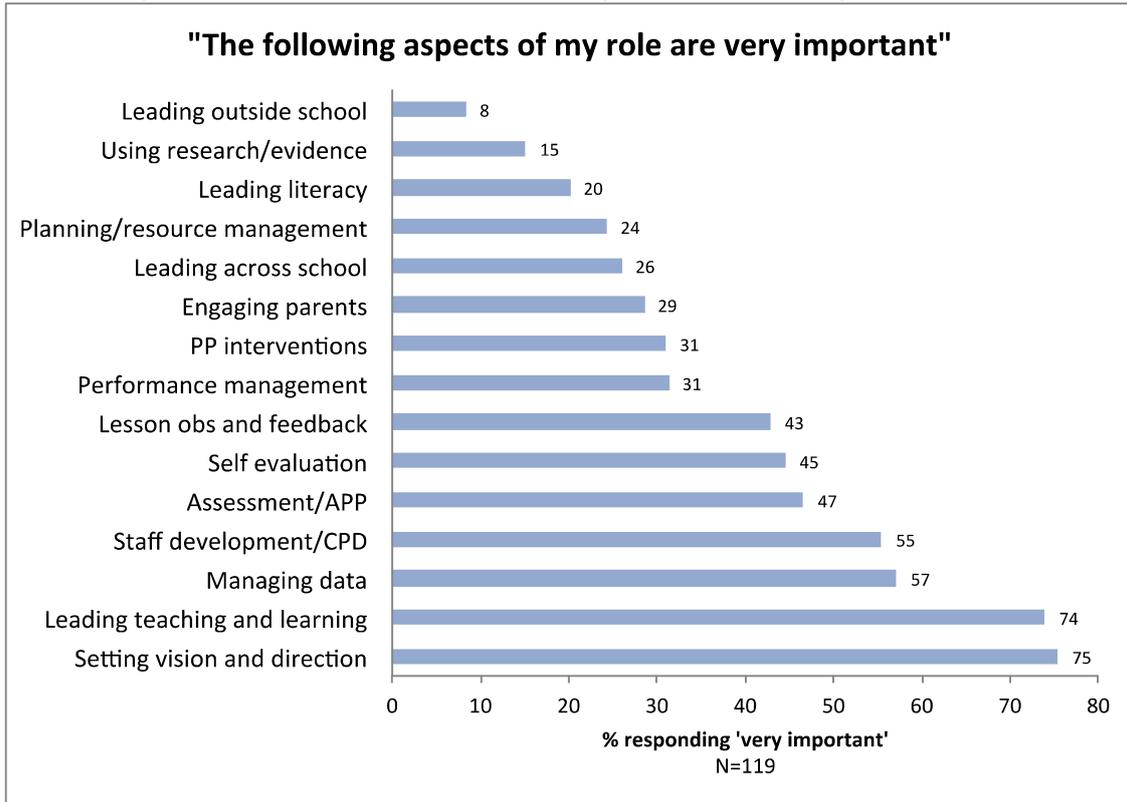
4.1.2 Survey analysis

4.1.2.1 Middle leaders’ assessments of the importance of different aspects of their role

The survey of middle leaders revealed that respondents considered setting vision and direction and leading teaching and learning to be the most important aspects of their role. Meanwhile, the level of importance middle leaders placed on managing data, planning/resource management, performance management, and leading literacy were all significant predictors of how well their department performed compared to the other core departments in their school.

The survey revealed a clear gradient in middle leaders’ assessments of the importance of different elements of their role. As Figure 6 shows, while three quarters of respondents felt leading teaching and learning and setting vision and direction were very important, fewer than one in five placed this level of importance on leading outside school and using research/evidence.

Figure 6 - Middle leaders' assessments of the importance of different aspects of their role



We used analysis of variance (ANOVA) to assess the association between the performance of middle leaders' departments and the importance they placed on different elements of their role. The variation in four of these elements was significantly associated with departmental performance, as shown in Figure 7. Of course, we cannot reliably infer a causal link between these self-reported priorities and departmental performance and, in any case, this causation could flow both ways: for instance it may be that prioritising data management lays the foundation for stronger departmental performance, or on the other hand, that stronger departmental performance allows middle leaders to focus less on front-line activities such as lesson observations, and re-allocate their time to activities such as managing data.

Figure 7 – Middle leaders' self-reported priorities with a significant association with departmental performance

Factor: importance of...	Proportion of relative dept. performance explained (eta ²)	Significance
Managing data	22%	.011
Planning/resource management	20%	.016
Performance management	21%	.014
Leading literacy	21%	.033

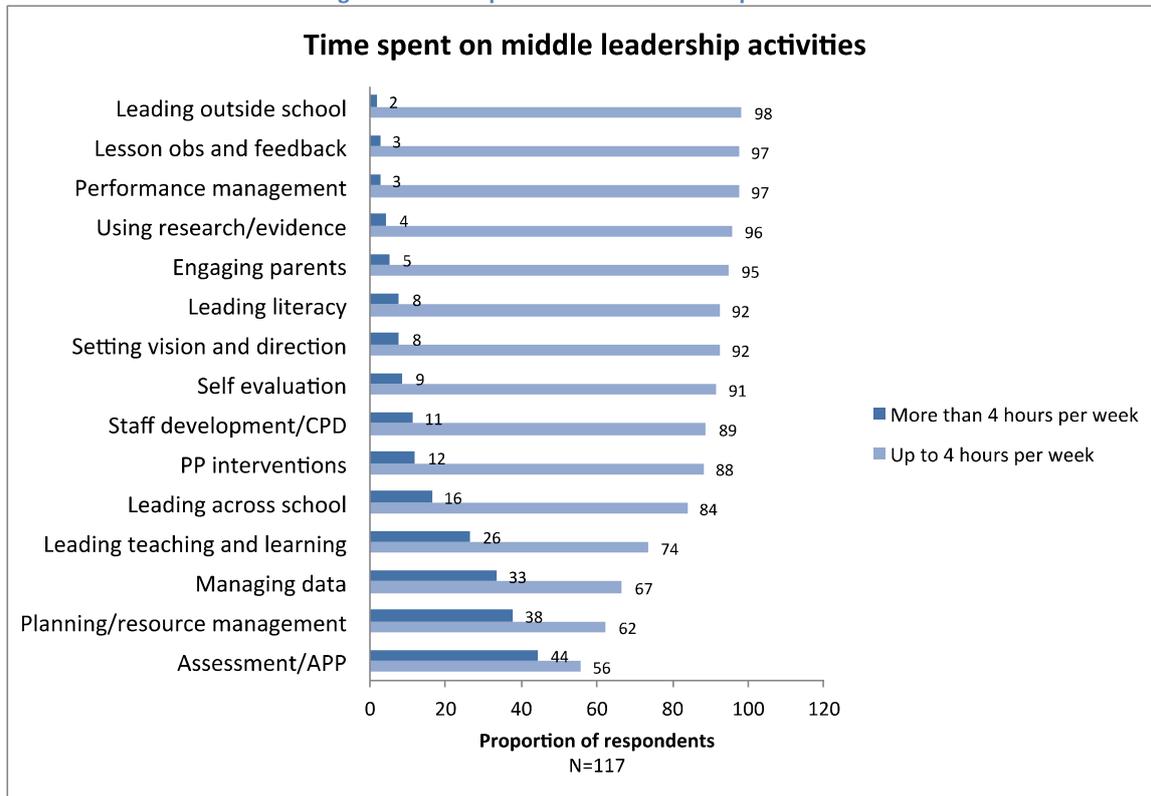
4.1.2.2 Middle leaders' time use

Not all middle leaders divide up their time in the same way but the activities that survey respondents generally spend most time on are assessment/APP and planning/resource management. In comparison, middle leaders generally reported spending the least time on leading outside school, lesson observations and feedback and performance management. Time spent on self-evaluation was one area of activity that appeared to be strongly correlated with a department's relative performance.

In the same way that middle leaders value different activities to different extents, there is also a clear gradient in how much time they allocate to different activities in an average week. As Figure 8 shows, while around four in ten respondents told us they spent more than four hours a week on assessment/APP and planning/resource management, less than 3% reported spending this much time on leading outside school and lesson observations and feedback.

One observation appears to stand out here: although the level of priority middle leaders attached to performance management appears to be significantly correlated with their department's relative performance, in general this is an area that is of only middling importance to Heads of Department and they spend relatively little time on it.

Figure 8 – Time spent on middle leadership activities



We assessed the association between relative departmental performance and differences in the amount of time they dedicated to different parts of their role. The only factor to be significantly associated with departmental performance was the amount of time spent on self-evaluation. This association was strongly significant, and accounted for around 30% of the variation in departmental performance.

Figure 9 - Fellows' self-reported behaviours with a significant association with departmental performance

Factor: time spent on...	Proportion of relative dept. performance explained (eta ²)	Significance
Self-evaluation	30%	.003

4.1.2.3 Enabling behaviours, characteristics, factors and barriers

When asked an open question about the personal characteristics and behaviours that helped make them effective Fellows were most likely to identify communication skills and relationships with their team. When it came to factors inside and outside school that helped them be effective middle leader a supportive team and broader professional network, alongside effective lines of communication were considered most important. Conversely, time and resource pressures were considered the most important barriers to success.

Free-text elements of the survey enabled us to identify the themes most commonly raised by middle leaders in relation to:

- the personal characteristics or behaviours that help to make them an effective middle leader;
- the factors inside or outside school that help them to be an effective middle leader, and
- the factors inside or outside school that hinder them from being an effective middle leader

These themes are summarised in Figure 10,

Figure 11 and Figure 12.

Figure 10 - Enabling characteristics and behaviours identified in survey responses

Theme	Number of responses ³	Examples
Communication	16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Clear/effective lines of communication with other staff
Team	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting your team • Engaging your team • Knowing your team; being approachable • Having a good relationship with your team
Leading by example	12	
Vision	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instilling vision • Setting vision • Having clear strategic direction

³ 123 total respondents. Some middle leaders identified more than one factor in their responses.

Figure 11 - Enabling factors inside and outside school identified in survey responses

Theme	Number of responses	Examples
Team	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a strong/hard working team • Support from department team and senior leadership • A team that shares the middle leader's vision and values
Communication	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good communication with other departments, middle leaders and senior leadership team • Clear communication of goals and expectations
Support	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive line manager/SLT • Peer support • Effective admin support • Supportive family and friends • External support and training
Time	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to reflect and plan • Time with departmental team • CPD time • A reduced teaching timetable • Time management skills
Vision	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear school vision from Head/SLT (vision from above) • Working with staff who share my vision (vision from below)

Figure 12 - Hindering factors inside and outside of school identified in survey responses

Theme	Number of responses	Examples
Time	73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of time in general • Lack of time with team • Teaching/marking/timetabled workload leaves little time for middle leadership tasks • Time spent on admin/evidencing practice
Resources	49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of experience/initiative/motivation from colleagues (human resources) • Lack of funding (financial resources)
Management	18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micromanagement/lack of autonomy/opportunities to be creative • Inconsistent behaviour management • Poor line management • Time management skills
Change	17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government-led changes to curriculum and assessment • Changes to school policy and procedures • Colleagues' unwillingness to change

4.2 Stage 2 findings

Thirty-one specific factors were identified which appeared to shape middle leaders' effectiveness. These factors broadly align with those identified in Stage 1. Three of the factors that appeared to be particularly important related to the 'team and interpersonal' set of behaviours and characteristics, namely:

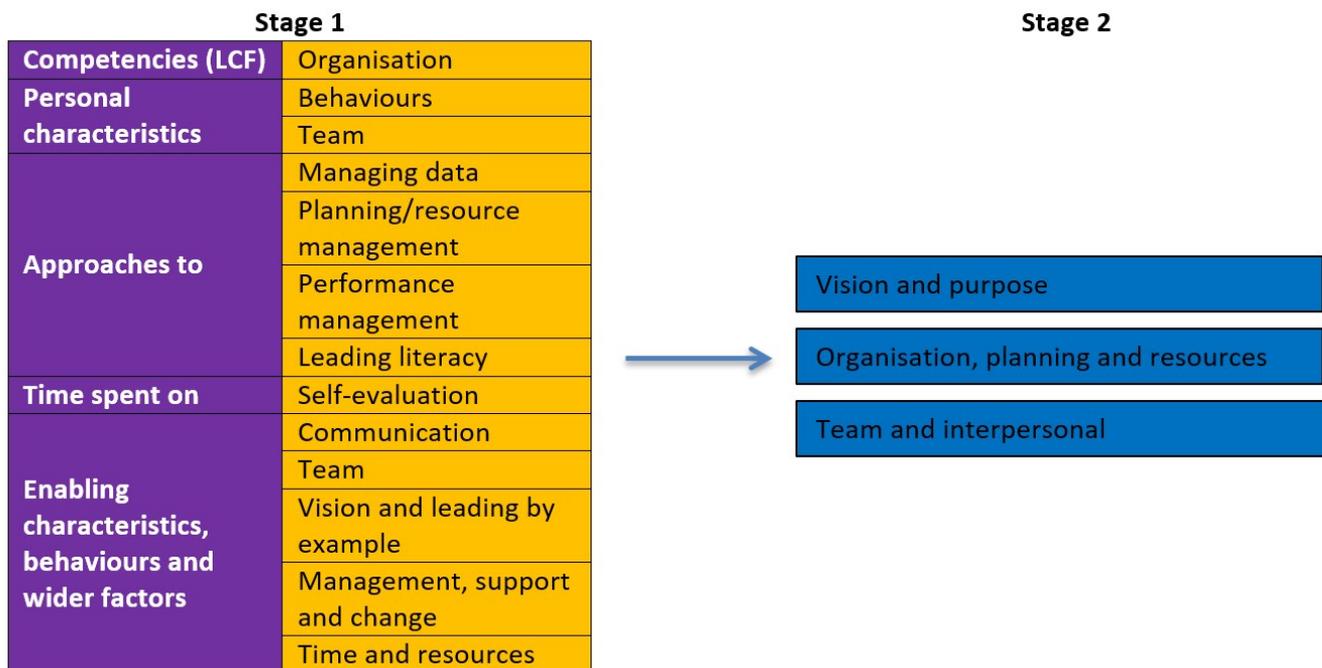
- being open, consultative and collaborative;
- communication and diplomacy, and
- knowing, developing and building a team.

A fourth crucial factor- procedures and systems, falls within the 'organisation, planning and resources' set of behaviours and characteristics. These findings therefore broadly corroborate findings from stage 1 by highlighting the role of team-level factors as and those related to organisation and management. However, an additional area was also identified that can be described as 'professional practice'.

Case studies allowed detail to be added to these broad categories and also shed light on a range of additional factors that were not identified in Stage 1. They also highlighted subtle differences in the notions of 'effective middle leadership' between different types of teacher.

In order to provide a broad guide for our case studies, we grouped together the variety of factors identified in section 3.1 and distilled these into three broad themes which formed the basis of our interviews and observations. Figure 13 summarises this process.

Figure 13 – Distillation of Stage 1 themes into Stage 2 themes



4.2.1 Overview of the factors identified by the case studies

Analysis of the 24 case study interviews and two departmental meeting observations identified 31 specific factors shaping middle leaders’ effectiveness. Whilst these factors largely mapped onto the three-part framework of behaviours and characteristics, an additional set of behaviours and characteristics - broadly clustered around the notion of ‘professional practice’ also arose from the case studies. Figure 14 summarises the final set of 31 factors.

Figure 14 - Behaviours, characteristics, supporting and hindering factors identified by the case studies

Behaviours and characteristics	Vision and purpose	Results driven
		Personal ambition
		High standards
		Moral purpose
		Consistency
	Team and interpersonal	Know, develop and build
		Communication and diplomacy
		Managing up
		Open, consultative and collaborative
		Motivating demeanour
		Assertive
		Delegating
	Organisation, planning and resources	Bold/innovative/resourceful
		Forward-looking/strategic
		Oversight and monitoring/holding to account
		Procedures and systems
Professional practice	Teaching expertise	
	Leading by example	
	Professionally informed	
	Personal development/growth mindset	
Supporting factors	Supportive SLT	
	Strong departmental team	
	Professional networks	
	Community/parents	
Hindering factors	Curriculum and accountability measures	
	Time constraints/workload	
	School policies	
	Pressure of being a core department	
	Funding	
	Teacher supply	
	Administrative burden	

The factors we have distilled here, from both stages of the research, clearly map onto those identified in the existing literature (see section 2.2). Some of the factors identified in the literature, such as establishing vision and leading people, map onto the broad ‘sets’ of behaviours and characteristics we have identified in the middle column of Figure 14. Meanwhile we found that other factors identified in the literature, such as teaching expertise and monitoring and evaluation, arose in our case studies as specific sub-factors, identified in the right hand column of Figure 14.

4.2.2 Principal factors identified in the case studies

4.2.2.1 Team and interpersonal

Three of the four most frequently cited factors fell within the ‘team and interpersonal’ set of behaviours and characteristics, reflecting the existing literature on effective middle leadership (see section 2.3). The three specific factors we identified here were:

1. *being open, consultative and collaborative;*
2. *communication and diplomacy, and*
3. *knowing, developing and building a team*

In this section we explore these in more detail.

i) Being open, consultative and collaborative

All twenty four interviews made reference to this factor when considering what made specific middle leaders effective, and eleven made reference to it when considering effective middle leadership in general. Interviewees identified three main dimensions to this factor. Firstly, teachers argued that effective middle leaders make themselves available to other staff – particularly those in their team.

“A door is always open and even if they are facing that way answering 100 emails in a morning then they’re very open to spinning the chair around to anybody who comes in.”

Secondly, interviewees said that effective middle leaders consult their team when making decisions. This behaviour was often mentioned when we asked teachers how issues were dealt with in their department, and how vision was set. As one teacher explained:

“You always feel consulted, you always feel like you’re always communicating ideas and they take those on-board for you to discuss if you feel like something’s wrong. You definitely find them approachable enough to actually voice those concerns and then we discuss it and then if it’s something for the benefit of the department or like I said, the vision or the goals, then we implement those changes.”

A number of our interviewees also explained how effective middle leaders consult with pupils and staff in order to identify issues within their department. One middle leader described how this consultation can consist of everyday informal conversations, as well as more structured tools:

“I want to know how people feel in my department, both the teachers and the students. Both formally and informally I’ll survey students and teachers so I can get feedback on how things are going; if we make a change or just an annual survey.”

Finally, the teachers highlighted effective middle leaders’ collaborative style of working. This was most often cited in relation to the way in which effective middle leaders work with those in other departments to share systems, resources and insights about the pupils they teach. As one middle leader explained:

“I’m now at the stage where I’m sharing that out with other heads of department that I think would benefit... I get a knock on the door about five or six times a week – “Please can you help?” – which is really nice, it’s really nice because we’re all working with the same children.”

ii) Communication and diplomacy

Twenty interviews made reference to this factor when considering specific middle leaders, and twelve made reference to it when considering effective middle leadership in general. The first dimension to this factor is a middle leader’s ability to communicate effectively. One teacher explained that communication was vital in ensuring a team understands the rationale behind day-to-day decisions:

“You can justify why you do certain changes or implement certain things because that’s when you have your team behind you, when they know you’re doing something for a certain reason.”

Meanwhile, a middle leader at a different school explained how, in their view, establishing vision and purpose is impossible without effective communication:

“I think being able to say to people, remind them why we’re doing it which is for the pupils. So I think you have to... convey that sense of purpose and I’d like to think that in our department, that’s what we, as a team, we are quite focused on delivering excellent results for our students.”

The second aspect of this factor – diplomacy – captures a specific way in which our interviewees felt effective middle leaders communicate. As one senior leader explained it is “the ability to have difficult conversations with people without alienating them.” In a number of interviews teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders alike emphasised that crucial activities such as giving feedback, managing up and reviewing performance relied on a middle leader’s ability to be diplomatic.

iii) Knowing, developing and building a team

Twenty interviewees made reference to this factor when considering specific middle leaders, and twelve made reference to it when considering effective middle leadership in general. The first aspect of this factor centres around how well middle leaders know their team – primarily in terms of their skills and strengths, but also in terms of any difficulties they may be experiencing inside and outside of school. As one middle leader explained, knowing their team is central to deploying staff efficiently and ensuring the department makes the best use of its human resources:

“I think it’s about knowing your team members, knowing their strengths and weaknesses and being able to develop them and know who’s suitable for what task so you can get the best out of each one.”

Meanwhile another middle leader felt a key component of their effectiveness was their ability to provide support, inspiration and challenge to their team members at just the right times, and that this relies on “being perceptive” and “understanding how they are feeling”:

“If someone is particularly stressed, knowing to go and support, if someone is feeling de-motivated, knowing that you need to kind of inspire them in some way. Or if someone is feeling a bit complacent, giving them responsibilities so they feel stretched and challenged. So I think understanding people and how they work is one of my strengths.”

The second aspect of this factor was voiced by a number of senior leaders who felt that effective middle leaders develop their team as part of their succession planning. In this respect effective middle leaders are responsible for supporting ambitious teachers into middle and senior leadership, for instance by delegating responsibility and making sure teachers within the department do not become fixed in their roles.

The final aspect of this factor captures the broader sense in which an effective middle leader builds a ‘sense of team’ within their department. As one senior leader commented:

“They sit in that office, they eat together, they work together, they plan together, it’s a very strong unit and that’s about [the middle leader].”

A teacher at a different school explained how their middle leader has built a cohesive team by recruiting carefully, seeking new members of staff who “buy into the team ethos and want to be part of the team.” One middle leader emphasised that this team-building function, if carried out poorly, can lead to a department becoming insular and

weakening its relationship with the wider school. From the interviews it appears the most effective middle leaders can build a team in a way that fosters close collegiate relationships within their department, without hampering their ability to collaborate with other departments and ‘manage up’.

4.2.2.2 Organisation, planning and resources

The fourth most frequently cited factor – procedures and systems – falls within the ‘organisation, planning and resources’ set of behaviours and characteristics.

Procedures and systems

Twenty one interviews made reference to this factor when considering specific middle leaders, and fourteen made reference to it when considering effective middle leadership in general. Broadly, this factor captures the importance of having good organisational skills and time management – a recurring theme in the majority of interviews. However, three more specific elements of this aspect of effective middle leadership emerged during the interviews. Firstly, a number of interviewees felt that effective middle leaders had to have good systems for managing data. One middle leader explained that they had introduced automated systems for analysing data within the department – cutting the workload for their staff and ensuring data was gathered in a uniform format for analysis. A senior leader at a different school explained how managing data in this way was the key to allowing middle leaders to “know what they’ve got to do for very specific children.”

Secondly, a number of middle leaders and senior leaders emphasised the importance of having procedures in place for overseeing the department’s day-to-day activity and holding staff to account. As one senior leader explained:

“It’s okay to have the vision... but you’ve got to get people doing things that are important at the right time... planning lessons, delivering lessons within a structure... making sure that people are following behavioural systems, that if there’s a particular methodology to how things should be taught, they’re following that, checking up on that. But also getting people marking the books, you know, getting people doing the things around routines that are vitally important to the running of the school.”

Finally, the interviews drew attention to the way in which systems and procedures established by the middle leader help to free up time for their department teachers so they can focus their efforts on supporting students. This was clear when one teacher explained how their middle leader had coordinated a coursework day:

“It was all just organised. We didn’t really have to think about it. It was just done. So we were all able to go in there, it’s all organised by [the middle leader] so we were just able to go in there and deliver the coursework day for the students so that they could just get on with their exams.”

4.2.3 Specific and abstract notions of effective middle leadership

On balance there do not appear to be any systematic differences between interviewees’ abstract and specific notions of an effective middle leader: that is, the factors that were considered to make the middle leaders in our sample effective appear to broadly align with the factors that are considered to make for effective middle leadership in general.

The interviews were designed to identify whether teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders identified different aspects of effective middle leadership depending on whether they were considering ‘what an effective middle leader looks like’ in the abstract, or the question of ‘how a specific middle leader in my school is effective’. The four factors discussed in section 3.2.2 appeared most frequently in both interviewees’ ‘abstract’ and ‘specific’ notions of an effective middle leader.

Nonetheless, some factors were relatively more likely to be identified when we asked about the abstract notion of an effective middle leader, such as being results-driven and having a motivating demeanour. Meanwhile, some factors were more likely to be identified when interviewees were asked about specific middle leaders within schools,

such as being forward-looking/strategic and being professionally informed. However, on balance there do not appear to be any systematic differences between interviewees' abstract and specific notions of an effective middle leader.

4.2.4 Variation by role

Interview data suggests that teachers tend to be more likely to see effective middle leaders as those who can delegate, while senior leaders tend to be more likely to see effective middle leaders as results-driven. The data also suggest that middle leaders are more likely than teachers and senior leaders to identify factors that hinder and support their effectiveness

Two main differences emerged between the factors identified by teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders during the interviews. Firstly, senior leaders appeared to be more likely than middle leaders and teachers to define effective middle leaders as results-driven. Meanwhile, teachers appeared to be more likely than middle and senior leaders to identify the delegating role of middle leaders as significant to their effectiveness. These patterns are a plausible reflection of senior leaders' ultimate responsibility for their school's results, and teachers' desire for professional autonomy.

Secondly, middle leaders appeared to be more likely to identify factors that hinder and support their effectiveness. Five of these factors were identified in half or more of the interviews with middle leaders, with time constraints/workload mentioned in all eight of our interviews with middle leaders. Meanwhile, the majority of these factors were identified by only one or two of the interviews with senior leaders, and one or none of the interviews with teachers. At face value this is not a surprising finding: middle leaders are more likely to identify the factors that hinder and support them in their role as they encounter these factors on a daily basis. However, it does suggest that teachers, and perhaps more importantly senior leaders, are not as alive to these barriers and supports as they could be.

4.2.5 Variation by departmental performance

Our case studies suggest that the highest performing middle leaders appear to be more likely to engage with developments in research and policy, and to be bold and innovative – often using research evidence to trial new teaching methods.

As outlined in section 3.2, we divided our case studies evenly between schools with a middle leader whose departmental performance was relatively high compared to the other core departments in their school, and those drawn from a random sample of the remaining middle leaders in our dataset. Despite the caveats to our approach to identifying these 'high performing' and 'random sample' middle leaders which we outline in section 3.1.3, we did observe some differences in the propensity with which themes emerged between the two types of case study. The greatest differences related to being professionally informed (mentioned in 9 interviews from the high performing sample and 1 interview from the random sample) and being bold, innovative and resourceful (mentioned in 8 interviews from the high performing sample, and 2 interview from the random sample).

In our analysis, being 'professionally informed' captures the way in which middle leaders keep up to date with research and policy, from changes to accountability measures to pedagogical developments and academic research in their field. As one middle leader from our high performing sample described:

"I'm very interested in the wider picture... keeping abreast of research and policy changes and just the general kind of what's going on in education nationally at the moment and I do that through, mainly online actually through Twitter and blogs and things like that. That's a really big thing for me, keeping abreast of current issues."

Meanwhile, being 'bold, innovative and resourceful' covers a range of activities, from trialling new teaching methods to seeking grant funding to support extra curricular opportunities. A senior leader we interviewed highlighted how being professionally informed and being bold, innovative and resourceful are closely related. When their middle

leader wanted to introduce mixed ability setting, they presented “firm evidence... a huge amount of research” to make the case for the change, which has since led to improvements in pupils’ attainment. Both the middle leader and their line manager explained how, without the weight of research evidence, it would have been harder to see the justification for taking this risk. In short, being professionally informed can provide a foundation for being bold and innovative.

While these dimensions of middle leadership do appear to provide the biggest distinction between the ‘high performing’ middle leaders in our data and those we sampled randomly, we cannot infer that they are necessary features of being an effective middle leader – merely that being professionally informed and bold, innovative and resourceful appeared to be more commonplace among the higher performing middle leaders in our data.

4.2.6 Drawing together the findings from Stage 1 and Stage 2

Taken together, the findings from the second stage of the research appear to broadly corroborate those from the first stage in two main ways. Firstly, the team-level factors whose significance was established in Stage 1 were also found to be significant in the teacher, middle leader and senior leader interviews. Secondly, factors related to organisation and management – also identified as significant in Stage 1 – were also found to be significant in the second stage of the research.

The case studies help to unpack and add detail to the broad groupings of behaviours and characteristics. In relation to ‘team and interpersonal factors’ the most important elements appear to be:

- being open, consultative and collaborative;
- communicating effectively;
- being diplomatic, and
- knowing, developing and building a team.

Meanwhile in relation to ‘organisation, planning and resources’, the most significant factor appears to be the use of procedures and systems.

As well as supporting the broad thrust of the first stage of the research, our case studies also shed light on a range of additional factors that were not identified in Stage 1. Some of these appeared more frequently than others in the interviews, such as:

- being results-driven;
- having a motivating demeanour;
- being forward-looking and strategic;
- being professionally informed/using research evidence;
- having a supportive SLT, and
- being embedded in professional networks both within and beyond school.

Finally, the case studies suggest that although there is a relatively tight consensus surrounding the factors that make an effective middle leader there is a small degree of variation according to interviewees’ role, with teachers focusing on the importance of delegation and senior leaders focusing on the importance of being results-driven. In addition, leaders of relatively high performing departments appeared to be more likely to be professionally informed and bold, innovative and resourceful.

5 Summary and recommendations

This report set out to identify the behaviours, characteristics, enabling factors and barriers that contribute to the success of middle leaders on the Teaching Leaders Fellows programme. The research consisted of two stages. The first stage of the research combined data on relative departmental performance with Teaching Leaders Fellows' Leadership Competency Framework (LCF) scores and their responses to a survey in order to identify broad sets of factors that appear to be associated with particularly effective middle leaders. The second stage was based on twenty four interviews with teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders in eight schools, which set out to explore the factors identified in the first stage of the research in more detail.

The first stage of the research identified two broad sets of factors that appear to influence middle leaders' effectiveness:

- the relationship between middle leaders and their team, and
- planning and resource management

The second stage of the research built on these findings. We identified 31 specific factors that shape middle leaders' effectiveness, with each of these factors mapping clearly onto those identified in existing research. Four factors appeared to be particularly significant. Three fell within the 'team and interpersonal' set of behaviours and characteristics, reflecting the findings of existing research. These factors were:

- being open, consultative and collaborative;
- communication and diplomacy, and
- knowing, developing and building a team.

The fourth factor – procedures and systems – fell within the 'organisation, planning and resources' set of behaviours and characteristics.

The findings from the second stage of the research largely corroborated those from the first stage, particularly in emphasising the importance of team and interpersonal factors and those relating to organisation and management. However, the case studies added further detail and nuance. They revealed additional, specific factors that appear to be related to middle leaders' effectiveness. The data from our case studies suggest that two of these factors – being professionally informed and being bold, innovative and resourceful – seem to feature more prominently with middle leaders in relatively high performing departments. Alongside strong team management and organisational skills, particularly effective middle leaders engage with research and policy and using this as a basis for driving innovation within their departments.

6 Literature review references

- Adey, K. (2000). Professional Development Priorities: The views of Middle Managers in Secondary Schools. *Educational Management and Administration*, 28(4), 419-431
- Bennett, N., Woods, P., Wise, C., & Newton, W. (2007). Understandings of middle leadership in secondary schools: a review of empirical research. *School Leadership & Management*, 27(5), 453–470
- Bush, T. (2002). *Middle Level Leaders Think-Piece*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership
- Cladingbowl, M. (2011). The key role of middle leaders – an Ofsted perspective. *Teaching Leaders Quarterly*, 3(13)
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a Culture of Change*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass
- Glover, D., Miller, D. Gambling, M., Gough, G. & Johnson, M. (1999). As Others See Us: Senior management and subject staff perceptions of the work effectiveness of subject leaders in secondary schools. *School Leadership and Management*, 19(3), 331-344
- Harris, A., Jamieson, I., & Russ, J. (1995). A study of “effective” departments in secondary schools. *School Organisation*, 15(3), 283–299
- Harris, A. and Muijs, D. (2003). *Teacher Leadership: A Review of Research*. Retrieved 11 November 2015 from: <http://www.teachers.org.uk/node/8139>
- Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why. Summary of the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) conducted nby Viviane Robinson, Margie Hohepa and Clair Lloyd*. Coventry: CUREE
- Muijs, D., & Harris, A. (2007). Teacher Leadership in (In)action: Three Case Studies of Contrasting Schools. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 35(1), 111–134
- National College for School Leadership [NCSL]. (2013). *Leadership Curriculum*. Nottingham: NCSL
- National College for School Leadership [NCSL]. (2003). *The role and purpose of middle leaders in schools*. Nottingham: NCSL
- National College for School Leadership [NCSL]. (2004). *Tackling within school variation: a leading practice seminar report*. Nottingham: NCSL
- National College for Teaching & Leadership [NCTL]. (2013). *International Programme for Middle Leaders: delivery partner prospectus*. Manchester: NCTL
- Ofsted. (2012). *Moving English Forward*. London: Ofsted
- Ofsted. (2013a). *Getting it right first time: Achieving and maintaining high-quality early years*. London: Ofsted
- Ofsted (2013b). *Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools*. London: Ofsted

- Rhodes, C., Brundrett, M., & Nevill, A. (2008). Leadership Talent Identification and Development: Perceptions of Heads, Middle Leaders and Classroom Teachers in 70 Contextually Different Primary and Secondary Schools in England. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 36(3), 311–335.
- Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why*. Wellington: New Zealand Ministry of Education.
- Sergiovanni, T. J. (1999). Refocusing Leadership to Build Community. *The High School Magazine*, September 1999, 12-15.
- Toop, J. (2014). *The Changing Face of Middle Leadership*. London: Teaching Leaders.
- Wise, C. (1998). The Role of the Academic Middle Manager in Secondary Schools. Retrieved 11 November 2015 from <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/000000470.htm>
- Wise, C. (2001). The Monitoring Role of the Academic Middle Manager in Secondary Schools. *Educational Management and Administration*, 29(3), 333-341
- Wise, C. & Bush, T. (1999). From Teacher to Manager: The role of the academic middle manager in secondary schools. *Educational Research*, 41(2), 183-195

Appendix 1 Online survey for fellows and alumni

About this survey

Teaching Leaders have commissioned LKMco to conduct some research into the factors that influence the effectiveness of the middle leaders on the Teaching Leaders Fellows programme. The findings from the research will help to maximise the effectiveness of the programme.

The survey consists of seven questions, and will take between 5 and 10 minutes to complete.

Your responses will be matched with administrative data held by Teaching Leaders as well as department-level performance data. However, no information contained in the results will be attributed to the person who submitted it without their explicit consent being obtained in advance. Data will be stored securely by LKMco in an anonymised form.

Your participation is voluntary. If you'd like any additional information about the research, please [get in touch](#).

Thank you for helping us with our research.

Loic Menzies
Director, LKMco

Your details

* 1. What is your name?

This information will help us match your responses to department-level performance data and administrative data held by Teaching Leaders - it will not be made public.

* 2. In what year did your NQT year commence?

Your role

* 3. How important do you think each of the following elements of your role are, where 1 is *Not at all important* and 5 is *Very important*?

	1 (not at all important)	2	3	4	5 (very important)
Setting vision and direction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading teaching and learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assessment/APP	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff development/CPD	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Managing data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading across the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pupil Premium interventions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planning/resource management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lesson observation and feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Performance management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-evaluation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading literacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using research/evidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading outside of school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Your role

* 4. During an average week, how much time would you normally spend on the following activities?

	Less than an hour per week	1-2 hours per week	3-4 hours per week	5-6 hours per week	7-8 hours per week	9-10 hours per week	More than 10 hours per week
Setting vision and direction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading teaching and learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Assessment/APP	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staff development/CPD	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Managing data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading across the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pupil Premium interventions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Planning/resource management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lesson observation and feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Performance management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-evaluation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading literacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using research/evidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leading outside of school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Personal factors influencing your effectiveness

* 5. What are the personal characteristics or behaviours that help to make you an effective middle leader? You can name up to three.

1

2

3

Other factors influencing your effectiveness

* 6. What factors inside or outside your school *help* you to be an effective middle leader? You can name up to three.

1

2

3

* 7. What factors inside or outside your school *hold you back* from being an effective middle leader? You can name up to three.

1

2

3

Contact details

8. We may wish to get in touch with you to discuss your responses in more detail. If you'd be happy for us to do this, please leave your phone number and/or email address.

Thank you

Thank you for completing our survey, we really appreciate your time.

If you have any further questions, please get in touch.

**Loic Menzies
Director, LKMco**

Appendix 2 Interview schedule for middle leaders

#"	Question"	Probes"
1"	In "your" opinion, "what" does "an" effective "middle" leader "look" like?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision "and" purpose" • Organisation "and" resources" • Team "and" interpersonal"
2"	What "personal" characteristics "and" behaviours "help" you "to" be "an" effective "middle" leader?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision "and" purpose" • Organisation "and" resources" • Team "and" interpersonal"
3"	What "factors" inside "and" outside "of" school "help" you "to" be "an" effective "middle" leader?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision "and" purpose "of" others" • Organisation "and" resources" • Team "and" interpersonal"
4"	What "factors" inside "and" outside "of" school "hinder" you "from" being "an" effective "middle" leader?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision "and" purpose" • Organisation "and" resources" • Team "and" interpersonal"
5"	How "do" you "go" about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting "vision" and "purpose"?" • Organising "and" managing "resources"?" • Managing "your" team/relations "with" other "staff"?" 	Specific "examples"?"
6"	Are "there" any "ways" in "which" you "differ" from "the" other "middle" leaders "in" your "school"?"	"
7"	Can "you" give "specific" examples "of" ways "in" which "you" differ "from" other "middle" leaders?"	"

Appendix 3 Interview schedule for colleagues

#"	Question"	Probes"
1"	In "your" opinion, "what" does "an" effective "middle" leader "look" like?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision "and" purpose" • Organisation "and" resources" • Team "and" interpersonal"
2"	How "typical" is "[middle" leader]" of "other" middle "leaders" in "your" school?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall "effectiveness" • Personal "characteristics" and "behaviours" shaping "that" effectiveness"
3"	In "what" ways "is" "[middle" leader]" different "from" other "middle" leaders "in" your "school"?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision "and" purpose" • Organisation "and" resources" • Team "and" interpersonal"
4"	What, "if" anything, "makes" "[middle" leader]" particularly "effective"?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision "and" purpose" • Organisation "and" resources" • Team "and" interpersonal"
5"	What, "if" anything, "hinders" "[middle" leader]" from "being" an "effective" middle "leader"?"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision "and" purpose" • Organisation "and" resources" • Team "and" interpersonal"
6"	How "does" "[middle" leader]" go "about": <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting "vision" and "purpose"?" • Organising "and" managing "resources"?" • Managing "their" team/relations "with" other "staff"?" 	"
7"	Can "you" give "specific" examples "of" how "they" do "that"?"	"
8"	How "typical" are "these" behaviours/characteristics "of" other "middle" leaders "in" your "school"?"	"

Appendix 4 Department meeting observation rubric

Purpose

These observations aim to identify any examples of the characteristics and behaviours that effective middle leaders exhibit, based on our findings from Stage 1 of the project. The key elements are:

- Vision and purpose
- Organisation, planning and resources
- Team and interpersonal

What might the different elements look like?

Vision and purpose

- Sets a clear vision for the department
- Communicates and instils this vision in the team
- Sets goals for the department that are clearly founded on a broader, coherent vision
- Uses their vision for the department to motivate themselves and their teaching staff

Organisation, planning and resources

- Good time management and organisation of the meeting
- Knowledge of the department's resources and resource constraints including staff, finances and time
- Makes decisions strategically, based on long term plans for the department

Team and interpersonal

- Communicates clearly and seeks agreement from team
- Demonstrates good rapport; is supportive and understanding
- Provides clear leadership; makes decisions and communicates their rationale

Approach

- The aim is to gather data which can be analysed
- Notes should therefore describe not judge i.e. comments should be about what you see happening: what are middle leaders saying? What are they doing? How are their colleagues reacting?
- Refer only to what you know is happening - avoid inference

Time Leave blank if throughout	Description What have you seen?	Tick all that apply		
		Vision and purpose	Organisation, planning and resources	Team and interpersonal



This report was written for the education charity Teaching Leaders. Teaching Leaders' mission is to address educational disadvantage by growing a movement of outstanding middle leaders in schools in challenging contexts. We design and deliver leadership development programmes for those leaders on the front line in the most challenging schools: middle leaders. Our high-potential and whole-school middle leader programmes transform the impact that leaders can make on pupil outcomes, retain them in their schools and build a talent pipeline for the future.

In November 2016, Teaching Leaders will join forces with The Future Leaders Trust. Together we will provide outstanding professional development to leaders at all levels in schools in challenging circumstances

www.teachingleaders.org.uk // [@teachingleaders](https://twitter.com/teachingleaders) // enquiries@teachingleaders.org.uk // 0203 846 5808.



This report was written by the education and youth development 'think and action tank' LKMco. We believe society has a duty to ensure children and young people receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. We work towards this vision by helping education and youth organisations develop, evaluate and improve their work with young people. We then carry out academic and policy research and advocacy that is grounded in our experience.

www.lkmco.org.uk // [@LKMco](https://twitter.com/LKMco) // info@lkmco.org // +44(0)7793 370459