



SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN PRACTICE

EDITED BY DONALD FRITH

School Management in practice

General Editor: Donald Frith

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Longman Group Limited
Longman House, Burnt Mill, Harlow, Essex, CM20 2JE, UK

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First published 1985

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

School management in practice.

1 .School management and organization—Great Britain

1. Frith, Donald

371.2'00941 B2901

ISBN 0-900313-21-8

Printed in Great Britain by
Butler and Tanner Ltd, Frome, Somerset

Foreword

During the last decade there has been a dramatic growth of interest in the concept of teachers as managers, and in the need for them to be appropriately trained. It has been accompanied by the growing acknowledgement that, for a variety of reasons, their tasks have become more varied and demanding, not least because they have required a change of style. Training for headship is now national policy. The publication of this book is therefore timely.

In each chapter the writers speak from their own experience and from the lessons which that experience has taught them. I know all of them as friends or through their work and can testify that their experience truly reflects the progress of their craft in our time. It is the story of how the purposes and methods of secondary education became more complex and problematic; and of how they subsequently found a unity in a heightened professionalism among teachers, and in the self-conscious, self-developing school, in which staff are both individual practitioners and members of a team with a shared philosophy and aims. Management there must be; but above all else must come the liberation and nurture of the individual within a matrix of fraternity. Headship is ultimately akin to artistry: it requires sympathetic insight into the lives of others and the ability to help others enrich that life.

This book provides both a handbook for heads and aspiring heads, and a source-book for all those who want a first-hand picture of 'what it is like' to be a secondary head. It should be of interest not only to trainers of heads, but also to all those, whether parents, politicians or administrators, who have a concern to know about the tasks which schools face.

John Tomlinson
Director of Education, Cheshire

Acknowledgements

This book is firmly based on the practical experience of members of the Secondary Heads' Association. The contributors would be the first to acknowledge the part played by many members who have regularly discussed their problems, both formally and informally, at headquarters and in the areas over many years. In a very real sense, this is an SHA book, and I commend it very warmly to all those who have leadership responsibilities in Secondary Schools.

Peter Snape
General Secretary
Secondary Heads Association

The authors and publisher wish to thank the following for permission to use copyright material: County of Avon Education Committee (fig. 9.2); Leicestershire Education Committee (Appendix: Leicestershire Education Committee revised scheme of management for a community college).

Contents

List of figures	iv
Foreword	v
Acknowledgements	vi
1 Introduction	
<i>Donald Frith</i>	1
2 Finance, plant and administration	
<i>Brian Knight</i>	11
3 Staff management I	
<i>John Sayer</i>	33
4 Staff management II	
<i>John Sutton</i>	49
5 Pupil management	
<i>David Williams</i>	69
6 Legal issues	
<i>Florence Kirkby</i>	91
7 The curriculum	
<i>Michael Duffy</i>	107
8 Sources of support	
<i>Peter Snape</i>	127
9 Clients	
<i>Michael Smith</i>	141
10 Changing the curriculum in a school	
<i>George Gyte</i>	157
11 Independent schools	
<i>Pamela Stringer</i>	175
12 Community schools	
<i>Veronica Kerr</i>	185
Appendix	
Leicestershire Education Committee Revised scheme of management for a community college.	203
References	209
Index	211

List of figures

Fig. 4.1	Teaching/management functions.	51
Fig. 9.1	Comprehensive objectives.	143
Fig. 9.2	<i>Guidelines for home and school.</i>	145
Fig. 9.3	Eight-step approach for new entrants.	147
Fig. 9.4	Parent's comment sheet.	150
Fig. 9.5	Parents' report evening.	152
Fig. 9.6	Academic achievements of leavers expressed as a percentage of the total number who left during the year	154
Fig. 12.1	Structure of a community college.	197

1 Introduction

Donald Frith

All the writers in this book speak from long professional experience as heads of schools. Furthermore, as is customary in this country, they moved into headship from experience as classroom teachers. Their basic commitment therefore throughout most of their working lives has been to the education of children, and, since their experience is largely limited to secondary schools, of children who in the process of their education emerge into young adulthood. The classroom encounters which have been central to their own professional development, and which in most cases have to some extent continued even since they were appointed to headship, make it likely that, amid all the day-to-day chores of 'running the school', their deepest conviction of the worth-whileness of what they do comes from their commitment to orchestrate the whole enterprise for the benefit of the pupils and of the educational experiences which they will receive.

When such people accept an invitation to write a book about education and the management of secondary schools it would not be surprising if their thoughts turned to the HMI publication *Ten good schools*. That booklet came to the not altogether surprising conclusion that the single most important factor in deciding the quality of a school was the leadership which it was given by its head. This conclusion was seized upon by heads as a public vindication of their importance. However, if the corollary was that bad schools similarly owed their badness chiefly to the indifferent quality of the head, then the judgement could be no less threatening than flattering. In the long run it is arguable that that publication has tended to increase public pressure upon headteachers. They are not only more likely now to be seen as the makers of good schools, but also as those responsible for marring schools which are judged to be bad. Already at least one head is perceived to have lost his job as a result of an

HMI report on his school. Common sense suggests that the formula 'quality of head = quality of school' can easily become over-simplified. If one set of people provide a newly appointed head with a target and the school is subsequently judged by another set of people in relation to a quite different target, the verdict may be scarcely fair on the head concerned.

Judgements about a school therefore, whoever its head and indeed its staff may be, depend not only on the quality of that head and those staff, but also upon the expectations which the judges may have, and upon the attitudes and capacities of both the pupils whom it contains and the community which it serves. Education in one sense is interference. It is a deliberate attempt to influence the minds of the young, to persuade them to learn things which adults believe to be to the advantage both of the young people themselves and of society at large. But what shall those things be? And how far will the young people themselves, their parents, their potential employers, the government and other powerful elements in society agree? Each school must live within that reality. It must surely follow that a school which is judged 'good', and whose head has received high praise for enabling it to be good, is likely also to have enjoyed, because of a complex combination of factors, a convergence of many outside influences, including the nature of its intake and the public perception of its role.

If this be granted, it is apparent how important it is, at the moment when a new head is being appointed, that those who make the appointment should make quite clear what their hopes and expectations are for the school in question: what are its perceived strengths and weaknesses; what they judge to be its limitations and which of those limitations it may or may not be reasonable to expect a new head to be able to overcome. A school's governors or an LEA may believe that if they are frank about what they see as the school's problems or handicaps, they will in some instances frighten off good candidates. Such an attitude is not only cowardly but also lamentably short-sighted. A difficult or even downright bad school will never improve unless it can benefit from an entirely honest and cooperative relationship between head on the one side and governors and LEA on the other. Such a relationship cannot develop if it begins in what will be seen by the head as dishonesty. If on the other hand a candidate finds that those who are offering a post have sought from the start to share the problems of the school, to make clear their concern and commitment to improvement and their need to seek this in partnership with the head, then a good candidate is more likely to be turned on than put off.

The newly-appointed head will also have to make sensitive

adjustments. He will bring to his new appointment all that he has learned from service in his previous schools. These are likely to have bred both positive and negative reactions. At one extreme he will have served under a head who has inspired him and he will therefore to no small extent be determined to introduce into his own school many of the techniques or systems which have seemed to operate so effectively in the previous one. At the other end of the scale he may have been getting increasingly impatient, even contemptuous, of the head under whom he has served and be eager to introduce into his own school the reforms which he could never get past the head in the previous one. It would be a poor appointee who did not have ideas and aspirations of his own, whatever their positive or negative genesis, but he too will need, like the governors and LEA, to match those ideas and aspirations against the actual situation of the school in which he finds himself. Some transplants can become very sickly in a different environment. It is true that some of the disliked factors in the new environment may be eradicable, and in real need of eradication; but others may not and may in themselves not be hostile to the educational process. This again amounts to a plea to newly-appointed heads to share with governors and LEA their own ideas and aspirations, to test them out against the views of those who are making the appointment, to acknowledge that what is to be done must be done in partnership and with mutual respect. It will be just as foolish for the head as for those who appoint him to start by deliberately concealing intentions which ultimately must come to light with all the irritation and frustration which may then ensue.

There is evidence to suggest that one of the commonest problems which faces a newly-appointed head is likely to arise from the character and practice of his predecessor – and perhaps from the disappointed deputy who was a candidate for the post. A great deal of sensitivity is needed to pick up the messages which are being transmitted. It is highly unlikely that no member of staff wants any change at all. There may be some likelihood that the older members, and those therefore perhaps in the more senior positions, may be liable to prefer the comfort of the *status quo*.

The aim must be, perhaps by the asking of Socratic questions, to discover as far as possible how the land lies, what changes seem likely to be broadly welcomed, what deals might respectably be done. The basic questions will continue to be: 'What is preventing me from doing what I believe needs to be done? How can I change that?' From time to time realistic proposals which arise when those questions have been asked do gain a sympathetic hearing. Teachers may see advantages in taking on a new role; examination boards may agree to a changed examination pattern; the LEA may

somehow find an extra bit of money; the local press may agree to come and do a helpful feature on a curriculum innovation which draws in industrial support. A scheme which has been carefully worked out, combined with determined optimism can succeed. Heads can be successful enablers.

Some of what I have written so far may sound logical but mildly impractical. There are very few human situations in which we are entirely frank with each other. In any case we often find it extremely difficult to know exactly what we are aiming at, or exactly what we can reasonably expect to achieve. Many of us are for example, mildly suspicious about the present government's obsession that schools should set down clearly on paper for parents and other interested parties what the 'aims' of each school are. In that context it is interesting to read what John Dewey wrote in *Democracy and education*.

It is well to remind ourselves that education as such has no aims. Only persons, parents and teachers etc. have aims, not an abstract idea like education. And consequently their purposes are infinitely varied, differing with different children, changing as children grow and with the growth of experience on the part of the one who teaches. Even the most valid aims which can be put into words will, as words, do more harm than good, unless one recognises that they are not aims, but rather suggestions to educators as to how to observe, how to look ahead, and how to choose in liberating and directing the energies of the concrete situations in which they find themselves.

This is not a recipe for laissez-faire, but a sensible caution against any assumption that educational aims can be cut-and-dried, a set of tablets handed down from on high. The fascination of teaching, that which prevents it from becoming a boring daily routine, is the fact that it occurs as an interaction between teachers and taught, with all the infinite variety that changing and developing personalities on both sides must bring to the process; that it is concerned not only with facts, but with imagination and sensibility and with opportunities for bringing new ideas to birth.

Nor is this interaction taking place only between teachers and taught. Any headteacher must hope for and strive to create or sustain a school in which similarly interesting and creative relationships exist between all the adults who share the responsibility for its organization and conduct. And the head has to accept that the prime responsibility for facilitating the growth of such a dynamic situation rests upon his or her shoulders. Above all this demands flexibility. The broad aim is clear, and it is one which all can be invited to share. But

from day to day the approach is likely to be pragmatic. In the nature of things all must depend upon the personalities and experiences, both in and out of school, of the people who comprise the staff. Wherever possible, opportunities must be created for each individual to make the best contribution of which he or she is capable. This is likely to be a recipe for diversity rather than conformity, so that a head may be in need of persuading his governors or LEA at any particular moment to make due allowances in any suggested curriculum blueprint for the particular personalities and capacities of some members of staff who would be likely to serve their pupils less well if they were forced into some preconceived mould.

I have remarked that almost invariably heads are appointed from among classroom teachers. What most newly-appointed heads notice – unless as deputies they have already been placed in positions which widely distance them from the classroom – is that their basic sense of responsibility is felt for the pupils rather than for the staff. They may also be acutely aware that their prime source of satisfaction up to now has been from their relationship with their pupils, much of which will have been positive and appreciative. In their new post they may quite possibly feel that many of their teacher colleagues, particularly perhaps in their own subject area, do a less good job than they themselves did. Simultaneously they may feel much more isolated from the pupils – and that much more draughty round the ankles – and where they believe they see weakness or inadequacy among the teaching staff, they may find themselves emotionally on the side of the pupils against their teachers. Such a situation needs a very long, cool look. No doubt firm judgements and carefully considered plans of action need to be formulated; but the head's own emotional involvement also needs to be recognized and his understanding of his new position and the ensuing re-orientation of responsibility carefully brought into focus.

One of the best expressions of educational 'aims' which I know is the one which appears in the Warnock report: 'First to enlarge a child's knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding, and thus his awareness of moral values and capacity for enjoyment; and secondly to enable him to enter the world after formal education is over as an active participant in society and a responsible contributor to it, capable of achieving as much independence as possible.' It is anything but a strait-jacket. It provides no practical suggestions, let alone requirements, as to what shall appear in a child's timetable. But it can provide the sort of formulation which enables a headteacher and his teaching staff to agree what together in broad terms they are trying to do for pupils, of whatever background and capacity. Any pursuit of such aims cannot be a private matter, let

alone a personal indulgence, on the part of the head. It can only become effective for the good of the pupils if it is shared, not in a mirror image, but through the wide diversity of insights present in all those partners with whom a head must work. Running a school can never be more than the art of the possible. Successful headship is likely to come not from fruitless worrying about ideals which have not been achieved, but from skill in observing where the possibilities lie and creating situations in which those possibilities become actualities. First and foremost this depends upon a constructive relationship between head and staff; but it often requires also the forging of alliances with the various groups outside the school which themselves will have legitimate ideas about what the 'aims' of the school ought to be and will constitute a range of both resources and restraints in relation to which the school must operate.

There will be very few newly-appointed heads who are not already well aware of the influences which are exerted upon schools by the members of the local community. We tend more often to remember the front-page headline about a misbehaving group of pupils than the piece in an inner page about a successful concert or football result. Similarly we remember the name of the local industrialist who intemperately attacked the alleged inability of local school products to spell or add up, rather than the local company which offered us a useful piece of equipment. At a time when schools seem to be at the receiving end of so much adverse and often ill-informed criticism, it is salutary to start counting the occasions when we receive good publicity so that our own perspective can be helped not to become too distorted. In any case it is part of a head's task to find ways of disarming critics and taking full advantage of allies. Before considering how that might best be done, it may be useful to sketch out the likely concerns of those sections of the community who have expectations of and make demands upon schools. It must be only a brief sketch because it will be dealt with in more detail in subsequent chapters. The sections of society whose names need to appear in the list are remarkably numerous: pupils, parents, further and higher education institutions, examination boards, employers, the providers of the schools (the spokesmen for these providers being professionals and elected politicians at both local and national level), the police and magistrates' courts, public transport companies, shopkeepers and residents in the vicinity of the school site, the Press. In effect, of course, the Press seeks only to represent the view of other sections already included in the list. But it is clear, whether nationally or locally, that most newspapers can readily be placed at some point on the political spectrum and that a significant part of what they publish is a deliberate attempt to win readers over to their

political standpoint by means of whatever the current accepted dogma may be.

On the face of it most of those clients could be said to be in agreement about what schools ought to be achieving. In their view secondary schools are supposed to turn out young adults with the necessary knowledge and skills (as parents and children would put it) to get a well-paid job or (as employers would put it) be competent and reliable workers. Of course schools would be equally happy if such aims were achieved. Few people, I imagine, believe that they are deliberately obstructing such aims. So why are schools and the rest of society alleged to be so much at odds? To some extent the answer might be because schools are not processing raw materials but processing – although that now becomes an entirely inappropriate word – human beings. The pupils in our schools may all indeed hope or expect that school will provide them with the means to earn their own living. But they have all the diversity of attitude, aptitude and aspiration that characterize also the adults who are their parents. These differences demand a flexibility in the process through which they pass which in turn places such demands upon the teachers as can never be fully met. Ultimately it is not possible to make people work, whatever their age, unless they can be persuaded that it is to their own advantage to do so. Negative persuasions, such as fear of punishment, may have their uses but can also be counter-productive. Those who are persuaded that school work is to their own advantage are the ones who find it enjoyable for its own sake – a state of affairs arising from the character of either the teacher or the pupil or most often both; and/or the ones who see it as an effective means to a personal end. If they are so persuaded they must be the sort of pupils who have sufficient trust in their parents and teachers to believe in the promise of long-term rewards in the employment market. Here home-background and the employment experiences of their parents play a crucial role. The school's task is made no easier by the absence of student allowances for the post-16's. It is to be remembered that over a very short time-span the young have had their earning prospects deferred first from age 14 to age 16, and now in effect in many cases to 17, 18 and later.

Parents are as diverse in attitude as their children. Some schools, because they are or are not selective, or because of the local community which they serve, may have as their parental constituency a relatively homogeneous group. Others may have a much more diverse clientèle. One way or another they will have to cater for the wide divergencies which exist in our society and which arise from a range of factors – financial, religious, racial, educational, social. There are no other institutions in society which have to adapt

themselves to the whole range of our population, with a commitment to provide them with a service tailored to their individual needs and on the basis that all must come and none may be excluded. Some of our most vocal critics would do well to meditate upon the exceptional nature of our responsibilities. The schools have to seek as much cooperation with parents as possible because they know that if school and parents are pulling in opposite directions the children in between are being forced to take sides. Even when they take the side of the school, they themselves can be placed in an invidious position.

Employers are concerned for the success of their own enterprises, for the sake of their own livelihood and that of those they employ. Whether they are bankers or manufacturers, they must keep up to date with both products and marketing if they are to prosper or even survive. Most of them are well aware that a vital ingredient of their success is a skilled and cooperative workforce. The adaptation of the workforce to the demands of new products and techniques, presents them with some of their most intractable problems. So they should appreciate how difficult it is to cope with the diverse and usually understandable concerns of a wide range of human beings. We have more in common than is generally supposed. But we have a lot to learn from them, and they from us. Many of them are just as likely to be ignorant of, or to misunderstand, what goes on in schools as we are of what goes on in places of work. If our GCEs and CSEs are less than appropriate as a preparation for adult life over the next twenty-five years, so often the entrance tests which companies set for job applicants are scarcely related at all to what those applicants will actually do if they are accepted into employment. There is a mutual need to define more clearly what the needs both of employers and of school-leavers are. Heads need therefore to seek as informed an understanding as they can of local employers and to create opportunities of bridging the gap of misunderstanding and suspicion which is never wholly the fault of one side or the other.

The influence upon the school of government, national and local, is of course unavoidable. The degree and direction of that influence varies according to the prevalent political and economic wind. The Archbishop of York in his recent book *Church and nation in a secular society* quotes some words of G. K. Chesterton: 'When everything about a people is for the time growing weak and ineffective, it begins to talk about efficiency . . . Vigorous organisms talk not about processes, but about their aims.' Few would deny that the publicized loss of faith in our maintained schools arises chiefly from our weak industrial performance and from our high level of unemployment; and that those who govern us are engaged in a search for the causes of that decline and for remedies for our perceived weaknesses. Nor

must we pretend that only schools have been singled out: industry, the police, the unions and many other sectors of society have been hounded by politicians and the media. And the talk is about the need for efficiency in all these sectors. In this context the requirement that we should set out the aims of a school may seem only a device to force schools to provide measurable targets against which efficiency can be judged. This is the context within which O- and A-level examination results are seen as the only respectable measures of a school's achievement. In such a climate of opinion no head can avoid making compromises. What society demands is understandable and up to a point justifiable, but the demands invariably over-simplify the issues and sometimes can seriously distort the nature of the school's responsibility. It is important that the staff as a whole should reach as high a degree of consensus as possible in order to cope with outside pressures. There is some encouragement in the fact that the voice of teachers seems recently to have been more heeded than in the past and that some aspects of national educational policy now seem more in line with the reality of schools' tasks. The definition of what all our children might be expected to attain during their compulsory years at school is beginning to be defined not only in terms of 'what they ought to know' but also in terms of 'what they might reasonably be expected to recognize as worth learning'. Furthermore there is a growing assent to the notion that the compulsory years of schooling provide only the foundation of the subsequent learning that they will need to undertake; for that reason alone it is essential that their school experience should lay a foundation of sober self-confidence.

What I have written cannot pretend to be more than a brief sketch of the environment in which schools have to operate. Heads have the ultimate responsibility for the performance and the reputation of their schools, taking into account the wide variations between schools of intake and social background. Their basic resource in doing so is the teaching staff with whom therefore their relationship is of paramount importance. They need also to establish a working relationship with all the outside agencies who cannot but exert important influences upon a school's aims and achievements. That relationship must seek to disarm the hostile and take the fullest possible advantage of those who are prepared to be allies. It is however important also to bear in mind that schools do not exist merely to 'turn out a product'. The value of a school to its pupils is not only related to the skills and knowledge with which they can be equipped, it is also concerned with the quality of the here and now. It provides a social milieu in the period of transition from the family to adult independence; it is a source of friendship, of shared social

activities, of loyalties and a sense of belonging. This aspect of school, as of a family, provides opportunities for the young to find a sense of worth in many different contexts. It is a commonplace to remark that the boy or girl who is 'bottom of the form' may appear in a very different light on a school camp. To this extent a school is justified in looking inward as well as outward, and must seek to strike a balance between the two.

Finally, lest heads expect too much and so suffer an unnecessary sense of frustration, they would do well to remember a remark of D. H. Lawrence: 'You never know what you have done or if you have really done anything. Manual work is much more satisfying. You can see something for all your pains. You know whether you have done a job well or not, but with teaching you never know.'