

# School Development Priorities

The ever changing school landscape is becoming an increasingly difficult field to navigate for charities, CPD providers, teachers and even school leaders. The drastic changes the education system has seen in recent years has created new challenges, opportunities and obstacles.

At Teacher Development Trust, schools are at the heart of what we do. We are a charity whose sole mission is to help schools and we fully believe that powerful professional learning helps children succeed and teachers thrive.

Given this, we wanted to investigate the issues and priorities for senior leaders driving change in schools across the country.

By utilising our network, we were lucky enough to have spoken to over 70 Headteachers, assistant Heads, CPD leads, MAT CEOs, Executive Heads and Trustees around their development priorities and areas of focus for their schools and trusts.

Each conversation was unique and had plenty of valuable insights around the challenges that schools and organisations are facing. Here we have summarised the general findings and common themes from all interviews in four big questions.

It is worth noting that we interviewed a majority of MAT CEOs and Executive Heads, then a slightly smaller proportion of individual school leaders, who may have very different priorities. Where appropriate we have noted the differences in their responses.

## Emerging Themes

As far as general trends went, it appeared people were concerned with the changes around the new Ofsted framework; the impact this would have on curriculum and how schools are going to be inspected going forwards. There was also an acknowledgement of recruitment and budgetary challenges schools are facing. One particular theme that continued emerging was the focus on retaining staff members through developing and supporting their progression to excel and upskill themselves.

## Key development priorities

The first question we looked at was around key development and leadership priorities. The common emerging themes were;

- Developing staff, career pathways, and succession planning
- Curriculum, particularly around adapting to the new Ofsted Framework

Other notable themes often mentioned included;

- Middle leadership, particularly around developing support for staff and subject leads
- Effective use of time, reducing teacher workload

More specific to MATs;

- Collaborative working, standards and consistency across MAT
- Growth and sustainability of the wider MAT

More specific to individual schools;

- Closing the gap with disadvantaged students
- Quality of teaching and learning, developing strong curricula

## Staff development priorities

We also asked about the main staff development priorities and areas of focus. The topics that came up most often for all schools were;

- Staff collaborating in a meaningful way and sharing expertise across school/wider trust
- Curriculum development and delivery, quite specifically around Maths and English

More specific staff development priorities for MATs included;

- Developing different levels of leadership within MAT and schools



- Upskilling current staff in subject knowledge and other areas
- Teaching and learning in a consistent framework across schools
- Helping staff manage pupil behaviour

And more specifically to schools;

- Empowering middle leaders to take ownership of school interventions
- Upskilling current staff by providing more internal opportunities
- Teaching and learning around subject knowledge of teachers
- Improving the structure of CPD, and more support for individuals

## **Three things that would make the biggest difference**

An interesting question that provoked some fascinating responses, was the opportunity to change any three things that would make the biggest difference. No prizes for guessing the top answer, but some interesting ideas emerged about what would make the biggest difference;

- Money/Funding
- Staff to buy into change more readily
- Raising expectations of what is possible for pupils to achieve
- More protected time for staff CPD

Other notable themes for MATs included;

- Having a shared culture and ethos across trust
- Teacher supply, recruitment and retention
- Schools across MAT/trust all able to recognise and set high expectations

The issues for schools remained largely the same, with a slightly stronger emphasis on ring-fenced time for CPD, staff collaboration and conversations around teaching and learning.

## **How do you identify areas of development to focus on**

Finally, we wanted to know how schools go about identifying developmental areas to focus on. Interestingly, of all the questions, this one provoked the largest contrast in responses, yet there was a clear preferred method across all schools and MATS, and that was using school data to inform decisions. This was from a range of different sources such as school performance, pupil needs, staff input, projected grades, and Ofsted reports, to name a few.



From MATs, there was a clear divide between MAT level decisions being made to identify areas, and staff feeding into school priorities from their own needs. However, the most common method appeared to be a combination of the two, with schools identifying their own needs with support and input from the wider MAT.

For schools, there was a clear preference for a more bottom-up approach and audit models (such as TDT audit) to identify areas to improve.

Other particularly interesting identifiers that emerged from conversations encompassed the following:

- TDT audit
- Staff surveys
- Middle leaders making decisions – T&L/CPD leads

## Next steps

There were some really interesting examples of practice that emerged throughout these conversations, which highlighted the importance of being part of a network, collaborating and talking to other schools and trusts.

Some particularly fascinating examples included a few schools using the new Apprenticeship Levy as an extra source of funding, with one particular leader highlighting how they rallied local businesses who weren't using the fund to add to their own funding.

As previously mentioned, the release of the new Ofsted framework is already driving schools priorities. Finally, there seems to be a general trend of schools doing more peer reviews using internal expertise and moving away from external reviewers and interventions.

We hope you have found the survey results interesting and useful to reflect on, thank you again for giving up your time to partake.

If you'd like to continue the conversation around your school development priorities, and how Teacher Development Trust can support you to achieve these, please get in touch with Ian Campbell at [ian.campbell@tdtrust.org](mailto:ian.campbell@tdtrust.org) or give us a call on 020 3961 6794.

