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School Leadership

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Tidying the Cupboard?

The role of subject leaders in
primary schools

How can subject leaders in a primary school share their talents and expertise to make a positive impact on teaching and learning in the school?

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S U M M A R Y P R A C T I T I O N E R E N Q U I R Y R E P O R T

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Background | 4 |
| School visits: what the headteachers said..... | 6 |
| Leadership and management structures | 6 |
| Knowledge and skills of the subject leader | 7 |
| Financial resources | 8 |
| School visits: what the subject leaders said | 9 |
| A summary of the issues and six questions for school leadership teams..... | 13 |
| Some ways out of the cupboard | 15 |
| Teamwork | 15 |
| Teaching teachers | 16 |
| Teachers leading teaching and learning | 17 |
| Bibliography..... | 18 |
| Appendix: research methodology | 19 |
| Acknowledgements | 20 |

Introduction

This report investigates the role of subject leaders in primary schools following a series of school visits and interviews undertaken between September 2003 and April 2004.

My interest in the role of subject leaders came initially from a staff development perspective and began during training for Investors in People in 2000. This was the first time that I had heard the term “coaching” in a school context (outside Friday afternoon after-school football club).

I was led to the book *Pathways to Coaching* (Powell, Chambers and Baxter, 2001), which included in its introduction the explanation:

“[Coaching] is a counterblast to the top down approach to change that has been hard to avoid in the educational community in recent times. It is a collaborative approach that assumes competence and aids further improvement; it is based on an effectiveness model rather than a deficiency model.”

Inspired by this vision, I decided to try adopting coaching as the preferred method for subject leaders in my school. My Local Education Authority (LEA) advisor gave only cautious approval; she saw it as a very different “avenue” to the conventional approach. A colleague headteacher remarked that it sounded very “cosy”. Faced with this scepticism, I accepted the invitation to become an NCSL Research Associate, hoping to embark on an enquiry into coaching, by subject leaders in other primary schools to support what I was doing in my own school. Quickly, the impossibility of the task became evident: I couldn’t find schools that said they did it!

So if subject leaders don’t coach, what do they do? Just tidy the cupboard? This became the focus for this research.

Background

Teachers with responsibility for subjects have traditionally been termed co-ordinators in primary schools. The term implies a tidying function; bringing together different elements and putting things in order. Although it perhaps undervalues the complexity of the role, it is still the most common term used in schools.

In 1998, the Teacher Training Agency published the National Standards for Subject Leaders and in doing so raised its profile in schools. The standards are now incorporated into the Teachers' Standards Framework (DfES 2001) and the role is clearly defined:

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

The leadership and management of subjects is included within the Ofsted Inspection Framework and it has consistently been identified as a weakness by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools in his annual reports:

| Date | Comments |
|-----------|---|
| 1998/1999 | “Co-ordinators need a clear view of how work in their subject progresses as pupils move through the school.” |
| 1999/2000 | “Co-ordinators have become much more involved in the monitoring of achievement and teaching in their subjects... However, they frequently lack the leadership skills needed to influence and support their colleagues.” |
| 2000/2001 | “The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies encourage coordinators to engage in classroom observation and, despite some initial reluctance, most co-ordinators now undertake this task.” |
| 2001/2002 | “English mathematics and ICT are the three best led and managed subjects... However, in a number of foundation subjects the quality of subject leadership is not good enough.” |
| 2002/2003 | “The leadership and management of subjects vary too much in quality and effectiveness.... The effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by co-ordinators varies widely.” |

The role of subject leader is of course a key element of leadership and management in primary schools. In *Leadership and Management: What inspection tells us* (Ofsted, 2003), HMI highlights the relationship between the quality of leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff (including subject leaders) and standards in the school.

“In primary schools, of the 38% of schools in which the leadership and management were very good, the quality of teaching was good or very good in nearly all of the schools.”

The report summarises the weaknesses: they lie not so much in the general leadership of schools (“setting the school’s agenda and direction”) but in the leading learning aspects, in particular, the monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching where the subject leader has a part to play in raising standards.

Because of these perceived weaknesses, the development of subject leaders together with other middle leaders is very much part of the current school improvement strategy. For instance:

- The National College for School Leadership runs the **Leading from the Middle** programme. The programme is based on the belief that “successful leadership for sustainable improvement requires leaders at many levels within the school” and demonstrates NCSL’s “commitment to the concepts of distributed and emergent leadership” (Leading from the Middle prospectus, NCSL).
- In 2003, the DfES launched the **Primary Leadership Programme** funded by the National Primary Strategy and part of the government’s **Excellence and Enjoyment** initiative. Primary schools are invited to take part in the programme and receive support with “strengthening collaborative leadership” of the headteacher senior staff and the “literacy and mathematics coordinator”. The programme is focused on imparting the “skills of observation, feedback and analysis within the teaching and learning of English and mathematics” (DfES, 2003). It gives a clear indication of how the government sees the role of subject leader.
- The **National Agreement** signed in January 2003 aims to tackle teacher workload, giving teachers more time, extra support and “renewed leadership”. “Teachers with leadership and management responsibilities will be entitled to a reasonable allocation of time within school sessions to support the discharge of their responsibilities”. Headteachers are now obliged to recognise the workload of the role of subject leader and support teachers so that they are able to carry out the job.

School visits: what the headteachers said

In the course of my research, I visited six primary schools varying in size from 180 to 700 on roll. It was clearly important in my visits to get an understanding of the headteacher's perspective on the role of subject leader.

All of the headteachers that I interviewed were aware of the problems associated with the role of subject leader. However, there was no one orthodoxy that became apparent, no sense that headteachers were responding to a single external pressure from central government. Instead, the answers given were specific to the particular schools.

In talking to the headteachers, I was able to identify three recurring themes related to subject leadership:

- leadership and management structures
- knowledge and skills of subject leaders
- financial resources

Leadership and management structures

Headteachers are very aware of the need to link the work of subject leaders to the development of the school as a whole and in doing so, maintain the headteacher's influence over what is going on.

Strengthening the link is done in all schools through the use of the school improvement plan. Typically, subject leaders write a subject action plan. In some schools, there is a clear timetable for this: at the end of the academic year, subject leaders meet with the headteacher to review what has been achieved during the year and, in the light of that discussion, a new plan is written. Key points from subject plans are then included in the school improvement plan. Headteachers stressed the need to oversee the process to make sure that subject leaders "set achievable goals".

The link is strengthened in some of the larger schools with the help of the senior management (sometimes called leadership) team. It is common that senior members of staff lead core subjects. Where subject leaders work in teams, there are senior teachers on each team, particularly the teams concerned with the core subjects. Sometimes the representative leads the team although in one case the headteacher was very definite that the senior teacher "facilitates" the work of the team and does not lead.

In two large schools, the role of subject leader overlaps with the work of other teams or structures in the school. In one school, a "teaching and learning committee" meets to discuss and trial ideas; all core subject leaders belong to the committee. In another school, the headteacher highlighted the overlap and possible conflict between the role of the subject leader and the role of the year group leader. In that particular school, the former has responsibilities for resources, the latter for planning.

Knowledge and skills of the subject leader

Headteachers are very aware of the demands of the role of subject leader on a teacher in terms of subject knowledge and leadership and management skills.

The challenge of subject knowledge is highlighted by headteachers:

“A Key Stage 1 teacher can have no idea of what’s expected in key stage 2 unless they get support.”

“Expecting a teacher to be an excellent classroom practitioner and be a subject expert is like asking them to walk on water.”

Yet a paradox is also recognised. Subject leaders who are class teachers do have the advantage of current knowledge and experience. It is the very fact that they are full-time classroom practitioners that potentially gives them the subject knowledge to make their role as leader so powerful. Headteachers, on the other hand, as one of them admitted, “can’t be practitioner experts when we’re outside the classroom”.

Developing the leadership and management skills of subject leaders is a complex issue. Headteachers are aware of the need for subject leaders to have good interpersonal skills: “You need to ensure that the work of subject leaders strengthens relationships in the school: ensure that everyone is positive, open and trustworthy.” The concerns of the headteachers also centre on the role of subject leaders in monitoring teaching and learning, usually because of a belief that this is what Ofsted wants to see. Reflecting on that challenge, one headteacher said: “staff are unsure, anxious ... not sure what they have to do”.

Headteachers meet these demands on knowledge and skills in a number of ways:

Team work

Some of the schools arrange for subject leaders to work together; for example bringing together representatives from different key stages, putting a less experienced teacher with a senior teacher, or forming curriculum teams working on a subject or a group of subjects. However, one school has abandoned this approach: “It gets too complicated; it doesn’t work.”

Subject specialism

The vast majority of the schools I visited employ general class teachers rather than subject specialists. However, headteachers are aware of matching subject leader roles to teachers’ knowledge, qualifications, experience or interest, but are then sometimes reluctant to ask teachers to swap roles.

Role clarification

All of the headteachers interviewed had devised job descriptions for their subject leaders. In some cases, this is based on the TTA Standards Framework.

Training

Headteachers planned how to support their subject leaders: by supporting them themselves; by getting them to work with other staff in school; and by bringing in people from out of the school. One headteacher is developing the technique of coaching in his school and is beginning to train subject leaders to use this approach in the school. There is evidence of some support by Local Education Advisors for subject leaders; leading staff meetings, providing off-site training or support groups, and giving individual support to a subject leader in, for example, lesson observation and feedback. In one example, an LEA literacy consultant works regularly with a school's literacy team to help them with their action plan. A number of headteachers referred to LEA support as "patchy" and certainly evidence from my interviews suggests that support across LEAs differs widely.

Financial resources

It is no surprise that headteachers identify lack of finance as a key barrier to the effective work of subject leaders. In the words of one headteacher:

"You can't expect the best if they're doing it in their own time."

There is a wide variability in the resources that headteachers say they have available to support subject leaders. The budget in one school was described as being "at rock bottom" so all subject leadership work is done in staff meeting time or the teachers' own time. In another school, a non class-based teacher is able to release subject leaders on a rota in the autumn term but is then needed in the foundation stage from January. Meanwhile in another school, the budget allows for non class-based deputy and assistant headteachers who provide non-contact time throughout the year.

One headteacher has implemented a cost-effective way of supporting subject leaders. He has appointed a "resource officer": a teaching assistant whose role is to work for each subject leader in turn auditing, organising and ordering resources, leaving the subject leaders themselves time to focus on teaching and learning.

School visits: what the subject leaders said

Having talked to the headteachers, it was obviously important to get the perspective of the subject leaders themselves. I asked them three broad questions:

What do you do as subject leader?

I compiled a list of the responses that I received to this question:

- action planning: writing a plan and monitoring and evaluating the plan during the year
- resourcing: auditing, ordering, tidying the cupboard, managing the budget, applying for grants
- policy: writing and updating policies and guidelines “so that everyone knows what they should be doing”
- curriculum: writing and revising the scheme of work
- monitoring: lesson observations, pupil interviews, work scrutiny, checking planning
- assessment: assessing work samples, analysing test data, compiling portfolios of work
- supporting: helping colleagues with planning, team teaching
- professional development: keeping up-to-date with curriculum development, organising and leading training, working with LEA consultants, visiting other schools
- promoting the subject: organising special events, running extra-curricular activities, preparing for awards (eg Artsmark) “being enthusiastic”
- strategic decisions: eg whether to “set” for the teaching of a subject

No one teacher claimed to do all of these things; individual schools put particular emphases on particular tasks. These are some illustrative examples of certain key tasks being carried out in different schools:

- A PE leader who organises a wide range of after-school sports clubs provided by external providers.
- A history leader who organises a whole school history week each year with cross-curricular links involving children, parents and the wider community to “raise the profile” of the subject and “make the curriculum more interesting for our children.”
- An RE/PHSE leader who “presents” a revised draft scheme of work at a staff meeting every term having compiled a file of long term plans for the teacher and a box of resources for the children.
- A maths leader who leads a termly staff meeting at which representatives from each year group scrutinise samples of work then feed back to year teams.
- An ICT leader who manages the work of the school’s ICT technician to ensure the smooth running of the network and associated equipment in the school.

Whilst subject leaders have lots to do, there is a greater uncertainty about a job description which formally defines what they should be doing in school. Some teachers were able to refer to particular documents. Others said:

“Nobody actually told me what to do.”

“You pick it up as you go along.”

“You learn by osmosis.”

No teacher made reference to the national standards for subject leaders.

How is it going?

Time, or lack of it, was the immediate response given in almost every school to the question “How is it going?” This was the case whether teachers received non-contact time or not. It seems that the role expands to fill all the time available.

“There’s never enough time!”

Almost all of the teachers I interviewed taught their own class and saw clearly where their priorities should lie:

“You have to balance [the role] with your class of children and your class comes first.”

All of them emphasised the need to be organised and to have an action plan to help prioritise and set realistic goals. None of the teachers interviewed referred to the National Agreement for teacher workload but they talked of the need to have “quality time” to be able to do “quality work”.

Another common issue was the relative experience of the subject leader and the level of their subject knowledge. This was the case when they were seen by other teachers as the experts:

“You feel... you have to be able to give the answer but sometimes you don’t have the answer.”

“People want instant remedies.”

It was a concern for some of those subject leaders who were asked to carry out lesson observations:

“It can be hard going to see a colleague teach if they are more experienced.”

There was a feeling that a teacher has to prove themselves before they can pass judgement:

“[The role] becomes easier as you become more established in the school and people see that what you do works.”

However, this is not always the case. In the schools where a teacher visiting other teachers' classrooms has become the norm, subject leaders are able to admit that sometimes they are the ones who are learning when they carry out a class observation. In these schools it is very clear that relationships between staff are positive:

"We're lucky to have a staff that is enthusiastic: that makes my job easier."

Linked to this is the notion of reciprocity:

"We're all professionals ... we're all equals ... you get help from everybody else. That's why we work so well as a team."

In other words, the geography leader organises the maps for the other teachers so it saves them time and in turn they know that, for example, the science leader will have sorted out the magnets for them. This understanding of the reciprocal nature of the benefits of the work is a powerful motivation for subject leaders to do their job thoroughly:

"It sounds corny but it's one big team."

Where schools use the team approach to subject leadership, it is seen as a valuable support:

"Before [when I led a subject on my own], I felt vulnerable and isolated."

"When you are subject leader on your own you feel you are making decisions for the whole school by yourself."

"When you feed back decisions to the staff they appreciate what you say because you're part of a team."

Interestingly, even where there was no specific team approach to subject leadership, subject leaders still saw themselves as part of a team and emphasised the importance of "getting support from other people (in and out of school) and keeping other people in the know".

Although all subject leaders knew they should be doing lesson monitoring, there was certainly a reluctance to make critical comments about the work of fellow teachers.

"You can't go up to someone and say 'you're not doing what you're supposed to do'."

"I feel underqualified to criticise someone else's performance ... you have a lot of respect for people you work with."

Of the 16 subject leaders interviewed, not one had a story of a difficult confrontation with a colleague. On the contrary, they were very positive about teachers they work with:

"I don't have to persuade or twist anybody's arm."

"People take [the subject] seriously and do make sure it's all done so there's not much pressure worrying that it's not being done."

The confrontational aspect of subject leadership, and certainly anything that was seen as being related to managing the performance of teachers, was seen as the job of the headteacher or deputy headteacher. Subject leaders had a “softer” role; they used phrases like:

“[getting] a broad vision of the subject.”

“Seeing the whole subject, seeing progression and seeing the dips.”

There was no hint that this was anything less than what the headteacher required. Indeed, in one school, the advice from the headteacher was that the subject leaders should not feel pressurised to be too judgemental.

What are the benefits?

The DfES expects subject leaders to focus on improving standards of teaching and learning in their subject. The outcome of my research suggests that subject leaders are very uncertain about the contribution of their work to standards in the school. On the other hand, they are much clearer about the benefits to their own professional development.

Subject leaders gave examples of the tangible tasks that they had completed as proof of the benefits of their work for the school. Providing resources and improving schemes of work were seen as key tasks:

“It all comes down to resourcing; the teachers are such good facilitators that you don’t really need to help them.”

“Everybody knows what they are doing and when they are doing it and have the resources they need.”

One subject leader saw the benefit of her work on improving the professional development of staff; she felt that staff benefited from the staff meetings and training that she had organised. Subject leaders of core subjects who were also senior teachers were the only teachers who had considered the standards in the school as reflected in test data. Even then, they did not claim responsibility for standards seeing them rather as a “whole school issue.”

In all the schools I visited, the view was expressed that being a subject leader was beneficial for the subject leader themselves. Subject leaders get to attend training, they get to visit other schools and in particular they get to see other teachers teach. Comments about visiting other teachers included:

“It’s not so much monitoring; just great to see other teachers teaching.”

“A lot of it is for me ... for my own professional development”.

“It makes you think about your own teaching.”

In one school, there is a clear acknowledgement that one of the reasons for classroom observations is to learn from the experience and the school’s lesson observation sheet has the prompt “What would you take back from this lesson for your own teaching?”

A summary of the issues and six questions for school leadership teams

My research, rooted in the reality of the daily grind of coping in busy primary schools, raises six fundamental concerns about the role of subject leader:

1. Headteachers are concerned about the need for joining up the leadership and management in the school. The devolution of decision-making, while having obvious advantages, also increases the complexity of the structures that need to be in place in the school. If the headteacher delegates a task, what mechanism is in place to check that the task is done to the required standard?

If your subject leaders lead the subject, who leads the subject leader?

2. Headteachers and subject leaders in my research are concerned about the subject knowledge demands that the subject leader role makes on teachers who first and foremost should be excellent classroom practitioners. Primary school teachers are almost always generalists rather than specialists, teaching all subjects in one part of the school. As subject leaders, we ask them to be specialists across the whole age range even though many of them may have only taught in one key stage.

Do your subject leaders have the subject knowledge they need across the whole age range in your school to be able to do the job?

3. Headteachers and subject leaders are unhappy about subject leaders making critical judgements about fellow teachers. Headteachers recognise that training and support is needed to do that difficult job but it is not always available. Teachers are reluctant to be critical of peers for whom they have respect.

Do you expect your subject leaders to confront unsatisfactory performance?

4. The DfES has a school improvement agenda foremost in its mind when thinking of subject leaders. However, subject leaders typically prefer to see the role as an opportunity for their own professional development rather than as a direct means of raising standards in their subject.

Who takes responsibility for standards in your school?

5. Subject leaders who I interviewed list 10 key tasks which made up their role. The National Standards for Subject Leaders list 36 tasks under four main headings. Headteachers are very aware of the need to give quality time to subject leaders so that they can carry out their work and subject leaders see time as a major issue. The National Agreement places an obligation on headteachers and governors to provide that time but provision in the schools I visited varies widely and is dependent on individual school budgets.

Is the job description for your subject leaders feasible in the time you give them?

6. Where have all the subject leaders gone? They're tidying the cupboard. It is not a surprise that every single subject leaders talks about their role as resource managers. That is not necessarily because they do not understand the need to do other things but, rather, comes from a belief that if teachers have the right resources, they will do a better job. It is also the part of the role that is achievable and less threatening. However, teachers make expensive bottle washers.

Is it necessary for a teacher to do all the things you ask your subject leader to do?

Some ways out of the cupboard

None of the schools I visited claim to have all the answers to establishing effective subject leaders so that they have a positive impact on standards of teaching and learning in the school. However, each of the schools offers ideas that could be taken by other schools to develop the effectiveness of the role of subject leader. I have given them under three headings, but there are links and overlaps between the three:

Teamwork

The role of single subject leaders in a school is a daunting role. An alternative that some schools are finding works well is a team of teachers working together. This could be:

- a team that works on one subject
- a team that works on a group of subjects; for example, a “core” group working on English, maths and PHSE (or whatever a school sees as “core”)
- a team that works on themes across a range of subjects; a “teaching and learning committee” working on, for example, assessment for learning or creativity

Teams typically have representatives from different key stages; “a foot in every camp”, as one headteacher put it. Teamwork gives the opportunity for more experienced teachers to mentor newly qualified teachers or stronger teachers to support weaker teachers. If teams have a senior member of staff involved, the link with the senior leadership team is stronger. The advantages of this type of teamwork are:

- greater collaborative learning between teachers
- stronger links between key stages across the school
- a wider consultative base
- a shared workload
- a system less likely to stall if individual teachers move on
- greater opportunities for teachers to gain expertise for a range of subjects more in keeping with a generalist class teacher

Michael Fullan in *The new meaning of educational change* commented: “Change involves learning to do something new, and interaction is the primary basis for social learning”, (Fullan, 1991). A team of teachers working together on curriculum development will be talking, reflecting and learning about teaching in a way that an isolated subject leader cannot do.

In *Working Laterally* (2003), David Hargreaves talks of unlocking the creative innovations of teachers: “Teachers need to share good practice and transfer it more rapidly. Lateral networks do this more effectively than top-down hierarchies.” Hargreaves talks of the school’s “intellectual capital”, the talents and expertise of all staff in a school being used peer to peer. His innovation vision fits completely with the role of a subject leader being at the very heart of school improvement.

Teaching teachers

In a recent Ofsted report on ICT in schools (Ofsted, 2004), it was noted that “where co-ordination is weak it is often because the ICT co-ordinator works without the full support of senior management”. The issue was highlighted in a recent NCSL Leading Practice seminar (NCSL December 2003); middle leaders need “support from a headteacher who is willing to enable middle leadership”.

If headteachers are serious about distributed leadership, then they need to give time and energy to supporting and developing leadership roles in the school. Alma Harris and Linda Lambert in *Building leadership capacity for school improvement* highlight the important role of the headteacher creating infrastructures to support teacher leadership, giving opportunities for teachers to lead and celebrating innovation and expertise. “[These headteachers] were teaching others in the school to understand what they were doing and to be able to behave in similar ways. They were the ‘teachers of teachers’ when it came to building leadership capacity” (Harris and Lambert, 2003).

Coaching is a particularly effective approach to adopt in a learning community as it does not require the coach to know everything. A useful definition of coaching by Max Landsberg is that it is “based on helping people to help themselves through interacting dynamically with them – it does not rely on a one-way flow of telling and instructing” (Landsberg, 2003). It is a learning experience for coach and coachee. Headteachers can coach teacher leaders; teacher leaders can coach peers so that change is a positive, constructive process rather than a negative judgemental one.

Clarifying the relationship between middle leaders and senior leaders in the school so that leadership is joined up is a key task. The question is posed by Leithwood and Riehl in *What we know about successful school leadership*: “If leadership functions are indeed distributed across many informal roles in a school, how are these roles co-ordinated and who takes responsibility for what?” (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003) Middle leaders at the NCSL Leading Practice seminar wanted responsibility and status within the school to be able to do the job: “There’s no point in being told you are all part of a team if no one listens and you have no influence.”

Schools in my research do some of the following:

- Make the development of subject leaders a theme in the school development plan.
- Make explicit the roles and responsibilities of the subject leader in an up-to-date job description.
- Revise the management structure in the school to include subject leaders or subject teams indicating in a diagram or matrix, channels of communication and responsibility.
- Provide training and support in the particular skills that are needed by subject leaders. For example:
 - ✓ Action planning.
 - ✓ Data analysis.
 - ✓ Communication.
 - ✓ Facilitation.
 - ✓ Coaching.
 - ✓ Classroom observation and feedback.
 - ✓ Resource management.

Teachers leading teaching and learning

As part of the National Agreement, headteachers are now obliged to review the workload of subject leaders and give them time or support to help them get the job done. The remodelling process has a teacher recruitment and retention element but the DfES also maintains that it supports the standards agenda:

“The proposed remodelling of the workforce has the potential radically to transform our schools ... teachers can be given the opportunity to concentrate more fully on the education of our children.” (Stephen Adams, Chair, National Association of Governors and Managers)

This point was echoed by Professor Geoff Southworth at the middle leaders' Leading Practice seminar. He identified one of the most important changes in the role of middle leaders as: “the change from resource manager to leader of teaching and learning”. However, my interviews suggest that subject leaders will revert to resource management as a familiar, perhaps more comfortable, option unless the headteacher and senior leaders refocus them on teaching and learning.

Schools in my research are trying a number of ideas:

- Headteachers plan a cycle of tasks to be completed each term using after-school staff meeting time to do the work. For example, staff work, often in teams, to write subject action plans, analyse work samples or review schemes of work. Staff meeting time is no longer used for “housekeeping” items; these are relegated to 10 minute lunchtime briefings, quick consultation notices on the notice board or weekly timetables on the staffroom whiteboard to keep everyone in touch.
- Making imaginative use of non class-based teachers to release subject leaders to do specific coaching tasks that have to be done during school time such as demonstrating an element of teaching or teaching alongside another teacher.
- Headteachers or senior teachers who previously had a large amount of time out of the classroom are themselves doing more teaching in turn for distributing leadership tasks.
- Using administrative staff or teaching assistants to audit, order and organise resources, working for the subject leaders in turn is a more cost-effective approach than paying for teacher time. Teachers are the most expensive resource in a school; they are not best used counting the bulbs and batteries.

The role of subject leader is an extremely demanding one. Left to their own devices, subject leaders will not have the expertise, influence, time or even the inclination to do more than open the post and tidy the shelves. If subject leaders are going to lead, it is the responsibility of headteachers to stop them spending their time tidying the cupboard and help them to work with other teachers in the school, sharing their talents and expertise so that they can begin to make a positive impact on teaching and learning in the school.

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Appendix: research methodology

It is difficult to find schools where interesting things are going on with subject leaders. My initial approach was to contact LEAs for their recommendations. Some LEAs were uncertain where there was good practice within their own authority; however, three schools in the enquiry were selected after recommendations from advisors. The other three schools were approached through NCSL.

My research method was simple. In each school I interviewed the headteacher and then two, three or four subject leaders. In all but one school, I recorded the interviews as well as making notes. The tape recordings were useful for recalling quotations to illustrate the views of the interviewees. A summary of the interviews was sent to the headteacher to check for accuracy.

I asked the headteachers about their background and about their school and then four questions:

What is your role in developing subject leadership?

What do you hope to achieve?

How is it going?

What are the benefits?

What top tips do you have for other headteachers keen to develop subject leadership?

I interviewed a total of 16 subject leaders. In all cases, the subject leaders had been chosen by the headteacher although not always with any warning. I was never aware that they had been “primed” by the headteacher! They had varying degrees of experience as subject leaders and led a range of subjects, core subjects, foundation subjects, PHSE and curriculum enrichment. A few of the subject leaders had responsibility for more than one subject. Some of the interviewees were senior teachers in the school. In most cases I interviewed subject leaders individually; in one case I spoke to a group together, in another, I observed a curriculum team meeting. I asked subject leaders four questions:

What do you do as subject leader?

How is it going?

What are the benefits?

What top tips do you have for other subject leaders?

The schools in the enquiry

| School | Type | Approximate number on roll |
|--------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | City primary school | 700 |
| 2 | Town primary school | 260 |
| 3 | Town primary school | 240 |
| 4 | Town primary school | 180 |
| 5 | Town primary school | 330 |
| 6 | Town primary school | 320 |

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