

Building the Leadership Pool in London Schools

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Overview

London urgently needs more headteachers and system leaders to lead raising pupil achievement still further, to meet the demand for new school places and to replace the many heads who are now approaching retirement. Our schools have many talented middle and senior leaders but currently we are not doing enough to help them become the head teachers of the future. Creating this leadership pool in London requires more support for aspirant headteachers and system leaders, both at a school and system level.

This report was commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA), on behalf of a pan-London group of education organisations and interests¹, to identify what London education agencies can do to address this challenge.

Research task and evidence gathered

We sought to identify:

- the professional development and leadership support available through national and London programmes
- the extent to which middle leaders and senior leaders aspire to become headteachers – and headteachers aspire to system leadership
- barriers to progression
- additional mechanisms to support teachers' journeys to leadership.

Significantly, the report's findings draw on an online survey of 397 middle and senior leaders and 268 headteachers and system leaders. They told us about their aspirations for headship and shared their experiences of current leadership training. The response we received was huge for a survey of this sort.

We also interviewed 35 key opinion leaders, all of whom were involved in system-wide approaches to leadership development. They came from the public and private sectors, both within education and beyond. Follow up interviews were conducted with ten middle and senior leaders and

¹ Greater London Authority (GLA), Association of London Directors of Children's Services, Heads of School Improvement in London (HOSI), Chair of Borough Headteachers' Groups, Regional Schools Commissioners, London representative of the Teaching Schools Council and Teaching and Leadership Adviser, NCTL/DfE.

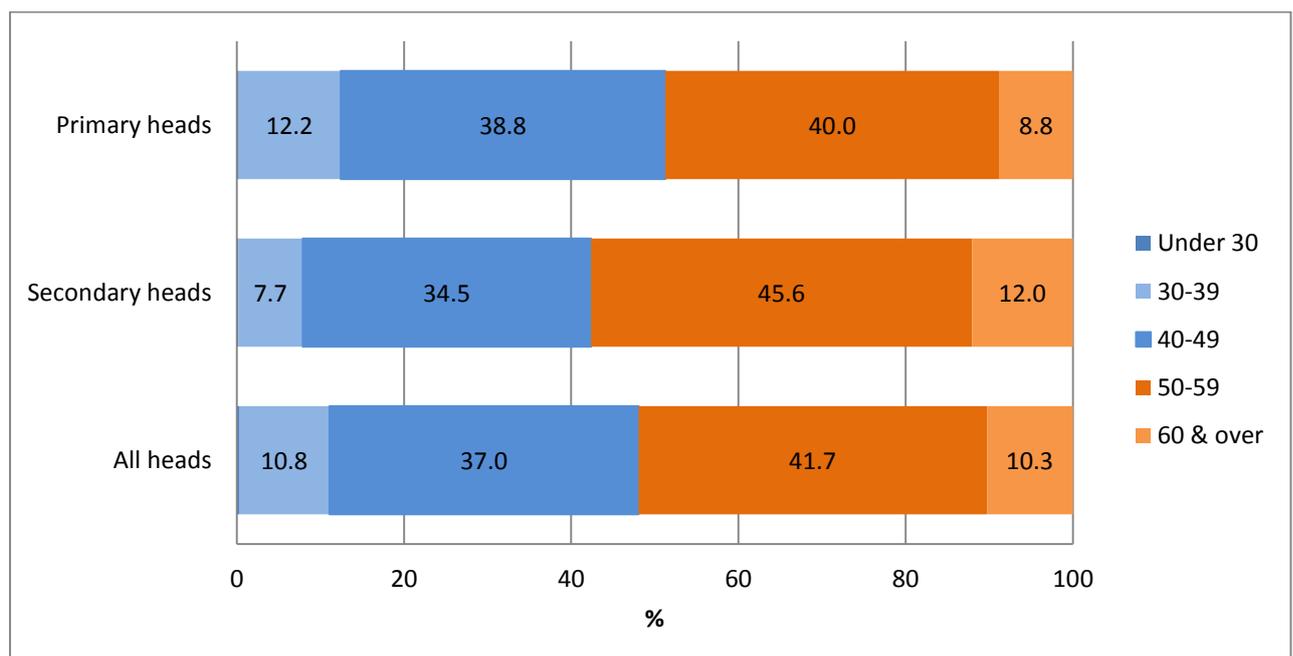
headteachers. There was desk research into CPD currently on offer and data analysis of the profile of leaders in London using the school workforce census. Roundtable discussion events held with representatives of various pan-London agencies or groups

Change is needed

The way school leaders are developed needs to change. The current approach to filling school leadership vacancies is reactive instead of proactive. Instead, system level talent management needs to be introduced to enhance what can be achieved through succession planning on an individual school basis.

A number of factors impact on the quality and size of the school leadership pool in the capital: the disproportionate demand for school places in London is placing increasing pressure on the system and over 50% of headteachers in London are fifty and approaching retirement. As a result, governors report finding it harder to attract good headteachers in London and re-advertising rates for headteacher posts are higher in London than in other regions. Whilst London has a culture of collaboration that attracts and retains leaders, the capital struggles to retain all its leaders as some move out, largely due to the affordability of housing and quality of life.

Figure 1: Percentage of heads by age in state funded schools in London 2014 (n=2578)²

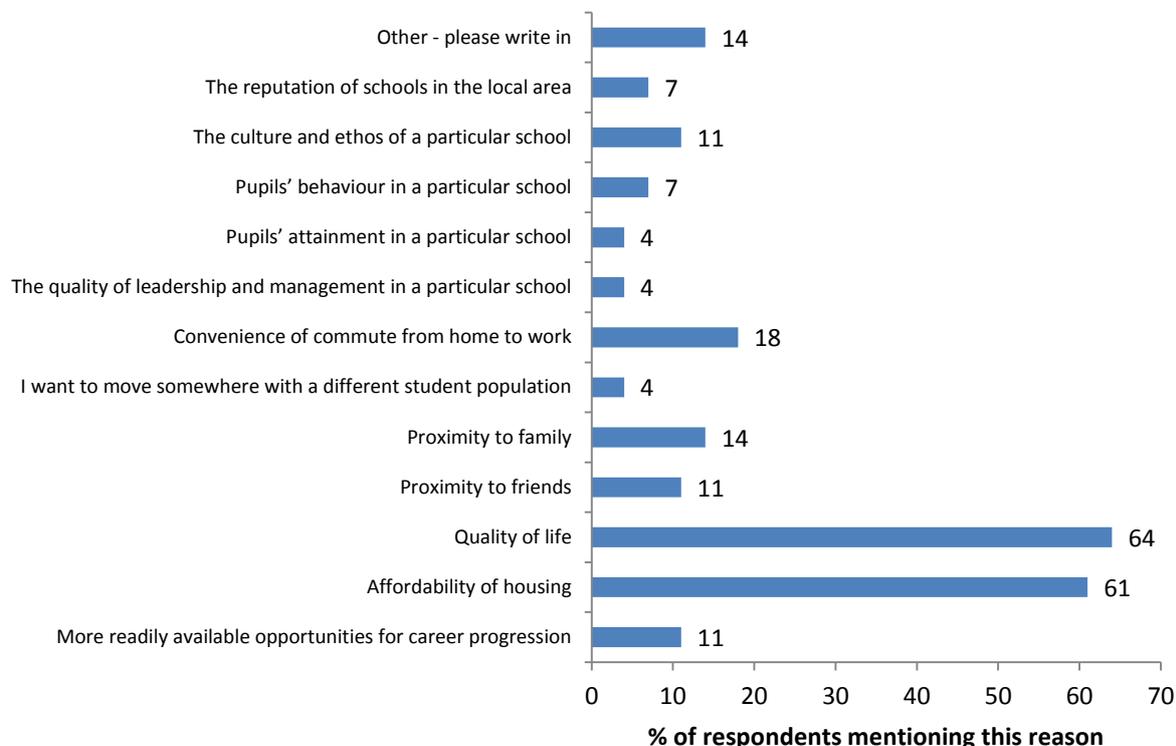


Further pressures loom on the horizon: the demands of headship are changing, and opportunities to play a wider system-leader role within a self-improving school system – for example through executive headship – are increasing. System level changes such as the drive to improve ‘coasting schools’ will significantly impact on the demand for heads and system leaders in the medium to longer term.

² DfE analysis of the school workforce survey 2014

A difficult but rewarding role

Figure 2: The reasons middle and senior leaders are considering moving out of London to pursue leadership (n=28)



The demand for more school leaders comes at a time when for many the role of headteacher feels particularly unappealing³ due to the stress of accountability and workload. Yet the research demonstrates that the desire to become a headteacher remains strong, and is even more pronounced in London than the rest of the country.

When people do become leaders, particularly those in London, it is primarily to 'make a difference' to pupils, closely followed by the chance to implement one's own vision. However for some, the role of headteacher and system leader are perceived as too far removed from pupils and staff and too focused on the business of running a school.

Inconsistent support for leadership development

A key finding of this research was that the quality of leadership development and the support leaders have to realise their ambitions varies from school to school. A fifth of middle and senior leaders and a tenth of deputy headteachers who want to become headteachers do not have influential figures in their school who take an interest in their headship aspirations. For headteachers, nearly a quarter do not have any colleagues internally or externally who take an interest in their system leadership aspirations.

³ The Key headteacher survey found that 87% of London headteachers feel that the attractiveness of headship as a career choice has worsened in the last five years. (The Key, State of Education Survey, 2015)

Figure 3: Middle and senior leader aspirations to be a head by region & phase

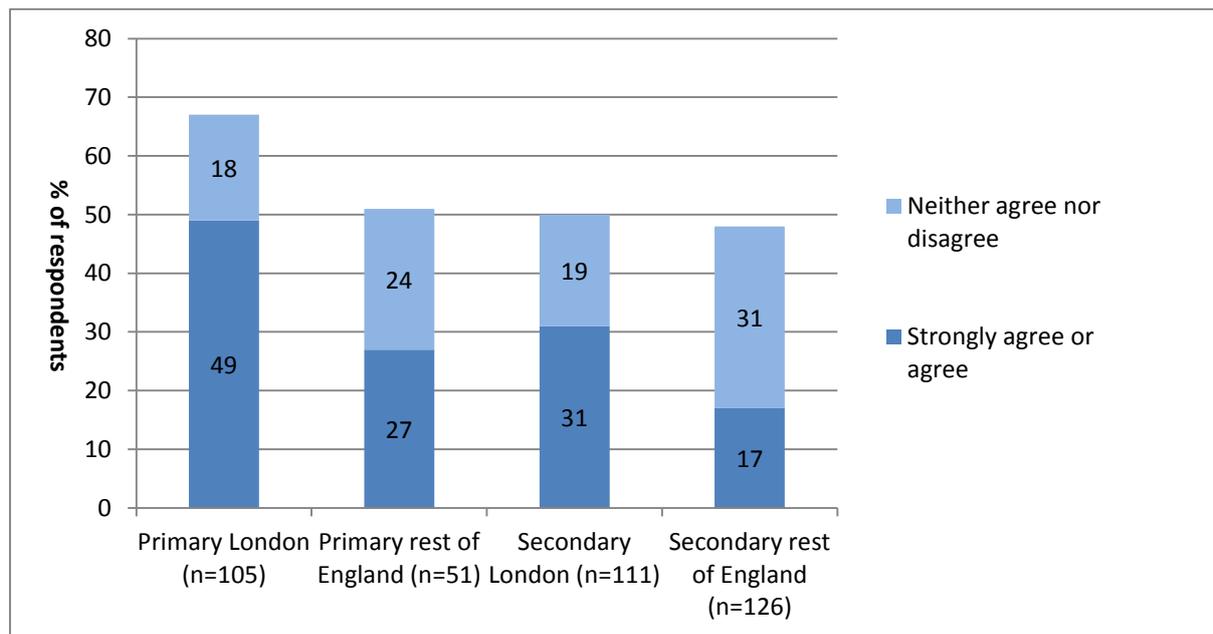
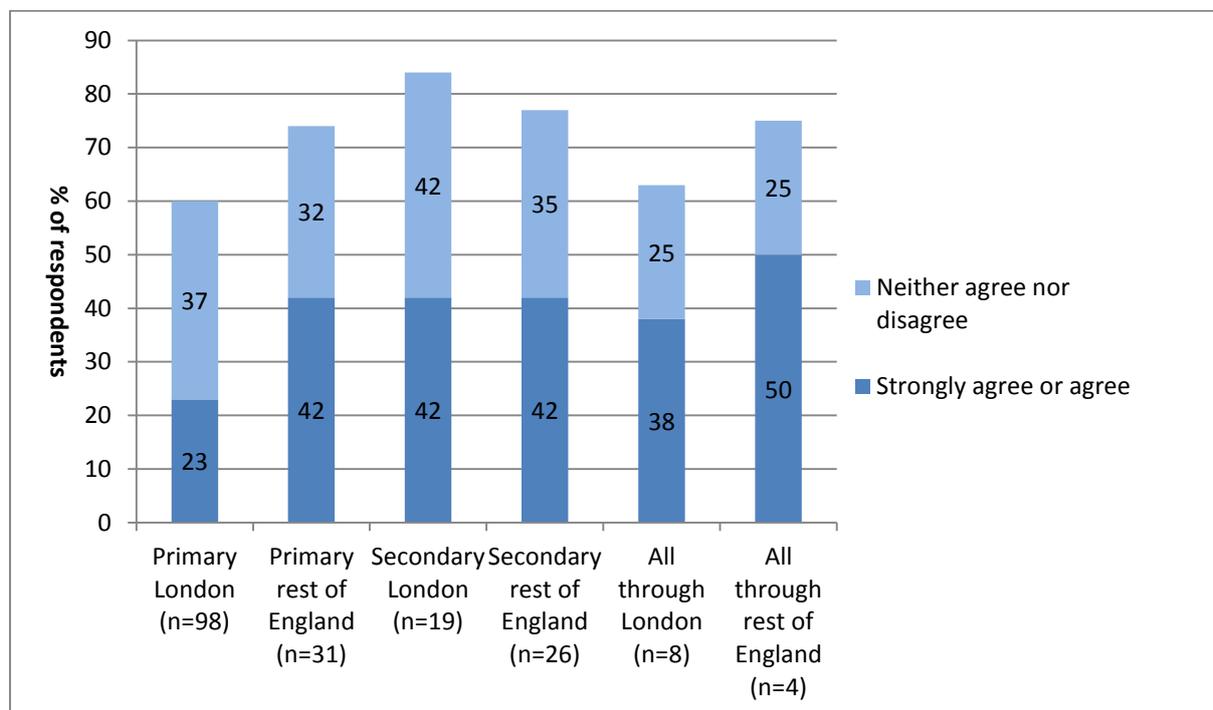


Figure 4: Headteacher aspirations to become a system leader by region and phase



This can leave progression too dependent on individual ambition and willingness to apply for opportunities. Furthermore, the market place for leadership development is complex, fluid and hard for schools and individuals to navigate on their own. There are significant gaps between the kind of support aspirant leaders receive and want to receive. For

example, although 76% of London middle and senior leaders who are interested in headship want access to secondment opportunities, only 17% receive this support⁴.

The current route to headship does not favour young, fast track or career changing headteachers. As a result, older white males are over-represented within the population of headteachers and there is some evidence that conservative appointments by governing bodies compound a lack of diversity in the headship population.

Establishing a school leadership talent pool

Key opinion leaders suggested establishing a school leadership talent pool for London which nurtures and supports a group of teachers to become London headteachers, and eventually system leaders. This would go a long way to addressing the issues highlighted above. Adopting this more proactive, talent management approach would ensure London had more of the outstanding school and system leaders that it needs. It is a model that exists in other countries⁵ but which has never been tried systematically in England.

Adopting the talent pool model in London could offer:

- A formal and transparent leadership development programme that sits alongside existing routes.
- A highly visible and prestigious investment in leadership development for the capital.
- An effective model for identifying people with ability and supporting them to seek a London headship.
- Someone outside the school to take an interest in teachers' career aspirations.
- Access to a package of learning and support informed by best practice from business and elsewhere in the public sector.
- Access and exposure to positive role models and opportunities to learn on the job in a range of settings through secondments and shadowing.
- Quality assurance of candidates – thus supporting school governors during recruitment and making it easier for them to appoint candidates from under-represented groups.

London education agencies should develop and consult on a detailed proposal for establishing a school leadership talent pool for London.

Key conclusions

- **More needs to be done to secure the leadership pool for the future** and this report has demonstrated a high level of support for a London-wide initiative to address this.
- The issues raised by this report are **beyond the remit of any single organisation** so actions required are addressed to London education agencies as a whole.
- **There are significant gaps between what aspiring heads and system leaders say they want and what they receive** and London education agencies could bridge this gap by working more collaboratively together.

⁴ Data from the survey undertaken for this report. Number of London middle and senior leaders interested in headship is 85. Further details of the survey can be found in Appendix 1

⁵ Barber, M, Whelan, F, and Clark, M, *Capturing the leadership premium: How the world's top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future* McKinsey 2010 Exhibit 5, p.10.

- The growing shortage of headteachers and system leaders is not unique to London although some of the challenges are. Many of **the interventions proposed in this report could be equally transferable to other regions** – perhaps following a pilot in London.
- The **cost of housing** in London is a key issue impacting the supply of headteachers but since it is beyond the remit of London education agencies, this report makes no specific recommendations in this area.

Next steps

The report proposes the following next steps for consideration by London’s education agencies:

- A greater focus on the **planned and systematic attraction, identification, development, engagement, retention and deployment** of future London school and system leaders which reflects the future needs of London’s pupils, schools and the wider economy.
- **Commission a London-wide schools’ talent management strategy** or encourage all London schools to be part of a grouping (such as a teaching school alliance or multi-academy trust) which has a proactive approach to talent management.
- Prioritise interventions that **build the pipeline of future headteachers and system leaders** and that match what leaders are requesting, such as secondments and mentoring from a current headteacher or system leader.
- Help individuals and schools to **navigate the market in leadership development courses**.
- Showcase the **opportunities for collaboration and peer support in London** and **make the moral case** for becoming a London headteacher and system leader explicit.
- Focus on **how to reach those leaders** who receive little support for their leadership aspirations and fewer opportunities for professional development from their school. **Increase governors’ confidence to appoint candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences** such as commissioning specialist training.