

Report of the Ethical Leadership Commission to the Association of School and College Leaders' Annual Conference 2018



What is the Ethical Leadership Commission (ELC)?

- 1 We face ethical dilemmas every day but we don't have an agreed framework that enables us to explore and test them against ethical principles.

The National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers published by the Department for Education (DfE) has little to say on the subject of ethics, beyond stating that excellent headteachers:

Demonstrate optimistic personal behaviour, positive relationships and attitudes towards their pupils and staff, and towards parents, governors and members of the local community.

And that they:

Lead by example - with integrity, creativity, resilience, and clarity - drawing on their own scholarship, expertise and skills, and that of those around them.

The *Teachers' Standards* states that teachers should:

Uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour.

They set out a series of broad behaviours applicable to all in education but which does not address the specific responsibilities of leadership.

- 2 Members of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) expressed concern about the absence of an ethical framework for education leadership, particularly in the context of a fragmented system in which accountability measures and their consequences are severe, and in which decisions are often taken under great pressure, and with competing demands in play.

They felt that a clear set of principles, owned by the profession, was needed to help us all navigate the educational moral maze.

- 3 In April 2017, we put together a commission of opinion-formers from across education:

- Martyn Beer, Deputy Head, Bootham School, York, and ASCL Council member
- Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive, Freedom and Autonomy for Schools National Association (FASNA)
- Professor Becky Francis, Director of University College of London Institute of Education
- The Rev Nigel Genders, Chief Education Officer of the Church of England
- Dr Peter Kent, International Confederation of Principals
- Emma Knights, Chief Executive, National Governance Association (NGA)
- Anne Lyons, President of the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT)
- Julie McCulloch, Interim Director of Policy, ASCL
- Dr Jane Martin CBE, Committee on Standards in Public Life
- Valentine Mulholland, Head of Policy, NAHT
- Stephen Munday, Teaching Schools Council
- Dame Alison Peacock, Chief Executive, Chartered College of Teaching
- Dr William Richardson, General Secretary, Headmasters' and Headmistresses' Conference (HMC)
- Carolyn Roberts (chair), Honorary Secretary, ASCL
- Amanda Spielman, HM Chief Inspector, Ofsted
- Roger Steare, Corporate Philosopher in Residence at the Cass Business School
- James Toop, Chief Executive, Ambition School Leadership
- Malcolm Trobe CBE, Deputy General Secretary, ASCL

- 4 The Commission has met six times, and will continue to meet until autumn 2018.

The work of the ELC

- 5 We spent a long time considering the value, or otherwise, of a code of ethics for educational leaders, and decided against it. Our profession has enough performance indicators and grade descriptors, and we wanted leaders to engage at a personal level rather than seeing our challenge as another tick-list.
- 6 Instead, we focused on defining and developing a set of principles and virtues against which we can test our decision-making in educational leadership. It will help us all if standards to which we expect to be held, or hold others to, are explicit.

We took as our starting point the seven principles of public life (also known as the Nolan principles):

- selflessness
- integrity
- objectivity
- accountability
- openness
- honesty
- leadership

We described how these principles apply to education leadership and we developed a list of personal characteristics or virtues necessary for ethical leadership, and how these inform our behaviour.

- 7 Our draft *Ethical Framework for Educational Leadership* is detailed at the end of this report. The ELC is currently consulting widely on the framework and we hope you will join in the discussion on our proposals at Annual Conference 2018. We aim to give clear structure to what most teachers and headteachers know intuitively, and that it will help us make the right decisions for the good of our children and young people, and all of our futures. If you have any thoughts on our draft *Ethical Framework for Educational Leadership*, or on ethical leadership in education, please send your comments to Carolyn at codeofethics@ascl.org.uk

How is consultation happening?

- 8 Our commissioners bring great experience and expertise to the table. We have a concurrent programme of taking evidence from other stakeholders. We have met with representatives of religious groups who run schools, academics involved in ethical thinking, and other education unions; we intend to meet with media and think-tanks, and representatives of multi-academy trusts. After Annual Conference we will approach government.
- 9 We want Annual Conference to be the start of mass involvement from ASCL members and we will be asking for your views in the coming weeks. Further information will be provided on the **ELC webpage** (see link in Further information), and via the weekly ASCL member email newsletter.
- 10 The ELC will continue to meet until September 2018, when we are aiming to present the following to government and the profession:
 - a Our ***Ethical Framework for Educational Leadership***
 - b A proposal for **embedding the framework in professional development programmes**
 - c A proposal for the establishment of a **committee for ethical educational leadership**

Embedding the framework in professional development programmes

- 11** This project has been initiated by ASCL, and we want to make sure ethical leadership is at the heart of what we do. As the framework develops we will:
- include the language of ethics in the support we provide to members, and publish a report on the types of ethical dilemmas faced by our members
 - embed the framework in our training programmes and develop materials for the ASCL programme for the National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership (NPQEL)
 - work with other providers of leadership and governance training to develop and reinforce a consistent message on ethical leadership
 - build towards links with initial teacher training, middle leadership and senior leadership training routes so that the framework is the backbone of our system
- 12** If the framework is adopted within the wider school and college system, collaborations and partnerships, and formal training programmes could be developed where desired or required. This should be led and moderated by a successor body to the ELC.

Establishment of a committee for ethical educational leadership

- 13** Our work may best become embedded in our profession by the establishment in the longer term of a committee which discusses ethical, educational leadership issues. This is not a proposal for a regulatory body, but for a group which can consider emerging system-wide issues. For example, it would be beneficial to the stability of our system - and the service we offer children and young people, their parents and communities - if the committee is able to examine policy changes for ethical implications as they arise, and advise government accordingly. We are all aware how policy can drive 'perverse incentives', and the committee could operate as a valuable sounding board for government to mitigate against unintended consequences.
- 14** The ELC will focus on this in 2018, informed by input from the Committee for Standards in Public Life to ascertain how it would work best.

Adopting the *Ethical Framework for Educational Leadership*

- 15** ASCL will adopt the framework and it may be that leaders and institutions might also formally align themselves. This could take the form of a statement of ethical leadership principles for adoption and constant discussion, not as a code of conduct, checklist or key performance indicators. Institutions will develop their own practice on this.
- 16** We hope that the framework might also give worried colleagues confidence in calling out unethical behaviour and assist the advice and support structures of professional associations in the guidance that they give to members who face such dilemmas.
- 17** The International Confederation of Principals (representing school leaders from across the world) has aligned itself with the work of the ELC and has committed itself to promoting the framework to its members.

The draft *Ethical Framework for Educational Leadership*

The draft *Ethical Framework for Educational Leadership* is based upon the seven principles of public life.

- 1 Selflessness** School and college leaders should act solely in the interest of children and young people.
- 2 Integrity** School and college leaders must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. Before acting and taking decisions, they must declare and resolve openly any perceived conflict of interest and relationships.
- 3 Objectivity** School and college leaders must act and take decisions impartially and fairly, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias. Leaders should be dispassionate, exercising judgement and analysis for the good of children and young people.
- 4 Accountability** School and college leaders are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- 5 Openness** School and college leaders should expect to act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from scrutiny unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- 6 Honesty** School and college leaders should be truthful.
- 7 Leadership** School and college leaders should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles, and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs. Leaders include both those who are paid to lead schools and colleges and those who volunteer to govern them.

Schools and colleges serve children and young people and help them grow into fulfilled and valued citizens. As role models for the young, how we behave as leaders is as important as what we do. Leaders should show leadership through the following personal characteristics or virtues:

- a) Trust:** *leaders should be trustworthy and reliable*
They hold trust on behalf of children and should be beyond reproach. We are honest about our motivations.
- b) Wisdom:** *leaders use experience, knowledge and insight*
Leaders should use experience, knowledge, insight, understanding and good sense to make sound judgements. They should demonstrate restraint and self-awareness, act calmly and rationally, exercising moderation and propriety as they serve their schools and colleges wisely.
- c) Kindness:** *leaders demonstrate respect, generosity of spirit, understanding and good temper*
Where unavoidable conflict occurs, difficult messages should be given humanely.
- d) Justice:** *leaders should be fair and work for the good of all children*
Leaders should work fairly, for the good of children from all backgrounds. They should seek to enable all young people to lead useful, happy and fulfilling lives.
- e) Service:** *leaders should be conscientious and dutiful*
We should demonstrate humility and self-control, supporting the structures and rules which safeguard quality. Our actions should protect high-quality education.
- f) Courage:** *leaders should work courageously in the best interests of children and young people*
We protect their safety and their right to a broad, effective and creative education. We should hold one another to account courageously.
- g) Optimism:** *leaders should be positive and encouraging*
Despite difficulties and pressures, we are developing excellent education to change the world for the better.

Further information

ASCL Ethical Leadership Commission www.ascl.org.uk/policy/ascl-ethical-leadership-commission.html

DfE, National Standards of Excellence for Headteachers

www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-standards-of-excellence-for-headteachers

DfE, *Teachers' Standards*

www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards

Committee on Standards in Public Life, *The seven principles of public life*

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life

Carolyn Roberts

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