

**System Leadership in an Academy School in England and a Charter School in the United States  
of America**

by

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## **Abstract**

This research-based thesis explores system leadership as a form of leadership used in educational settings. A detailed and comprehensive review of literature surrounding system leadership has been carried out to gain an understanding into system leadership and ways in which it can be utilised. The research involves two case study schools. The first case study was an academy school in England, which was part of a larger Multi-Academy Trust, the second a charter school in the United States of America. The theoretical framework of system leadership developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) is the lens used to view system leadership through when reviewing the data collected from the case study schools and investigating the utilising of system leadership by leaders in each of the case study schools.

The research utilises mixed data collection methods including questionnaires, interviews, and physical observations. Questionnaires utilising a web-based questionnaire tool were sent to leaders in the two case study schools, and then semi-structured interviews with leaders in both schools were carried out face-to-face. Data is analysed using a pattern matching technique to see if the data collected matched the theoretical framework of system leadership developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). This framework highlights key areas of system leadership, as defined by Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009). The key value at the centre of this framework is leading with moral imperative. The aim of the research is to compare the data gathered to the theoretical framework, in order to understand if system leadership is being utilised by leaders in the two case study schools, and to what extent.

The data highlights that the respondents involved in the research, from both the academy school in England and the charter school in the United States of America, held 'moral imperative' at the centre of their leadership approach. They have a strong belief in doing what was right for their students, parents/carers and their local community. Having moral purpose at the centre is key to the model of system leadership further developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) and was very apparent in questionnaire and interview responses from all. All other aspects of the system leadership model developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) are also present in the responses of the leaders in both schools. The research provides evidence that the system leadership approach adopted within the educational establishments involved in this research lead with moral purpose at the centre. This impacts on my work as a leader in an educational setting, with moral purpose at the centre of my leadership, and the dissemination of this to the setting and wider academy trust.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ACT – American College Testing

CMO – Charter Management Organisation

DfE – Department for Education

EAL – English as a Additional Language

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

EMO – Education Management Organisation

LA – Local Authority

LEA – Local Education Authority

LPD – Leadership preparation and development

MAT – Multi Academy Trust

NLPs – National Leaders of Education

NPQH – National Professional Qualification in Headship

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Ofsted – Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills

PSHE – Personal, Social and Health Education

RI – Requires improvement

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SIPs – School Improvement Partners

SLE – Specialist leader of education

USA – United States of America

UTC – University Technology College



## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Locating the Study**

I have been fortunate to have worked in secondary education for the last sixteen years, as a teacher and then a school leader. At the start of my career, as a science teacher, I had very little involvement in whole school leadership. My focus was on teaching and learning and developing strategies to support my students. As my experience and confidence grew, I undertook leadership roles – firstly as a key stage leader, then as a second in department, a head of department and then into whole school leadership. During this journey I have worked in seven different schools, and five education authorities, from central Birmingham to rural Cornwall, to city centre Coventry and then onto a new ‘studio college’ and to my current role as an assistant principal responsible for pastoral development in inner city Leicester.

During my career journey many aspects in the field of education have changed, including the move from schools being under Local Authority (LA) control, to the start of academisation, free schools, and now schools forming partnership and Academy Trusts, both locally and nationally. I worked in several LA schools, then as a head of science in a new academy school which then formed a new Multi-Academy Trust. Then I became Assistant Principal in a new start-up Studio College, which was a part of a large Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). I am now an assistant principal in a school which went through the academisation process and joined a local academy trust following an ‘inadequate’ Ofsted inspection grading (Ofsted, 2017).

My interest in school leadership stemmed from being a part of the changes within education. Six years of senior leadership has demonstrated that roles and responsibilities are continuously evolving. The schools I have worked in no longer access ‘experts’ from the LA, who come in to advise subject teachers or members of the leadership team, the ‘expertise’ and guidance comes from within the academy trust or local partnership. School leaders, such as subject directors, can be employed by a Trust to work across schools with subject leaders, rather than in one school. At the start of my teaching career in 2005, budgeting, payroll, HR, and IT support were provided for all schools by the Local Education Authority (LEA). As we have now entered the times of Multi Academy Trusts, schools have centralised these systems themselves allowing each trust or standalone academy more autonomy over these affairs.

My experience of school leadership in school, and the taught sessions I attended at university, and the assignments I undertook as part of the EdD, initiated my particular interest in further investigating educational leadership. The Multi-Academy Trust in which I am employed actively promotes the use of system leadership as their chosen leadership model, and this prompted me to focus on, and examine this

model. My interest in education has always gone beyond what happens in English schools. Following a secondment to the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), and due to working with the International GCSE examination team at Pearson Education, I also have a particular interest in international schooling. Thus, when undertaking an initial review of research and literature, focussed on system leadership, I noted that in other countries, such as Finland and the United States of America (USA), it was a regularly cited leadership model. Following two summers working in the USA with students, this added to my interest, and the desire to interrogate whether a model being encouraged in English school leadership was being mirrored in similar autonomous schools in the USA, and the comparison, similarities, and diversity in these.

## **1.2 Aims of the Research**

My interest in system leadership stemmed from the two educational leadership modules studied within the EdD programme at the University of Birmingham. These covered middle and senior leadership within schools. The senior leadership module was of particular interest as it focussed on leadership methodologies and then the work of Gronn (1999) from his book *The making of educational leaders*. This sparked an interest in headteachers and senior leaders and how and why they lead schools in the way they do. Following a recommendation from one of the university's EdD tutors during this module, I then read Boylan's (2016) article, *Deepening system leadership: Teachers leading from below*, introducing me to the concept of system leadership and its role within schools and education. I was intrigued at the idea of an educational leadership methodology suggested specifically for leaders within academies because at that time I was working for a school that had just gone through academisation and this article interested me in terms of the senior leadership involvement in this process. I wanted to further investigate how school leaders led within their school and across others, at times, whilst keeping students at the forefront of their minds. Through my research, during the EdD modules, I also found the nature of academies evolving in a similar way to charter schools in the USA to be fascinating. The networks of academies in England, and charter schools in the USA seemed to have grown from very similar beginnings, and this led to my decision to focus on this for my research. This formulated the aims of my research, then leading onto my research questions.

Aims of research:

1. To investigate and analyse the concept and role of system leadership as an approach to school leadership.

2. To analyse areas of commonality and difference in the formation and development of academies and charter schools.
3. To explore school leaders' experiences and perceptions of system leadership, as an approach to leadership in an academy in England and a charter school in the United States of America.
4. To review and analyse the way in which school leaders, in an academy and a charter school, were involved in system leadership and their views on its impact on school improvement.
5. To contribute to and extend the research base around system leadership in academies and charter schools, and make recommendations for future development, research, and practice.

These aims have then enabled me to focus my research questions:

1. What insights do school leaders' accounts provide on the use of system leadership as an approach to leadership in an academy?
2. What insights do school leaders' accounts provide on the use of system leadership as an approach to leadership in a charter school?

I wanted to focus on two very different schools within this project, using system leadership as a lens to investigate the leadership approaches within them. The academy school, as part of a larger multi-academy trust, was the focus of one case study. The research takes account of the leadership approach in relation to leading the academy and being part of a MAT. The charter school reflects the community aspects of school leadership, hence why this school was chosen.

### **1.3 Educational Systems**

During the twenty first century there have been significant social and economic changes in educational systems. There has been an increased focus on the performance of students in schools, and high expectations have been placed on schools. This has most frequently occurred in countries where schools have been deemed as not reaching the standards required, and where there has been a recognition that schools are not delivering the quality of education that parents and educators would like for their children (Eyles *et al.*, 2016)

Fullan (2003) stated that the context of what education and schools provided was changing and the job of the school leader needed to change to meet the changing context. Pont *et al.* (2008, p.3) noted that school leaders: ‘...must not only prepare all their students to participate successfully in the new global economy and society; they must take increasing responsibility for helping to develop other schools, their local communities and other public services. This means that school leaders must become system leaders.’ Carpenter and Peak (2013, p.150) suggested that reform of education systems across the globe had to be led by school leaders, and as such: ‘the quality of a school’s leadership is one of the most important school characteristics affecting student’s learning, second only to the quality of a school’s teachers.’ This had led to schools working with other stakeholders such as social care and health to oversee not just the learning of students but their welfare in a much more far-reaching way. School leadership has had to evolve so that principals are not just working in their schools, but across agencies with a wide variety of professionals overseeing students who leave them as young adults prepared to contribute to the economy and society in a positive way.

#### **1.4 Research Context**

The DfE (2010) ‘*The Importance of Teaching*’ paper laid out its vision for what it defined as a ‘self-improving’ school system, and this led to some schools moving away from Local Authority (LA) control. Close (2016, p.113) described the vision of the DfE as being one of using ‘system leadership’ where, ‘teachers and schools would be responsible for their own improvement. They would learn from each other and from research so that effective practice spread. The best schools and leaders would extend their reach across other schools so that all schools improved, and government intervention or support would be minimised’.

Bush (2007, p.391) has described how interest in educational leadership has grown greatly during the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He explained that ‘this is because of the widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes a significant difference to school and student outcomes.’ Change in educational policy, and the educational landscape, has led to some school leaders becoming more autonomous. Eyles *et al.*, (2016, p.456) stated that: ‘The notion of giving schools more autonomy, and that the decentralized operation of schools has scope to improve performance, has been a crucial ingredient at the heart of the recent school reform movement’. Alongside Austria, Sweden, New Zealand, Belgium and Australia, England has undertaken a process of academisation of some schools (Eyles *et al.*, 2016).

The purpose of this research is to make sense of the object: system leadership. It is not possible to investigate the role in which system leadership features within schools without considering the

environments in which the research occurred in, and the humans involved within the research, myself as the researcher included. Figure 1 shows the possible contexts of system leadership within this piece of research, in terms of local context, school context, wider context and philosophical context.

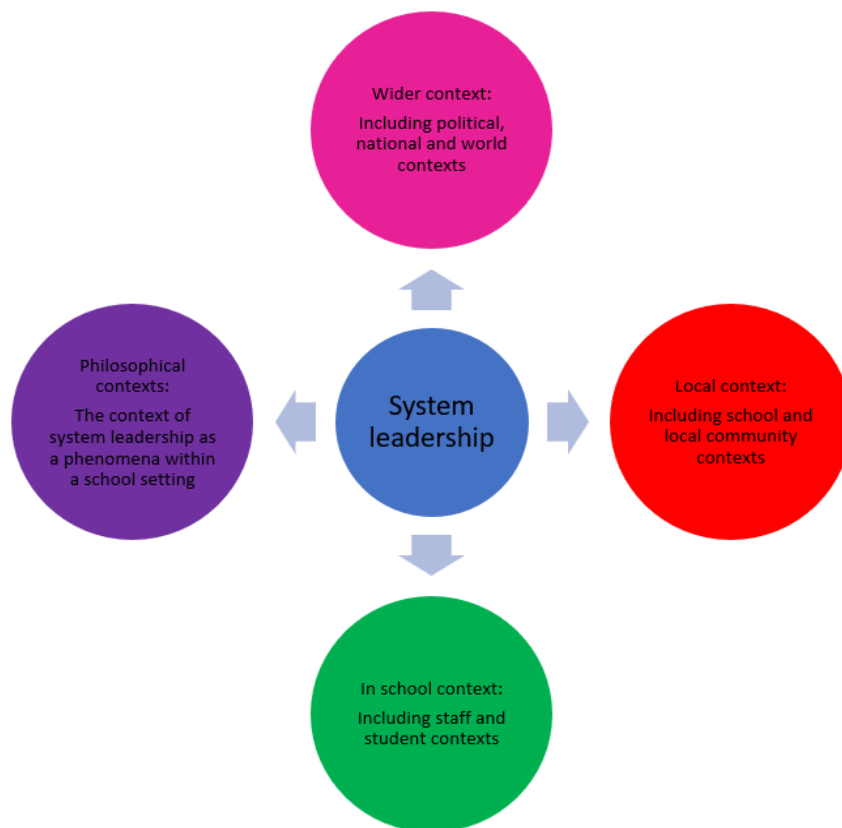


*Figure 1: The possible contexts of system leadership*

As Pring (2000) explained, educational research is not something where one context exists in isolation, but a case where contexts overlap and interact with each other. It is important to understand the different contexts surrounding the one which is the centre of the research and these contexts all co-exist with each other and will have an impact upon each other. It is important to understand, as a researcher in education, the different contexts which may have an influence or impact upon the context being researched. Figure 1 above shows some of the contexts which could have an impact upon the research context of *system leadership*. Pring (2000) went on to explain further, it is not the presence of other contexts which causes an issue, but failure of the researcher to acknowledge them. He draws the attention of the researcher to the continually changing fields and contexts surrounding educational research such as funding, curriculum, political landscape, governmental policies, and worldwide influences. This leads to a

continually changing context within the field of educational research. Connections must be identified between the continually changing social structures within the world and our place as a researcher within the world, ‘what is researched is to be understood within the context with which, and through which, it has been constructed’ (Pring, 2002, p.48). Figure 1 shows the context of the research; however, it does not show the full complexity of the interlocking contexts in which this research sits. Heidegger would express this as thought of Being-in-the-World and that we can explore aspects of this to piece the world together (Wisniewski, 2013).

### **1.5 The Reflexive Dimension of the Research**

‘As researchers, the meanings we attach to things that happen and the language we use to describe them are the product of our own culture, social background, and personal experiences’, (Denscombe, 1998, p.86). It is important to recognise that the personal beliefs, values, and ideas of the researcher will impact upon their research and their view of their research (Denscombe, 1998). As Robson (2016, p.170) explained, people are involved in research and people exist in the real world, meaning that they are, ‘conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them’. This is true of researchers, and they will choose their research topic due to an intrinsic interest within that topic.

As Denscombe (1998) explained, research is beneficial when you have knowledge from within, however when you are an insider researcher your own field you must be careful not to ignore what the researcher may feel as too mundane, or too usual to register as an important factor to the research. Care must be taken as an insider within the research to note what may be the expected. As a researcher looking into your own world there will be a sense of self within the research, and it is important that the researcher reflects upon their own position in terms of the research with a degree of introspection to understand how personal values, beliefs and experiences may affect the insights gained in the research.

### **1.6 Location of ‘Self’**

As suggested by Bourdieu (1977), it is important for the researcher to first have and deepen their understanding of ‘self’ and their own position in the world. This will help them better understand others. Pring (2000) explained that an understanding of self is important within research to ensure that the researcher is fully aware of what they are viewing in the world, ‘is this the *real* world that I am observing – or one that is interpreted through my own personal (and subjective?) scheme of things?’ (p.35). It is necessary to locate ourselves within our research world so that we are aware of our interactions with it. The research must make this key so that accurate observations of the world in which we are researching are made.

Reflexivity allows researchers to reflect upon and then acknowledge the part of ‘self’ within their research and the part it plays in the research. It is key so researchers are aware of any bias or preconceptions their own beliefs, values and personal experiences may bring to the research. It is not easy to be self-reflective but vitally important when conducting research. The researcher needs to understand their own positioning in relation to their research, ‘in my practice I have found self-reflection vital in understanding how I am relating to my research and how this subsequently informs my practice’, (Bell, 1998, p.180). It is key to understand how your journey as a researcher and as a human in the *real* brings you to the point of your research world. There is an overlapping of realities made from personal context, social context and environmental context and as a researcher it is important to locate self within these contexts as explained by Bell (1998), ‘reality is complex and no single view will be adequate to explain the nature of complexity within and around us’, (p.181).

I am currently an assistant principal in a large city secondary school where I have been for four years. My role has evolved considerably with my main role being working with our local community, feeder primary schools and in the safeguarding team. Before this role I have worked in secondary education since completing my MEng in Civil Engineering. Previously I spent five years as a Head of Science and then moved into senior leadership with teaching and learning responsibilities in senior leadership. My current job was my first move into pastoral leadership. It has changed my own positioning in terms of my real world as I see education through different eyes working pastorally, rather than focussing on simply the academic performance of cohorts of students which are the focus when a head of subject. I purposefully chose my current workplace as when I joined it has not converted to academy status and was not part of a trust. Having previously worked in a school having just academised and forming its own trust, I was sceptical about the benefits of this.

Deciding on my research focus made me think about the role academies now play within education and how in my sixteen years of teaching this has changed. I had always felt a certain ‘safety’ working for an LEA and feel that academies do not offer this in the same way. I have experienced more redundancies being made in academy schools than in LEA schools. Moving into leadership in a school which then started going through academisation interested me and influenced my decision to investigate leadership in an academy. The school I joined had achieved an ‘inadequate’ Ofsted rating (2017) and was going through academisation as well as joining a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). The school I joined as an assistant principal was a member of a multi academy trust. The deputy CEO of the trust described at interview the way in which system leadership was used within the school, and other schools, within the trust. This was explained as a way in which the students at all trust schools were equally as invested in

by leaders at all levels. System leadership was described to me as a way in which all leaders were able to have impact and work together so that school improvement could occur. As a new member of the leadership team, I was interested to interrogate the potential of a system leadership, what the approach would mean in practice, and to focus my research on this.

I am aware that my positioning in terms of my research was also to help me understand my role as a leader and how I could improve that and sparked by an interest in academisation and a feeling of ‘is it really worth it?’ and ‘does it really impact me as a leader in education?’. After initial reading into academy conversion, I began to read how this was a similar system to the charter school movement in the USA. I have always had a keen interest in education in other countries, having originally become a teacher to work around the world. My summers spent working in Virginia, USA with children aged 3-18 and a history of family members working in the USA has embedded within me a fondness for the country. I am aware it was impossible to remove ‘self’ from this piece of research due to having personal opinions, beliefs, and values on some aspects of this thesis, particularly academies and academisation. However, I carefully planned the methods for data collection to remove bias as much as possible to report the findings of this study as honestly and as trustworthy as possible (Cohen *et al.*, 2011)

The initial reading and research undertaken focussed on system leadership, as suggested to me by an EdD university tutor following the Senior School Leadership EdD module made me initially sceptical about its use in practice. I understood the theoretical idea of linking key aspects of schools together for simplification, such as HR and IT. However, I was unsure of whether one head teacher, based initially in one school, would be able to move between schools and invest sufficient time, energy and interest in each school, to ensure that the school would gain the necessary leadership. I could see the idea of system leadership in education could lead to a dynamic leadership style, and I have always believed, myself, as a teacher and now a school leader that we should always be guided by our moral purpose towards the education of students. I was interested to see if this could be so in practice.

### **1.7 Research Justification and Focus**

The motivation behind the research was based on my own career in education. In the early stages of my career, the school system in England was one of schools being under the control of the LEA. During the last fifteen years, this has shifted to many secondary schools in England becoming academies, or part of Multi Academy Trusts (MATs). The National Audit Office (2018) reported that 72% of secondary schools in England had converted to academies, and 27% of primary schools had converted to academies. The British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA, 2018) noted that England had 738 multi academy trusts in England containing two or more schools. This has greatly changed the dynamic

within schools. Having worked in a variety of LEA schools, academies and MATs, consideration of how leadership methods have changed and developed over time, has proven to be particularly interesting.

### **1.8 The Choice of Academy Schools and Charter Schools**

Elton and Male (2015, p.411) have described academies as, ‘publicly funded independent schools which do not have to follow the national curriculum and can set their own terms. They still have to follow the same rules on admissions, special educational needs and pupil exclusions as other state schools but get money directly from central government and not the local council’. Elton and Male (2015, p.411) described the key reason for the introduction of academisation as being to help with school improvement for low attaining schools for schools situated in, ‘communities with low academic aspirations.’ The two routes into becoming an academy were schools required to convert due to poor attainment following Ofsted inspections and then in 2010, following The Academies Act, those who voluntarily chose to convert to academy status. Elton and Male (2015, p.411) explained the academisation by stating, ‘upon conversion to an academy the school will become independent of the local authority and will be managed by a sponsor who will become proprietor. For those being required to become academies the process of conversion will then follow the same route as a school that has voluntarily chosen to have that status.’ Academy status enabled school leaders to gain more autonomy, such as choosing a curriculum to fit the needs of their cohort and local community by offering qualifications more specific for their pupils, rather than having to enforce students to complete a certain number of highly academic qualifications.

Charter schools have been defined by Bergeron (2017, p.722) as: ‘Public schools that are authorized by an external agency, with open enrolment that is often determined through a lottery. Charters are designed so that schools have more autonomy in budget, curriculum, scheduling, and hiring due to freedom from restrictive regulations.’ Barr, Sadovnik and Visconti (2006, p.292) stated that it was possible that charter schools would be able to ‘change the course of public schooling in America’ by offering more teacher innovation and autonomy as schools were not tied to local regulations and rules.

As well as seeking more autonomy, both academy and charter schools are also able to have more control over their taught curriculum, hiring and dismissal of staff members, centralised systems such as finance, HR and leadership structure. Both school types have seen a lot of publicity, both positive and negative since they emerged as schools of the future in their respective country. They can choose their leadership structure and methodology with more freedom, allowing them to think about what they believe to be important for their students, their communities, and their wider environments in a far more independent

way than schools in a centralised system such as a traditional public school in the USA or a local authority-controlled school in England.

Thomas (2016, p.21) described a case study as offering a piece of research that is, ‘a rich picture with many kinds of insights coming from different angles, from different kinds of information’. The research was undertaken in two case study schools, an academy school in England, and a charter school in the USA. The academy school was part of a larger multi academy trust and the charter school was a standalone charter school, working with the local school district.

The research utilised a theoretical framework of ‘system leadership’ developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). I investigated whether school leaders utilised aspects of this system leadership approach, within their respective organisations, and the insight that school leaders provided into this. The data collected was used to analyse how deeply embedded the use of system leadership was within the two organisations, by matching this to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews’s (2009) theoretical framework. Literature and data were reviewed and analysed, to develop knowledge and understanding of the systems leadership approach, the implementation, influence, and impact of this.

Thus, it was intended that the research would provide a unique consideration of two organisations, and from these trends, patterns, similarities, issues, challenges, and resolutions could be highlighted, to enhance knowledge and understanding within the field of educational leadership.

## **1.9 Signposting the Thesis**

This introduction chapter has provided a brief overview of the research and thesis, a rationale, aims, research questions, and my positionality, as the researcher, within the research. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature, focussed on methods of educational leadership, an overview of academy school and charter schools and an in-depth review of system leadership. Chapter 3 considers the research design, and methods utilised, including data collection, data analysis and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 provides the research findings and an analysis of these. Chapter 5, the concluding chapter, presents the key points from the research, links back to the research aims and questions, reviews strengths and limitations of the research, suggests further research, considers the contribution of the research, and the dissemination of this.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter 2 focusses on the first two research questions and includes the history and development of academy schools in England and charter schools in the United States of America (USA), and the political and controversial issues associated with the developments are reviewed to provide a contextual foundation for the research undertaken. Educational leadership approaches will be defined and considered. Literature and research surrounding the key theme of system leadership has then been reviewed to formalise a definition for system leadership that was used in the research, as well a review of the history behind the phrase and its place within leadership approaches in educational settings. A theoretical framework of system leadership developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) was reviewed and critiqued, as the underpinning theoretical framework for the research.

### **2.2 Literature Research Strategies**

Literature research strategies were used to find literature relevant to the context of the research. Much use was made of the University of Birmingham online library search so that suitable materials and academic literature could be identified. Web based searches using 'Google Scholar' also proved useful when identifying key websites and literature. The DfE website was used to source key government policies. Web searches of national newspapers in both England and the USA also proved useful sources of up-to-date information of key thinking and the most recent news stories concerning academy schools and charter schools. Web searches, particularly those involving 'Google Scholar' were used to identify key authors and key texts which the researcher then went onto explore in more detail. A search using the electronic library was made. Initially the following key words were used to identify key authors, research papers and professional journal articles: charter school, system leadership, academy, moral purpose. Once initial materials had been identified, reference lists from these provided further materials that were explored.

### **2.3 Definitions of Educational Leadership**

Much has been written over the years about the variety of leadership approaches used in the field of education. In this section some leadership approaches are briefly reviewed, to acknowledge that a variety of approaches exist and are utilised in schools, although the focus of the research is system leadership. It is important to note that there are recognised differences between what is defined as educational leadership, compared to educational management. Educational management and educational leadership both must co-exist in an educational setting. Cuban (1988, p.193) provided a clear distinction between management and leadership, whilst still stressing the importance both have within an education

organisation, clearly explaining how educational leadership is about the influence of the leader of others, compared to management being more an administrative function of a leadership role:

By leadership, I mean influencing others' actions in achieving desirable ends. Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently they initiate change to reach existing and new goals....Leadership....takes....much ingenuity, energy and skill.

Managing is maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational arrangements. While managing well often exhibit leadership skills, the overall function is toward maintenance rather than change.

Leadership and management co-exist within educational settings to ensure that a school is moving forwards, but also maintaining essential daily tasks. The focus within this thesis will be on the educational leadership aspects of school leaders, and if leaders utilise a system leadership approach within their respective settings, through their insights gained during the research. Several educational leadership approaches have emerged over the past 30 years, and a brief review of some of these are included in the following sections.

Transformational leadership was first termed by Burns (1978). Anderson (2017, p.3) stated that it was used initially, 'to define a process where leaders and followers work together to advance motivation and morale'. Anderson (2017, p.1) described transformational leadership as being, 'characterised by a leader who works with subordinates to identify needed change, create a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and execute the change in unisons with committed members of a group'. The key to transformational leadership is the school leader focussing on the school outcomes rather than the direction of these outcomes. It has been described by Leithwood *et al.*, (1999) as a form of leadership which relies upon high levels of personal commitment to achieve goals. The focus of transformational leadership is to motivate those following to perform in an improved way by having a focus on high order intrinsic needs by transforming their values, beliefs, and attitudes (Bass and Avolio, 1994).

Transformational leadership as a leadership method in education requires the leaders and staff within a school to have shared interests and values to lead a transformation of a school. However, if the visions were simply of the school leader alone then there would not be success. Bush (2011, p.72) described transformational leadership as being a collegial model of educational leadership, such as distributed leadership (described later in this section). Bush (2011, p.72) stated that these theories, 'emphasise that power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organisation'. The leadership behaviour associated with transformational leadership was broken down into eight

dimensions by Leithwood (1994). Leithwood (1994, p.507) suggested that the use of transformational leadership in education was a way to facilitate school restructuring by following the eight dimensions of transformational leadership given below.

- Identifies and articulates a vision
- Fosters the acceptance of group goals
- Conveys high-performance expectations
- Provides appropriate models
- Provides intellectual stimulation
- Provides individualised support
- Contingent reward (The leader tells staff what to do to be rewarded for their efforts)
- Management by exception

The key to the use of transformational leadership as a leadership method in education is that the leader (such as the principal of the school) can transform beliefs and attitudes of the followers (including the staff). As explained by Anderson (2017, p.3), ‘transformational leadership is a style of leadership that transformed follower attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, to a higher realm of motivation where the leader inspires followers to be motivated to rise above and beyond current levels of achievement and performance’. However, Bush (2007, p.396) described some issues with using transformational leadership in education, ‘transformation’ requires action at all levels and there are limits to what Principals can achieve’.

Leithwood *et al.*, (1999, p.14) noted another educational leadership approach, *managerial leadership* which ‘assumes that the focus of leaders ought to be on functions, tasks and behaviours and that if these functions are carried out competently the work of others in the organisation will be facilitated’. Managerial leadership was an approach that focussed on controlling tasks and day-to-day school running, rather than having a vision or direction for the school, staff, and students. The approach focussed on the head or Principal leading in terms of having control of the functions of the school, for other staff to be able to do their day-to-day job, rather than facilitating them to take on leadership of their own areas.

Bush (2007, p.395) described how managerial leadership ‘does not include the concept of vision, which is central to most leadership models. Managerial leadership is focussed on managing existing activities successfully rather than visioning a better future for the school’. This model of leadership may have

been used in schools with successful systems where there was no need to change or have new vision and could continue to move forwards as they were. However, as Bush (2003, p.46) stated it may not be the most appropriate leadership method to use 'if Principals and educators do not 'own' innovations but are simply required to implement externally imposed changes, they are likely to do so without enthusiasm, leading to possible failure'.

Research (Harris, 2008; Leithwood *et al.*, 2009, Spillane, 2006) noted that in the early 2000s, distributed leadership moved towards the forefront of models of educational leadership. Distributed leadership was described by Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) as a leadership theory where the leadership of an organisation was distributed between a variety of stakeholders. Harris (2002) described it as, 'the expansion of leadership roles in schools, beyond those in formal leadership or administrative posts.' The push for the use of distributed leadership in educational settings was in the forefront from 2004 onwards, and Groon (2006, p.1) described it as the 'new kid on the block'. The role distributed leadership can play within education has been further discussed by Gunter *et al.*, (2013) as being a good leadership model, 'that offers significant potential for schools wishing to transform the practice and outcomes of schooling in line with the modernisation process' (p.471). Distributed leadership enables growth within the leadership structure as it encourages others to become involved with leadership tasks. It also permits those with the most relevant experience in certain areas to be able to lead on these.

The appeal of distributed leadership has also been described by Spillane (2006, p.2) because it is a leadership method accessible to all. Distributed leadership in an educational field focussed on the leader distributing different areas of the oversight of education onto different leaders, with a focus on those in the best position for each 'job'. For example, distributing the leadership of a science department in a large secondary school to an experienced science teacher and subject specialist. Hammershaimb (2018, p.1) explained the purpose of distributed leadership as being 'to develop leadership with adequate diversity and skills to address sustainable operations and development in education'. Distributed leadership can focus on the leader most relevant to the task. This, in turn, will then ensure the best possible outcome, rather than having a person with more leadership experience (such as the deputy head) who may have little experience in the necessary area compared to another leader with less overall school experience.

The key to using distributed leadership in schools and ensuring schools were successful focussed on the individual in the distributed roles, and the staff within the educational establishment. Distributed leadership is not about one leader within an educational setting leading the development of the organisation, it is about there being multiple leaders having an input into the leadership and direction of

an educational organisation. Elmore (2000) described how distributed leadership relied upon the fact that the main leader within the organisation had the role of overseeing the others and by distributing leadership tasks a culture of openness and trust was secured. The principal or head teacher was not the only leader present in a school and their role was to oversee the organisation; other leadership tasks could be completed by other members of staff within the organisation. As powerful as distributing leadership around a school could be, as it ensured many staff were invested and taking a key role, distributed leadership must be handled with caution. As Timperley (2005, p.417) stated, ‘distributing leadership over more people is a risky business and may result in the greater distribution of incompetence’.

The final model to be discussed is moral leadership. This model permeated through from 1981(Sergiovanni) to 2010 and beyond. Bush (2007, p.400) described moral leadership as having a critical focus on, ‘the values, beliefs and ethics of leaders themselves’. Fullan (2003, p.19) went on to comment on leaders within education having ‘moral purpose’ with this being, ‘one of the greatest strengths one needs, especially in troubled times, is a strong sense of moral purpose’. Fullan (p.30) commented on how moral leadership within education was the only way to transform schools and school systems; ‘the driver should be moral purpose’. Moral leadership assumed that these values and beliefs coalesced into shared norms and meanings that either shape or reinforce culture.

## **2.4 The Development of Academies in England**

The 1944 Education Act in England established a national system of primary and secondary schools, under the supervision of Local Education Authorities (LEAs). Since 1944 there has been a continual refinement and movement of the English education system. Eyles *et al.*, (2017, p.118) stated that: ‘The English government has radically restructured its school system under the assumption that academisation delivers benefits to schools and students’. There has been notable change in the English educational landscape over the past twenty years. Much of this is due to the rise of schools moving away from LEA control and becoming academies and state-funded independent schools. 2002 saw the first academy school open in England (Gibson, 2018).

The academy programme significantly expanded after the new government came into power in 2010, due to the Academies Act (2010) inviting all schools to aspire to academy status (Eyles, 2017). The DfE Education Bill (2010) outlined what Morris (2020, p.1) described as an ‘invitation for both primary and secondary schools to be given the opportunity to become Academies’. Under the Coalition government, the expansion of the academies programme was dramatic. Academisation was one of the most prominent policies being used to do what Rayner (2018, p.750) described as, ‘re-shape the public education service

in England as a market' since it enabled thousands of schools to make the choice to remove themselves from the control of the LEA, increase their autonomy and have more control over their educational offer and the way they were led and managed.

Following the DfE (2010) Academies Act there was a large increase in the number of academy schools. The Academies Commission (2013) document *Unleashing Greatness* stated that there were 203 academies in May 2010, and this had increased to 2456 by November 2012. This report explained how there was a radical change in the English educational system. Over half of all secondary schools and a growing number of primary and special schools became academies or were in the pipeline to become one in 2013. By 2017, the number of state-run schools with Academy status amounted to 30% of schools (DfE, 2017). Free Schools, University Technology Colleges (UTCs) and Studio Schools also emerged, which were forms of academies. There was a new educational landscape and it developed with astonishing speed. The current landscape of schools in England has been described by Gibson (2018, p.82) as, 'the Academy model is an alternative System of school organisation; the stated aim of the national government is for all schools to become Academies and the preferred System of governance is within a multi-Academy trust'. In the DfE document (2020), *Open academies, free schools, studio schools and UTCs and academy projects awaiting approval: April 2020*, there were by April 2020, 9147 academies in the UK including secondaries, primaries, special schools, and alternative provision. At this point there were also 54 schools due to convert to academy status. in April 2020 and a further 557 awaiting conversion. 35.5% of mainstream primaries were, by April 2020, academies and 77.4% of mainstream secondaries.

DfE (2014) highlighted that one of the main attractions for schools converting to academy status was the increased autonomy gained due to moving away from LA control. Due to the Education Reform Act (1988), there was greater autonomy in schools as financial and appointment decisions became individual to schools rather than the LEA. This was more legal autonomy rather than the wider net of autonomy provided by academisation. As well as being in control of hiring and dismissing staff (previously this was led by the LEA), academy schools were able to exercise a range of freedoms they did not have when under LA control. This includes what Eyles *et al.*, (2016, p.471) stated as the ability to have been, 'opting out of and not being obliged (apart from core subjects) to follow the national curriculum', as well as having controlled their own HR, finance, and staff structure. Pre-2010 schools that converted to Academies did so due to poor performance and had students predominantly from disadvantaged backgrounds. These schools had to have a sponsor before being able to convert to Academy status. Post 2010, this was not the case and schools were able to convert to Academies without a sponsor and often were successful schools with far less students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Eyles *et al.*, 2016).

Following the DfE (2010) Academies Act, there was far more freedom given to schools to be able to convert to academy status, and there became a movement of academies joining together into small groups. When academies started to join into small groups these became known as academy chains, or Multi Academy trusts (MATs), Simkins *et al.*, (2018, p.7) described a multi academy trust: 'A MAT comprises a group of academies which operates as a single organisation under a single governing body'. The Academies Commission (2013, p.17) explained the term Academy chain to encompass, 'a wide range of groups of schools.' Academy trusts were state funded, but they operated outside of LEA control, enabling them more independence and freedom.

Gibson (2018, p.93) detailed that MATs had grown rapidly over the years following the DfE (2010) Academies Act 2010, 'in March 2011 there were 391 MATS and by November 2016 there were 1121, which contained 4140 schools.' By December 2016, 97% of academy converter schools had joined MATs. DfE (2016, p.4) *Multi-Academy Trusts. Good Practice guidance and expectations* provided 'non-statutory guidance'. It fulfilled the government's commitment to publish 'design principles' for Academy trusts, including those establishing new trusts and existing trusts planning to grow'. DfE (2016, p.5) explained how: 'Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) have been created by many of our best leaders, teachers, and governors to improve and sustain standards in our schools'.

Davies and Brighouse (2008, p.94) had previously described how the leadership used in Academies was key for their success. This was because, 'the *raison d'être* of the academies programme was to transform learning and educational opportunities in areas that had previously had inadequate educational performance by bringing fresh ideas and educational success.' After all, the initial Academies movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s required leaders to take on the challenge of schools who were more disadvantaged and challenge themselves to work with these schools to facilitate their improvement. Only appropriate leadership in these Academies, and later the MATs, would bring about the change that was so desired, this being the way in which leaders, teaching staff and support staff were deployed throughout the MAT.

## **2.5 Alternative Perspectives and Controversial Issues in the Development of Academies in England**

The initial introduction of academies in England was to enable underperforming secondary schools to improve. However, following the 2010 Academies Act, all schools in England were able to convert into academies if they so desired, including primary schools which has not initially been the case. Eyles *et al.*, (2017, p.108) described this as follows: 'in England schools that became academies have more

freedom over many ways in which they operate, including curriculum design, budgets, staffing issues and the shape of the academic year. However, the change to primaries has been controversial'. This is in part due to academisation leading to changes from traditional primary school catchment areas and therefore creating issues with student enrolment, and the issue of smaller primary schools having autonomy away from the support of the LEA.

Other issues following academisation were whether the autonomy, which academisation promised, was really taken up by academy schools. In the DfE (2014) report, '*Do academies make use of their autonomy?*' mixed results were shown of the changes schools had made due to their increased autonomy following academisation. As explained in the DfE (2014, p.23): '18 percent reported that they were unable to make at least one change they would have liked, most commonly a change to the length of school terms; changes to capital expenditure; increasing revenue generating activities; changes to staff pay and increasing the length of the school day'. DfE (2014, p.26) stated that financial autonomy was the main reason many schools in England chose to academise, over issues such as improvement in student attainment, or being able to change their catchment area: 'Three of the four most commonly made changes are linked to saving/having control over money but the academies who have made these changes do not necessarily link them to improved attainment'. Basset *et al.*, (2012) and Cirin (2014) researched that financial autonomy and financial issues were a key reason many schools converted to academies. Cirin (2014) found that 83% of academy respondents gave the ability to be in control of their own funding as the most common reason for converting to academy status.

Converting to academy status and removing the school from LEA control has led to many financial implications for schools. Smaller schools, such as many primaries in England, struggled with this as once they were academies, costs that had not fallen upon them before were now their responsibility. As explained by Eyles *et al.*, (2017, p.114), 'even though primary academies spent more on teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and other running costs after conversion, the increase was greater for administrative costs. This is true for schools in all Ofsted categories.'

Groups such as The Anti-Academies Alliance formed in the aftermath of widespread academisation. They have a strong standpoint against academisation and openly support schools returning to public hands. They actively encourage people to stand against academisation and have claimed that since academisation, 'over 70% of academies have less freedoms than they had before, as they are run by Multi-Academy Trusts and no longer exist as autonomous schools' (West and Wolfe, 2018, p.4). West and Wolfe (2018) explained some key findings around academies such as how having a system of trustees, rather than governors as in an LEA school, does not provide rigorous accountability and their

appointment, ‘remains opaque, and through processes that are not subject to rules on openness’ (West and Wolfe, 2018, p.5). Other key issues discussed by Wolfe and West (2018) surrounding academisation are issues of reduced curriculum opportunities as the National Curriculum does not have to be followed, a lack of published information and lack of detail over expenditure. Further to this, a 2017 report, *The impact of academies on educational outcomes*, do not provide the evidence that they are an automatic solution to school improvement. (Andrews and Perera, 2017).

Pre-2010 converter academies, who converted under the labour government, have shown to have a positive impact upon attainment of students, with GCSE grades improving to be at least one grade higher in an average of five subjects. This improvement in attainment is also evident in schools with an Ofsted rating of outstanding who converted after 2010. (Andres and Perera, 2017). However, the same cannot be said of schools rated as good, satisfactory, or inadequate showing improvements in pupil attainment if they are post-2010 academy converters.

## **2.6 The Development of Charter Schools in the United States of America**

The charter school movement in the United States of America began as part of an effort to seek to improve traditional public-school education. Marshall (2017, p2) explained that charter schools were ‘initially envisioned as independent public schools that would serve as laboratories of education innovation’. Bradford (2018, p.16) explained the rise of charter school growth in the United States as having a, ‘firm root in the American education landscape. What started with a few Minnesota schools in the early 1990s has burgeoned into a nationwide phenomenon, with nearly 7000 charter schools serving more than three million students in 43 states and the nation’s capital’. The initial idea for charter schools was put forward by Ray Budde. Budde (1998) proposed a model for changing school organisation with the aim of improving teaching and schooling in the United States of America.

The charter movement spread widely across the USA, and now 44 states have charters, encompassing over 7000 schools and 3 million students (data from Education Week, April 2018). 2004 was a key turning point for the number of charter school conversions due to the number of schools that were not meeting the Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks set out in Abowitzs’ (2010) ‘No Child Left Behind’. In this document, Abowitz (2010, p.537) explained how many advocates of charter schools had supported the movement a decade ago, ‘hoping that Charter school laws as well as other forms of public choice policies might be (re)formulated so that educational publics of all types might develop schools that would ensure high quality-education and democratic participatory parity for their children as future citizens’.

A charter school is different from a public school in the USA due to each having their own 'charter' which serves as a contract. Gawlik (2018, p.424) described 'the main purpose of Charter schools is to provide real parental choice, to reduce stifling bureaucracy, and to increase curricular and fiscal accountability while actualizing higher student achievement and parental satisfaction'. Each school's charter laid out the vision and mission of the school, their accountability, and their academic vision. Having their own charter enables each charter school to be exempt from many of the laws and regulations of the state in which the school is situated. Each state operates under a different charter law, but often the more freedom the charter school has, the more state accountability it faces. Unlike public schools, families chose where to send their students, often having gained a place taking the form of a lottery system, rather than being assigned to a school. Due to the autonomy offered to a charter school, they are often able to fill a specialised niche, particularly if the charter school is independent to any charter school groups or networks (Prothero, 2018)

According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2014), the charter school movement has seen a rapid increase in student enrolment. From 2003-2013 there was an increase of over 225% in terms of number of students on roll in charter schools across the USA. There are many reasons for this and Bergeron (2017, p.719) suggested charter schools were 'increasing their impact on educational reform across the country through charter-friendly policies. Key legislative objectives at both the state and federal levels have included providing more options for charter schools, expanding teachers' influence over decision-making, and increasing charter schools' autonomy from state and district policy'. Leahy and Shore (2018, p.1) further described the key features of charter schools including, '...these schools receive freedom to be innovative, autonomous, and driven by their charters or contracts, they also face a variety of political, financial, and organizational issues that typically differ from traditional public schools'.

Dressler (2001, p.177) stated that charter school principals needed to have the same vision and leadership ethos as all other school principals. They needed to inspire the teaching, learning and curriculum but also the oversee legal matters, community relationships and business and financial management; 'effective schools are led by Principals who have a clear vision of where they are going, who are knowledgeable enough about teaching and education to help teachers and students work towards desired ends, and who are able to protect the schools to operate on a professional basis.' Leadership in a charter school has often been a more diverse role than in a traditional public school due to the smaller nature of a charter school. The principal of a charter school often has had to hold a variety of leadership roles within the school that would have been split between a range of leaders in a traditional public school.

Given the autonomy of charter schools, their leadership needed to be different to that of a traditional public school. As explained by Campbell, Gross and Lake (2008), 'being a charter school leader brings about other challenges not often faced by Principals of traditional public schools, who receive support from their districts' central offices. For the charter school, there is no central office to recruit students and teachers, secure and manage facilities, or raise money and manage school finances.' The leadership of a charter school has been more than just the management of a school. As Dressler (2001, p.182) reported, 'the key outcomes of charter schools are designed to be more responsive and accountable to parents and the community. These targets require leadership that goes beyond management'. Due to the different demands placed upon the leadership team within a charter school and the increased autonomy, the principal has an increased responsibility compared to the principal of a traditional public school

The Philadelphia Inquirer (2019) described how oversubscribed charter schools had become in the city of Philadelphia because they were offering an alternative to traditional public schools. Charter schools proved a popular choice due to their flexible curriculum attracting a wide number of students who would have traditionally attended public schools. In this online newspaper article, Fioriello (2019) explained the gaining popularity of charter schools was due to being able to offer a tailor-made curriculum fitting community need offering more choice and making them more attractive to parents for their children.

## **2.7 Alternative Perspectives and Controversial Issues in the Development of Charter Schools in the United States of America**

Hanna (2020) stated charter schools have long since been a key issue in the USA and there has been much debate on the positives of charter schools. Zimmer *et al.*, (2009, p.1) explained, 'critics worry that Charter schools perform no better than TPSs, that they may exacerbate stratification by race and ability, and that they harm students left in TPSs by skimming away financial resources and motivated families.' However, they continued to gain popularity and increased their student numbers 25 years after they were originally set up. Frankenberg *et al.*, (2011, p.1) stated 'the political popularity of Charter schools is unmistakable'.

A comparison of charter schools with the traditional public schools in the USA suggested a variety of advantages and disadvantages. Prothero (2018) detailed some of the advantages as being that charter schools are far more autonomous, allowing a much broader curriculum to be taught, and for teachers to be far more innovative in the classroom, which allows for more student engagement in education. Bergeron (2017, p.719) explained, '...these public-school entities hold the promise of reforming education, particularly for the nation's most at-risk and underserved student populations'. However, there has been much debate over charter schools as the greater autonomy has led to issues such as

mismanagement of finances and poor results. Due to the relative freedom that charter schools have had from state and legislative law, and their autonomy over the curriculum they have been able to offer, and even the way in which they have been able to teach this, they have needed to meet specific results in terms of student achievement to keep their charter status.

Marshall (2017, p.3) explained that: 'Charter schools have been presented as one way to provide greater access to school choice to parents, especially those with fewer means.' It has however become apparent in some charter school cases that they were not doing this. But they were in fact, in the case of niche charter schools, as Marshall (2017, p. 3) went on to state, 'charter schools have the potential to promote equality and access, they often fall short of accomplishing these goals.' This has further been described by Eckes *et al.*, (2011) as some charter schools having been, 'ethnocentric or culturally orientated', with a focus on attracting students from certain social or ethnic groups by offering a curriculum that would appear to a certain group, or even integrating religion into cultural study. Eckes *et al.*, (2011, p.86) stated that, 'interest has focussed on the difficulty of niche charter schools' difficulty to deliver ethnocentric education without violating state or federal statutes concerning both student ethnicity and church/state entanglement'. Concern was raised that these niche charter schools were aiming to attract certain groups of students. Eckes *et al.*, (2011, p.87) stated 'niche charter schools are growing in popularity among some families in part because they provide a certain level of comfort for some students and may appeal to a particular interest of the student or the student's family'. Although this could provide some students with an alternative to traditional public schools in which they may not feel as comfortable, some worried that as Eckes *et al.*, (2011, p.87) described, 'that most of the students who enrol in these programmes choose to do so because the schools' values align with their own family and cultural background, and thereby, create cultural enclaves within the public school system'.

There are examples of charter schools serving certain religious groups, such as those described by Eckes *et al.*, (2011, p.88), one charter school in Florida which, 'characterizes itself as focusing on Hebrew strictly as a language, but it is named after Jewish high priest and is led by a rabbi. In Minnesota, the Tarik Ibn Ziyad Academy, which asserts it purely secular *raison d'être* has an Iman serving as the principal and the school focusses on the Muslim culture as well as the Arabic language. The school's pupils are almost entirely Muslim'. This caused some controversy as schools, according to the establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution explained prohibit 'state support of religion' (Eckes *et al.*, 2011, p.88). However, school leaders used the description of culture rather than religion to mitigate this.

There have been concerns that some charter schools have contravened Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This Act prohibits discrimination based upon colour, national origin or race and it stops schools from using racial quotas concerning admissions. Eckes *et al.*, (2011, p.90) stated that, ‘a Title VI could arise if a student was believed to have been denied a spot in the charter school because of his or her race or ethnicity. Title VI claims have been raised’. Marshall (2017, p.4) discussed this further, stating that: ‘one area of initial concern surrounding charter schools was that of student diversity’. He went on to explain how initially there was concern that charter schools, due to their autonomy and ability to design an innovative curriculum would attract white, privileged students stating, ‘this was certainly a possibility; it was reasonable to conceive a situation where the better educated, better informed, better connected, and overall more privileged families would be the ones who would take advantage of charter schools, especially in urban settings’.

## **2.8 Comparing Academy Schools and Charter Schools.**

Eyles *et al.*, (2017, p.109) described how primary academisation has been influenced by the introduction of other more autonomous schools internationally by explaining that, ‘this introduction of primary academies took place in an international context where publicly funded autonomous schools have become a familiar form of school improvement policy, most notably through charter schools in the US’. Academy schools and charter schools have both been seen as ways to bring about reform and self-improvement within schools. Charter schools, as described by Farrell, Wohlstetter and Smith (2012, p.499) ‘have been touted as one organizational model to be such a vehicle for reform’. Charter schools and academy schools were both designed to respond to the needs of the community in which they exist. Dressler (2001, p.173) also described this response of charter schools to their community as being that ‘Charter Schools are designed to respond to the needs of children and families by making fundamental changes in the form and substance of public education in the United States’.

Both academies and charter schools are accountable for their own student achievement. Many have a sponsor, whether this be a local university, business or in the USA a local school board or ‘authorizer’, which could be a university sponsor or private company. Both must have had a proven track record of academic success to attract students to attend them rather than the more traditional public-school options available to parents. Both types of school have also had a reasonable degree of freedom over their timetabling, term dates and curriculum. Both were funded by the state/LA, but have control over their own finances, giving them far more autonomy than public schools, especially in matters such as the hiring and firing of staff and budgeting for their own needs as a school.

Academy schools and charter schools are run independently from the LA or local school district, this being one of the reasons they were initially set up. Eyles *et al.*, (2016, p.2) stated that this was a characteristic feature of both academy schools and charter schools, in that they have 'greater autonomy and independent operation than a standard community school'. Charter schools are privately owned, and academies are not under LA control, and this enabled both school types far more freedom in decision making in terms of finances, curriculum, and teaching. Initially, both academy schools and charter schools were set up in areas with a high number of disadvantaged students.

Academy schools and charter schools were both predominantly introduced to bring about change in educational outcomes for the young people. The leadership style used needed to transform the school, the staff, the teaching and the learning, and the place of the school within the community to promote local buy-in. As Davies and Brighouse (2008, p.95) described 'transformation is not just about transforming teachers and students, it is about transforming the hopes and expectations of parents and the community'. It was also about changing and transforming organisational culture and it needed to be sustainable.

Both academy schools and charter schools had many parts of the individual organisation run from a central office. This allowed for a more joined up and more economically viable business side to both organisations by having single HR, finance, marketing, and recruitment departments at a central location for all schools within a MAT or school district. Both academies and charter schools were also able to draw students from different areas to the usual public school catchment area, where families have chosen to send their child to that school rather than their local school.

Charter and academy schools were actively encouraged to be set up by the relevant countries they are in to create self-improved and self-governed local schooling and a way in which to best meet the needs of the local community. As they are independent from state and local authority, they are able to set their own vision. As explained by Dressler (2001, p.176), 'founders of Charter schools have a clear purpose for their schools, a sense of accountability for determining the success of their schools and they strive to identify staff who will be a proper fit'.

A key difference between the two types of school is that academies tended to be schools which were already in existence and then converted to academy status, whereas many charter schools tended to be new start-up schools. Charter schools allocate places using a lottery system if they are oversubscribed, whereas entry into an academy in England follow the same rules as for place allocation as LA schools. Charter schools could originally be set up by community members, which is not true of academies.

However, both were initially set up as stand-alone establishments and some have grown into systems of schools, either MATs (academy schools) or management organisation or working alongside the local school district (charter schools).

## **2. 9 System Leadership in Education**

The term system leader can be used for a wide range of leaders both within education, and within external businesses and wider context such as those running a country. Senge, Hamilton and Kania (2015, p.27) described Nelson Mandela as the embodiment of a system leader, ‘someone able to bring forth collective leadership. In countless ways, large and small, he undertook interventions aimed at bringing together the remnants of a divided country to face their shared challenges collectively and build a new nation’. Macdonald *et al.*, (2018, p.3) explained that ‘system leadership is a coherent and integrated theory of organisational behaviour’ and then goes on to state that system leadership theory is unique as a leadership theory as system leadership theory does not just look at one part of an organisation, it is a leadership model focussing on the overall running of a system. A system leader is a leader who is able to oversee the system as well and improve and sustain it.

Within education there are system leaders and system leadership theory. A system leader in a school system undertakes a similar role to a system leader in any other organisation, whereby they take a variety of school departments, employees or whole schools at different stages and they bring these together to move them all forward by examining and working with the systems in play at each stage. Within the context of education, and the schools’ systems, Higham *et al.*, (2009, p.2) described a system leader as ‘a headteacher or senior teacher who works directly for the success and well-being of students in other schools as well as his own’. It is not simply just about leading across more than one school, but also ‘caring’ about the success of all schools within their leadership role. Fullan (2005) argued that system leadership was ‘led by moral purpose, without that, there would not be the passion to proceed or the encouragement for others to follow. This has led on to the system leadership model presented by Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009), showing that a system leader has moral purpose at the centre of their leadership methodology. They use this to focus their leadership over a range of schools, or a school and its community, and are focussed on the improvement and sustainability of the system as a whole, not just one part of it. A system leader understands that for system improvement they must focus on the wider picture; different schools, staff, students, and community, as well as the basis of education such as teaching and learning and staff development. This is when a system leader will create an improving school system.

The term *system leader* used in an educational context is a term that was introduced by Fullan (2004) who described this method of leadership in education as being system leaders in an action setting, the action setting being an educational establishment. Shaked and Schechter (2014, p.792) described being a systems thinker as something which involved ‘an holistic approach, which puts the study of wholes before that of its parts’, meaning that a system thinker will look at the whole system before exploring the parts which make up the system, be these different departments within a school or different schools within a group of schools. Fullan (2006, p.114) explained that ‘these are leaders who work intensely in their own schools or districts or other levels, and at the same time connect with and participate in the bigger picture’. There are various definitions of an educational system leader, which have common features, these being holding clear values, striving for success across all schools they are leading in and for all students, and having a clear commitment across the whole system.

Cousin (2018) explained the importance of system leadership in schools through the eyes of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In 2008, the OECD concluded that at this point system leadership was in its early stages, yet had benefits which were beginning to emerge. Pont *et al.*, (2008) noted these focussed on developing the capacity of the leader, and encouraging distributed leadership within school, with senior and middle leaders best suited to different roles and areas, becoming leaders of that area. From 2006 to 2010, system leadership in English schools, following the introduction of new school systems such as Multi Academy Trusts, led to the National College defining a series of specific system leadership roles within English schools. This showed that system leadership was believed to be the way in which school leadership should be moving within education (Close, Kenrick and Outhwaite, 2018).

A system leader is concerned with having a systematic approach to educational leadership, especially with an aim for systems improvement. Hargreaves (2011, p.24) suggested it was a term which has become commonly used to ‘explain the role of national and local leaders of education who have an exemplary reputation as school leaders and are willing to spend time working with and in another school that is seriously underachieving and/or in difficulties.’ A system leader will have brought about the successful improvement of a system. A system leader does not need to just be the person at the top of the organisation; in a true system leadership model there will also be what Boylan (2018, p.90) referred to as ‘teacher system leaders.’ Whether a system leader who was leading an academy trust or a cluster of schools, or a teacher system leader, there was a commonality among the practice of these ‘system leaders’ at every level.

A key feature of a system leader is that the leader shows a moral purpose in their leadership style and strategies. This may mean that their style of system leadership embodies an element of moral leadership. Bush (2011) described moral leadership as a style which is based upon beliefs and values focussing on the moral purpose of their leadership role, by doing what is best for the staff, students and community of the school, rather than what is best for themselves or one particular group of stakeholders, in order to bring about school improvement. Those leading with moral purpose place values and beliefs at the centre of their leadership, ensuring that their leadership style and choices are thought about to bring about what is morally in the best interest of others.

Due to the demise of LAs, underachieving schools looked to other schools to form a trust or federation with. This led to successful schools setting up trusts, with their school as the pinnacle school, with the principal leading the schools and supporting school improvement (Close, 2016). Close (2016) credited the Teaching Schools Alliances as being the initial starting point for the system leadership model in the English school landscape. However, some schools who wished to remain as standalone academies have not been able to do so and have been encouraged to join trusts. Giving schools more autonomy has been a way that many countries have led school improvement policies. Schools began to work in small groups, with one CEO or principal working across a range of schools, with system leadership at the forefront of educational leadership models. The change in the English educational system, brought about by academisation, led to multiple schools having a CEO, with overall responsibility for all the schools.

Pont *et al.*, (2008) noted that system leadership had emerged as a leadership style in a variety of other schools in different countries including Belgium, Finland, and charter schools in the USA. Simon (2015, p.545) explained the benefits of using system leadership within a school setting as being able to ‘include the capacity to create strategic alliances, to pool better resources and expertise, and to share more effectively good practice, costs and risk’. The whole system (all the schools involved) were likely to benefit, rather than just one. There was a strong push from the government for the use of system leadership within schools in this new era of school leadership and management. Boylan (2016, p.57) suggested that: ‘More recently it has been used as both a descriptor and an advocated stance in English policy for school improvement, leadership and professional development’. This suggested that system leadership, in an educational system, is twofold. It has been used as a way to describe educational leadership, as well as a means to describe the policy making behind schools. This has developed out of cross-organisational leadership and collaboration, and leading across multiple schools, with the overall aim being to bring about school improvement.

System leaders are those leaders working across a range of schools, or a school and the wider community. Boylan (2016, p.57) suggested ‘the practices of those who extend their arenas of leadership from within a school or organization to interschool or wider networks’. It has been a relatively new addition to leadership styles within English schools that emerged following the move of schools away from LA control which led to the formation of academy chains and trusts. This encourage leaders to work across schools, so that schools are not working in isolation, and resources and good practice was shared, to enable school improvement.

## **2.10 System Leadership as an Effective Approach for School Leadership**

School leadership, within each school, greatly impacts on the organisation. Without effective leaders in place, school improvement would be much more difficult to ensure. Effective leaders and leadership approaches differ, depending on factors such as policy, socio-economic, and cultural (Leithwood *et al.*, 2020; Lalor, 2022). The Department for Education pushed for the use of system leadership within schools in England. Courtney and McGinity (2020) expressed how the DfE encouraged system leadership in MATs and described the influence these effective system leaders had outside the reach of their own MAT:

Working closely with system leaders in the MAT, in partnership with those working in teaching school alliances and beyond, we can demonstrate that the most effective practice in any community can be shared so that new and better practice is introduced into the schools we want to improve quickly’, (DfE, 2016, p.5)

MacDonald *et al.*, (2018, p.3) explained how ‘system leadership contributes to improvement across a variety of types of organisation. There is now considerable evidence to suggest that system leadership if used appropriately, does indeed contribute to significant improvement’. This is key to why it is thought to be an effective leadership method within schools. Hopkins (2008, p.22) stated that system leadership ‘leads to sustainable educational transformation’. One of the key reasons why system leadership has been recommended as a leadership model to use in schools is the autonomy it allows the schools leaders to have. The DfE (2010, p.13) white paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, explained how greater autonomy and accountability for school leaders, moving away from the centralised systems would lead to sustainable and marked school improvement stating, ‘the primary responsibility for the improvement rests with schools, and the wider system should be designed so that our best schools and leaders can take on greater responsibility, leading improvement works across the system’. System leaders can cater for their school and their community, thus enabling school improvement by offering a bespoke curriculum fit for the purpose of their student body.

The purpose of a leader within a school varied between institutions and what one may need will be very different from another. Murphy *et al.*, (2007, p.193) described effective school leaders as those that will understand ‘contextual trends and influences and their potential impacts on the school and the larger community, particularly how these environments support or hinder learning in classrooms’. There are many features that an effective leader demonstrated within their own school and there will be commonality between these. Murphy *et al.*, (2007, p.194) described the purpose of the leader as being that: ‘Leaders serve as role models in terms of accepting responsibility for what happens to children and families in their school community’. In the DfE’s (2016, p.8) white paper, *Educational Excellence Everywhere*, it explained how educational excellence everywhere can be achieved by ‘putting the best leaders at the heart of the school system, with the support to thrive, recruiting and developing great teachers wherever they are needed; setting high expectations for all – supported by fair, stretching accountability measures; and enabling pupils, parents and communities to demand more from their schools’. DfE (2016, p.41) stated: ‘good leaders are best placed to raise standards and improve outcomes for children – by running schools and groups of schools, recruiting, and retaining high quality teachers, sharing their expertise to support other schools, and being held to account for rigorous, well-measured outcomes’.

There has been great change in school systems in many countries, including England and the United States of America, over the past twenty years. Gronn (2003, p.7) described how reform ‘emphasised the need for school restructuring along with a renewed focus on teaching and learning. For many reformers, the key ingredient in the success of restructured schools was leadership, particularly the leadership of Principals’. Since 1999, schools in Belgium had been in groups known as ‘communities of schools’, set up by the Flemish Ministry of Education. Now over 95% of schools in Belgium are part of a community. The aim of these communities was for schools to work more collaboratively and to share resources, save money and be able to supply a wider range of courses by using schools as systems and leaders of the schools as system leaders.

With more schools forming networks with one another rather than being standalone or forming more partnerships with their local community and sometimes even further afield, there was a need for a new leadership methodology to ensure that these systems of schools and/or communities were effective. System models are one theory on which leadership models can be built. Bush (2011, p.44) explained how systems theories ‘emphasize the unity and integrity of the organisation and focus on the interaction between its component parts, and with the external environment’. A systems approach in a school system has an emphasis on shared objectives across the community, for which the members of the system agree.

The DfE (2016, p.14) explained the purpose of multi academy trusts and their importance within the system to move education forwards, ‘the growth of multi-academy trusts (MATs) expands the reach and influence of the most successful leaders so more children can benefit’.

In 2008 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) carried out research in a range of case studies into the use of system leadership in schools in OECD countries – Australia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, England, Northern Ireland, and Scotland. This involved conducting a study of school leadership with the purpose of providing policy makers with information that was analysed to improve school leadership, and policy, with the aim of improved education. Their findings reported that system leadership could build capacity in education; share expertise, facilities, and resources; encourage innovation and creativity; improve leadership and spread it more widely; and provide skills support.

There are a range of benefits in the use of system leadership in school. As described by Pont *et al.*, (2008, p.3), ‘the collective sharing of skills, expertise and experience could create much richer and more sustainable opportunities for rigorous transformation than can ever be provided by isolated institutions.’ If schools are working together for their students, a much deeper field of knowledge and expertise is accessible for all staff and students, enriching the education on offer. In the same year Hopkins (2008) also described why leaders in schools should be system leaders, moving forwards to bring about school improvement. Leaders were no longer simply responsible for the outcomes of their school, but also other schools which make up a system or the community the school is in, making a system. Hopkins (2008, p.22) elaborated on why system leadership could benefit education; ‘if our goal is “every school a great school”, policy and practice must focus on system improvement’. This meant that school heads were as concerned about the success of other schools as about their own schools. Hopkins went on to suggest that: ‘Sustained improvement of schools is not possible unless the whole system is moving forward’. Also, Cousins (2018, p.2) has commented that: ‘In England, the earliest suggestions that headteachers take responsibility for schools other than their own came from the Minister of State for School standards: ‘in the interests of raising productivity, effecting greater social justice and ensuring sustainable improvement’. Cousins (2018, p.3) explained how along with academisation, headteachers saw system leadership as a ‘legitimate extension of a headteacher’s career ladder, an acknowledgement of their expertise, and evidence of a move towards professional self-regulation’. System leadership was also viewed by educational policy makers as a solution to educational reform, a method to bring about school improvement by using existing knowledge across the material boundaries of a physical school building.

Pont *et al.*, (2008) suggested that school leaders had different needs to meet compared to what school leaders had been faced with in the past. They were given more autonomy and were now expected to have greater accountability, provide knowledge rich curriculums, and provide more support to local communities and other services, whilst having less governmental support. There was a need for schools and school leaders to work in a more united, cohesive way to continue to move forwards and to make sure that they faced the new demands upon them. If school leaders worked in isolation, they may not always have been able to achieve as much as if they worked as system leaders, either within a system of schools or a school in a system with their community with the purpose of improving the school. Working with other leaders as system leaders allowed school leaders to reach beyond their own organisation and can enabled them to become more autonomous.

Many school principals would have had very little preparation for what leading a school meant before taking up that post. In England, school leaders may have completed their National Professional Qualification in Headship (NPQH), however it has been argued what this qualification adds to a new school leader in terms of making them ready for school leadership, especially with the ever-increasing demands of this. Sarason (1982, p.17) in Fullan (2003) explained that ‘being a classroom teacher itself is not very good preparation for becoming an effective Principal. In their interaction with Principal’s teachers (as future Principals) obtain only a very narrow slice of what it means to be a Principal’. For a future principal to be able to drive change within a school, across schools or within a community, Fullan (2003, p.19) argued that a strong sense of moral purpose was central to effective leadership, ‘One of the great strengths one needs, especially in troubled times, is a strong sense of moral purpose’ and alongside this leaders must be the ones within a school to lead the learning – to show that they themselves are still learning. Fullan (2003, p.20) explained that this was how headteachers lead the system of which they were a part of and ‘all organizations need to be learning organizations to be effective, the Principal has to be the lead learner. If Principals do not go out of their way to learn more (inside and outside of the school), regardless of what the system is doing they cannot become a pressure point for positive change’.

System leadership is a way to embed effective leadership both within and across schools. System leadership works within school leadership in order for it to be effective. The way to do this is to build an understanding of system leadership into leadership training programmes, ‘this ‘system’ approach to strengthening school leadership has the intended purpose of providing future-focussed leadership programmes’ (Lalor, 2022, p.8). The teaching of system leadership should be explicit within leadership training programmes, so that leaders are able to build capacity and sustainability (Lalor, 2022).

Fullan (2003) further suggested that principals who effectively utilised system leadership, and the values attributed to a true system leader, often overcame these issues, and worked within their systems to bring about improvement and/or change within the system and the moral purpose of the leader was central to this. Fullan (2003, p.20) noted: 'Principals are constantly experiencing overload and a proliferation of expectations. This is a system problem, to be sure, but it is far more damaging if Principals lose track of their moral compass'. Many roles that a principal is responsible for within a school have little or no link to moral purpose. Whilst a true system leader will put moral purpose at the forefront of their leadership, many aspects of current principalship do not pertain to moral purpose at all. Being a competent manager, engaging in good public relations, and even getting higher test scores do not constitute moral purpose. Fullan (2003, p.30) suggested that the driver for true school leadership, and in fact leadership within a school at each level, should be moral purpose and that all other capacities (e.g., knowledge of the change process, building professional learning communities) should be in the service of moral purpose'.

Both academy schools and charter schools were initially set up to provide alternatives within education, to develop and change what was already there, and for the developments to be sustainable. As the DfE (2010, p.8) explained: 'In England, what is needed most of all is decisive action to free our teachers from constraint and improve their professional status and authority, raise the standards set by our curriculum and qualifications to match the best in the world'. DfE (2010, p.11) went on to explain the reason for academisation as being the key to school lead improvement: 'Across the world, the case for the benefits of school autonomy has been established beyond doubt. In a school system with good quality teachers, flexibility in the curriculum and clearly established accountability measures, it makes sense to devolve as much day-to-day decision-making as possible to the front line'. The same can be said for the charter school movement. As Kahlenberg and Potter (2015) explained in their article in the New York Times, charter schools and their model provide educators with an opportunity to build schools from the beginning. Fullan (2005, p.40) suggested the way to do this was 'through leaders at the system level and all other levels, becoming explicitly conscious that they are engaged in widening people's experiences and identification beyond their normal bailiwicks'. The proposition was that the key to changing systems was to produce greater numbers of 'system thinkers.' System thinkers being involved from the initial building blocks of an educational establishment allowed those leaders to put their moral intent and values at the centre and build a school culture and ethos around this.

Cousins (2018, p.13) explained how in 2009 there existed 'a certain alignment of political, policy, professional and academic views of the world, a perspective which gave birth to system leadership as a potential means to 'rebalance' professional and political power'. From this point onwards, the use of

system leadership became more common as the preferred method of leading in schools in England. This followed the move of schools from the LA and the formation of academies, and then academies forming together into trusts, chains, and clusters. Close (2016, p.113) described how the English government in 2010 set out a vision for the use of system leadership to provide a 'self-improving' school system in England: 'They would learn from each other and from research so that effective practice spread. The best schools and leaders would extend their reach across other schools so that all schools improved, and government intervention or support would be minimised'. DfE (2010) noted one of the key reoccurring themes was that system leadership, when used effectively, was a keyway for schools to lead their own 'self-improvement'. DfE (2010, p.12) explained how 'the timetabling, educational priorities and staff deployment of schools cannot be decided in Whitehall'. DfE (2010, p.28) stated 'the attempt to secure automatic compliance with central government initiative reduced the capacity of the school system to improve itself' and explained that the role of the headteacher should be to, 'feel empowered to do what they think is right, know where they can go for support if they want it and are accountable for the results they achieve. These principals apply both to teaching and learning, and the wider support schools provide to their pupils and their families'.

Gronn (2003) described that there had been much reform in schools in many countries, including England and the United States of America over the past two decades, and this led to schools working more and more as networks, with a school that was facing difficulties working with a school seeing more success for the latter to provide support to improve. Charter school networks in the United States of America and Multi Academy Trusts in England are both examples of recent networks of schools. This reform of schools led to a need to reform leadership styles within schools, as many Principals tend to now oversee several schools within their system and take on the role of 'Executive Principal'. This new way of schooling calls for a new method of leadership as Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.91) described how, 'in this context, Executive headteachers and their wider leadership teams represent a rediscovery of the traditional moral purpose that is a powerful motivational force within the teaching profession. By formalising their support for a school facing significant difficulties, Executive heads are system leaders who work for the success and welfare of students in other schools as well as their own'.

Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.130) argued how for these new school systems to be successful in moving schooling forwards they needed a new professionalism, 'by which we imply leadership at all levels, will lead a renewal and deepening of the teaching and learning process and will engage students more authentically in doing so'. Leadership of learning, within and across schools (that is, system leadership), is the new level needed to build capacity for this progressive change. The emphasis on leadership across schools was important not only because of the moral commitment to

children and young people more widely but also because of the knowledge and expertise it brings. Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) considered that system leadership was the method that led teaching and learning, through effective leadership, at all levels within systems of schools to bring about success for the students. This was the purpose of education and formal schooling, so for schools, the use of system leadership could be the key to their success.

## **2.11 The Making of a Successful System Leader**

Macdonald *et al.*, (2018, p.5) wrote that ‘leadership and creating positive organisations is difficult and hard work, that people are complex and have opinions’ and then went on to explain that: ‘if leaders do not understand people and how they view the world, they will fail. If they do understand people, they have a chance to engage the creativity embodied in everyone’. This idea has been supported by Fullan (2006) and Senge, Hamilton and Kania (2015) linking a system leader to someone working across organisations, with the same connection and time devotion to each, and leading through the building of relationships based on trust and collaboration.

Fullan (2003, 2005), Hopkins (2007) and Hargreaves (2010) argued that for system leadership and a specific system leader to be a success, particularly when trying to bring about school improvement, the leader must have had a real moral purpose as without this, others would not follow their leadership (Hargreaves, 2010). For a system leader to show success they must impact upon those working with them. Within a school, the leader must show moral purpose for student and staff success, especially narrowing the gap between high and low performance. Having moral purpose in a school environment ensured that students and staff all benefited from a set of desirable goals, and this ensured continuous progress. This collective moral purpose arises when the system leader has equal moral purpose across the schools they are leading, and this is when system leaders will be most effective. If the moral purpose is lacking the leadership will not bring about the improvements necessary (Hargreaves, 2014). Leading with moral purpose ensures that the educational leadership is purpose-driven rather than simply being in charge of a school (Bush, Bell and Middlewood, 2002).

Hopkins and Higham (2007) found that successful system leaders shared a set of very specific characteristics, these being setting direction, personal development and an ability to translate vision and moral purpose into an education system with tangible outcomes. The key difference between a successful system leader, and simply a school leader, was their ability to successfully work in collaboration with others, in a wider network than simply their own school. Hargreaves (2010) and Simon (2015) described one of the strengths of system leadership as being led by moral purpose, a very

different take on a method of school leadership, leaders striving for improvement of all schools and all students in the system.

One of the key roles of a school leader, especially those working in a challenging context, had been school improvement and moving the school forwards. This may have been academically through an improvement in academic results, or in other ways such as improving community relations or improving the teaching and learning profile. A school leader working as a system leader should be able to use their system leadership skills to promote school improvement. Fullan (2003, p.45) stated that: 'leading schools – as in any great organization – requires Principals with the courage and capacity to build new cultures.' For a system leader to have made a real difference and have made improvements in their own context they must have reached beyond their own school confines. This may have taken many forms, such as working as a group of schools in a trust, working with other groups or stakeholders in the community or working with schools in the same geographical area or district. If leaders within a system are not working together, the school and the education will be unable to move forwards. Leaders alone cannot improve a school, they can provide vision and aid initiatives, but it is the people involved (staff, students, and the community) who will enable the vision to come to life (Fullan, 2003).

## **2.12 A Model of a System Leader**

Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.28) developed the core practices a successful system leader should demonstrate, building upon the 2007 model presented by Hopkins. These are; setting direction ('total commitment to enable all learners to reach their potential with a strategic vision that extends into the future'), managing teaching and learning ('ensuring every learner is inspired and challenged through an appropriate curriculum and a repertoire of teaching styles'), developing people ('enabling students to become more active learners, develop thinking and learning skills') and developing the organisation ('extending an organization's vision of learning to involve networks of schools collaborating to build, for instance, curriculum diversity, professional support, extended and welfare services and high expectations'). A successful system leader has not just shown these attributes; however, they have also demonstrated the different roles shown in the outer ring of Figure 2.



*Figure 2: A model of system leadership practice (Hopkins, 2007, p.166)*

Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.31) described how before becoming involved in the whole system, the first port of call for system leaders was to, ‘develop a deep and rigorous understanding of Systems for improving their own schools’. Effective system leadership has brought about sustained improvement across a system (Fullan, 2003). This started with a school leader leading change for improvement within their own school, and once these leaders are well on their way towards this, they can take on what Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.44) described as, ‘wider System roles that share their knowledge and practice with other schools’. A good system leader would have also gone on to help in the local community, developing a role wider than just within the school and this tends to lead on to helping other schools and becoming a system of schools, rather than individual schools, all working towards a common purpose.

Hopkins (2007, p.33) described the model of system leadership as shown in Figure 2 as having logic which flows outwards showing that, ‘leaders seek to empower teachers and others to make schools a critical force for improving communities’. Moral purpose is a necessary trait in a true system leader, but not enough on its own. It needed to be used alongside the other attributes shown within the model such as, ‘the moral purpose, personal qualities and strategic capacity of the System leader are focussed on three domains of the school: managing the teaching and learning process, developing people and developing the organisation’ and the moral imperative of a successful system leader working within involves cultural change to make all those within the system commit (Fullan, 2003).

Moral purpose was the key central feature of a system leader, whatever their leadership situation be within education – across one school, many schools, or a school district. Without holding moral purpose at the centre of a school leader's thinking they cannot have been a true system leader, having made the differences which school improvement can bring which have been accredited to having true system leadership as the key leadership methodology in place. This moral purpose also will have fed into personal development and the development of others. As explained by Fullan (2003, p.41) 'we need Principals who develop leadership in others, thereby strengthening school leadership beyond themselves'. School leaders must have been built within school and school systems to have moved those systems forward. Principals have been able to do this by ensuring that they provided plentiful opportunities for the development of their staff to be able to grow. If a school was to improve and to have grown this will have involved what Fullan (2003, p.78) described as, 'strengthening the infrastructure to develop school leadership'. It has also been integral to the moral purpose of a true system leader that they have enabled their staff to move forward and build leadership pathways for them within their own establishment.

Much of this model puts the leader and their own purpose and their own school, rightfully, at the centre. The next level shows work across other aspects of school leadership such as teaching and learning and developing staff, all which would lead to school improvement. However, those acting as true system leaders will have stepped beyond this and worked with other schools, other organisations or within their local community. Fullan (2003, p.60) explained 'the most effective leaders are those who can see and appreciate the larger context within which they operate'. This does not just refer to having worked as the CEO across a multi-Academy trust but could refer to having worked across a community in which the school is situated or having worked with a variety of external organisations with the purpose of moving school improvement forward. Effective system leaders will have understood the full context in which their school has operated, and not just a focus on what has happened in their own organisation. This meant that an outward facing Principal will have shown a greater understanding and capability to move their own school forward.

### **2.13 Moral Purpose at the Centre**

There is a key difference between the relative nature and morals and the nature of moral purpose. The relative nature of morals has been described by Stace (1937) as morals, and morality are a human feature that has grown from human nature. Loloci and Hoxha (2019) have gone on to explain that morals are not the same all the time, they will change depending upon era, groups, nations and different societies. Morals will be different from individual to individual, and group to group depending on what they see is as good for them as an individual, and for the good of the group depending upon the matter being

considered. Holmes (1947, p.5) described morality as, ‘a code of conduct for individuals or social groups’, going on to explain how morals can be freely chosen or could be imposed due to pressure from a social group or even from wider social views. Morals refer to what is right or wrong in society, and therefore what is acceptable or not. Morality is not fixed, and morals are changeable depending upon the time in history, individual or group. Humans are unable to live life in moral isolation, they grow up in a system or society that contains a set of morals (Chowdhury, 2016). By humans holding these morals, it enables society to flourish, and it must be accepted that there are a variety of opinions on the morals of the individual such as, ‘moral is a personal choice, moral is given by God, moral is a social agreement’ (Loloci and Hoxha, 2019, p.1737).

Moral purpose, particularly relating to school leadership in this research, can be described as educational leadership which is purpose driven. For educational leaders, moral purpose is not just about the individual morality of the leader, but about what is best for the system which they are leading. Moral purpose is about more than the individual morals of the leader (Begley, 2010). Moral purpose is about asking the question ‘why do people do what they do?’ and thinking about how this has value in their work and impact the greater good in the system they are working in (educational leadership in the context of this piece of research) (Speaks, 2018).

An educational leader will have their own set of personal morals through which they lead their day to day lives. However, they should also have a moral purpose guiding their work as a school leader, relating to leading and being committed to making a difference to their staff, students and community. This is wider than their own personal morals. The moral purpose of the leader within a school will greatly impact those within the establishment. It must also align to the moral purpose of the MAT (if applicable) or wider educational system should their school be part of a wider trust or chain of schools.

Moral actions are described as values-justified actions. Moral actions usually occurred in a specific context. Morals are values in an applied form’. In an educational leadership context, ‘moral’ purpose for school leaderships came in the form of decision making, people management and resource management. It is possible to argue that all schoolteachers will have a sense of moral purpose towards their students and their school, but moral purpose for true systems leaders is beyond this. As described by Hargreaves (2012, p.15) ‘System leadership requires, on the contrary, a positive extension of moral commitment to other schools and students.’

Moral purpose is the underlying key theme for all those who have defined or modelled system leadership and the attributes that are shown by true system leaders. Fullan (2003, p.29) stated that, ‘The only goal

worth talking about transforming the current school system so that large-scale, sustainable, continuous reform becomes built in. Moral purpose of the highest order is having a system where all students learn, the gap between high and low performance becomes greatly reduced, and what people learn enables them to be successful citizens and workers in a morally based knowledge society'. Moral purpose of the school leader was central to the theoretical framework of system leadership developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009).

Different school groups will undoubtedly have had a different moral purpose for all stakeholders dependent upon their own circumstances. What is not necessary is what the moral purpose may be, but how the leader has expressed how they led with moral purpose. Schools within different contexts will have had a different moral purpose. Hopkins (2007, p.23) described the moral purpose in schools in England as being 'addressing issues such as gaining a better understanding of the factors behind improvement in teaching and learning, and changing the situation where deprivation is still too good a predictor of educational success.'

A firm definition of the moral purpose that has been central to a system leader is impossible to form due to the different context in which different leaders will be working. However, it has been described by the ways in which system leaders express their moral purpose. Fullan (2005, p.15) explained moral purpose as having three aspects: '(1) raising the bar and closing the gap of student learning; (2) treating people with demanding respect (moral purpose is supportive, responsive, and demanding, depending on the circumstances); and (3) altering the social environment'. The reason that moral purpose has been at the centre of a true system leader is due to the fact that if the leader of the system had true moral purpose, then this will have led to commitment of all within the system – senior leaders, middle leaders, class teachers, students, parents/carers and the wider community. Hopkins (2007, p.23) explained the emerging roles for those leaders who were system leaders. The roles involved leading and improving a school in a challenging context; being a partner to another school facing challenge, to help improve it; developing successful educational partnerships; acting as community leaders or acting as expert of change leaders within systems. 'These roles could be divided into formal roles that were developed through national programmes and had clear protocols, such as consultant leaders; school improvement partners (SIPs) and national leaders of education (NLPs); and informal roles which are locally developed and are far more fluid and organic'.

Fullan (2005, p.88) argued that systems in education must be sustainable. If there is a moral purpose, it leads to commitment from people within the system and this in turn will make the system sustainable. It is also not something to be simply switched on and off. Moral purpose must be a continued aspect of

the leadership. A true system leader will have modelled moral purpose so that it will then have permeated throughout the system as Fullan (2005, p.88) outlined: 'System leaders need to model moral purpose in its own right and through other strategies'. Hopkins (2007, p.23) expanded on the points made by Fullan in terms of ways in which system leaders have been able to express moral purpose. Features included there being improvements to student learning by increasing attainment and improving teaching and learning.

In England there have been a wide range of leadership roles that have emerged, which have moral purpose at the centre of them, leading towards a more widespread use of system leadership. Some of these roles were outlined by Hopkins and Higham (2007) as:

- Developing and leading a SIP involving several schools
- Choosing to lead a challenging school
- Being a partner to a school facing difficulties
- Shaping partnerships and networks within the community
- Acting as an expert/change leader within a system such as an SLE

The roles have enabled moral purpose to have been able to be moved to the forefront within schools in England. For these roles to have led to improvement, particularly sustainable improvement, those in these roles must have been morally committed to the vision which they have had for their schools, their students, and their communities.

It could be argued that all school leaders must have moral purpose at the centre of what they do. Principals are appointed to make a difference – for students, staff members and their communities. They will demonstrate this in a wide variety of ways such as giving students and staff individual attention, spending time with prominent people within the local community and a range of other ways. However, Fullan (2003, p.31) described that although this may have impacted on the few, the keyway to have ensured sustainable change and improvement is to have tackled the way a school works as a system because, 'moral purpose becomes more prominent when we shift our focus to encompass the whole school. The criteria of moral purpose being that all students and teachers benefit in terms of identified desirable goals, that the gap between high and low performers becomes less as the bar for all is raised, that ever-deeper educational goals are pursued, and that the culture of the schools becomes so transformed that continuous improvement relative to the previous three components becomes built in'. In other words, true moral purpose was more than simply changing things on the surface, it was about leading on sustainable change to show sustained improvement across the school system.

A true system leader will have had moral purpose evident in their practice from the moment they chose to go into teaching, and this will have developed as they continued in the profession, particularly if they have taken on responsibility and eventually found the path to headship. As Fullan (2003, p.39) explained ‘deciding to go into teaching must be a decision from the heart. It must come from moral imperative to ensure the success of all children and from a commitment to social justice’. Demonstration of these attributes for newly appointed leaders within schools has been shown through the application and interview process.

Simon (2015) has commented on headteachers taking on the role of system leaders could also be thought to be ‘servant leaders’ who operate, ‘for the greater benefit of the education service as a whole’ (p.4). This promotes the theory of system leaders working in collaboration for the greater good of the education system must have moral imperative. Servant leadership focusses on leaders uplifting and empowering those who work for them so that staff are developed and have a sense of purpose (Shek, Chug and Leung, 2015). Servant leaders have a want to serve, and when linked to system leadership this promotes a moral imperative to serve their schools, students, and the wider communities in which they work, creating staff that are committed and engaged to their roles and the system.

#### **2.14 Benefits of the use of System Leadership**

Both academies and charter schools were initially set up to promote schools being able to have more autonomy compared to under the umbrella of an LEA or the public school system, dependent upon the country they were based in. System leadership moves to bring school leadership towards more of a professional judgement by the school leader or leadership team, rather than the school being led by policy and policy makers (Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews, 2009, p.11). System leadership leads to greater professionalism within the school, rather than following simply what policy is dictating at a national level to all schools, therefore giving greater autonomy for schools to ensure their offer is most appropriate to their own circumstances. It aims to move prescriptive education to professionalism in education, as shown by Figure 3.

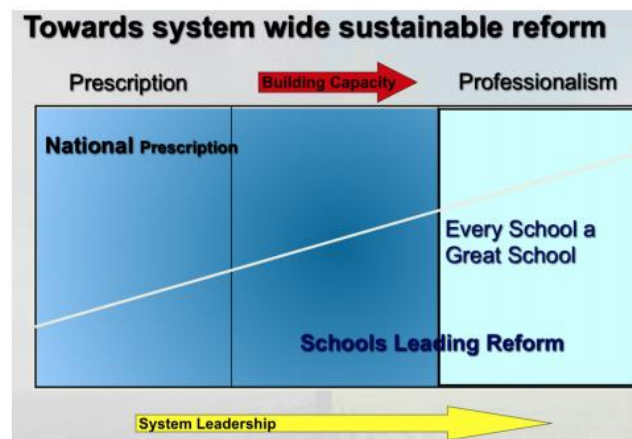


Figure 3: From prescription to professionalism (Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009, p.10)

The use of system leadership within education aimed to build capacity within a school, with each school leading their own reform so that it fitted their needs. System leadership is a keyway for schools to lead improvement. As Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) have described, system leadership and system leaders have been able to drive forward change and improvement because of the care they have for their schools and others they work with by holding moral purpose at the centre of what they do. Due to the autonomy held by academies and charter schools, they have been able to implement key elements of system leadership effectively and move their schools forward, which is why system leadership currently has appeared to be the future of leadership within schools and education systems.

Simon (2015) explained how system leadership could be supported as a method of school leadership since system leadership actively promotes schools working together to form strategic alliances, and this is done to provide better resourcing and pooled resources, as follows from the system leadership framework posed and developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) that shows schools working in improvement partnerships and developing organisations are often led by system leaders. This in turn followed on from the DfE 2010 White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, which stressed, ‘the need for schools to explore new ways of working together’, (Simon, 2015, p.3).

## 2.15 Critique and Critical Analysis of System Leadership

Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) detailed how system leadership could be effectively used within schools and school networks in England, as a practical leadership method. However, system leadership is far from the only leadership method available for use in schools. The DfE (2010) cited system leadership as a leadership method capable of enabling whole-system reform, to bring about school improvement in terms of curriculum, school autonomy, accountability in the community and

encouraging professionals to work collaboratively. The DfE (2010, p.12) suggested that a move towards academisation would be a route for many schools to achieve school improvement, despite it being noted that, ‘some schools will not want to acquire Academy status just yet, others do not yet have the capacity’.

For schools which are leading the field in terms of teacher and student performance and working in effective academy trusts collaboratively with their communities, system leadership provides an excellent leadership style to enable a school to extend its reach and help other schools in a variety of ways. Some of this will be financial by centralising many costs such as those related to PR, IT, and finance. Some will be by having an outstanding school at the centre with a principal able to lead across a variety of schools working together in either an academy trust or charter management organisation, using their autonomy gained from academy or charter status to enable change by developing organisations, having strategic acumen, and leading with moral purpose. Hopkins (2007) noted how the power of system leadership was creating impact in schools when used as a key driver as shown in Figure 4.

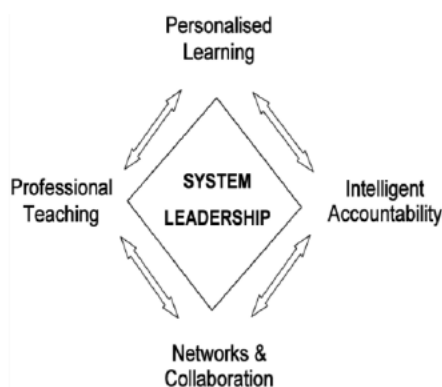


*Figure 4: System leadership moulds the key drivers to context (Hopkins, 2007, p.142)*

Through his research, Hopkins (2007) identified growing evidence in the secondary school system in England of system leadership having a positive impact when leadership of the school focussed upon the four key drivers shown in figure 4. For example, Waverley school showed an improvement in GCSE pass rates of over 40% between 2001 and 2004 and Mossborne Academy showed a marked impact in the wider community following a focused approach to excellent behaviour, high expectations and keeping teaching and learning as a key focus.

Hopkins (2007) noted, however, that the approach to system leadership was very ad hoc in English secondary schools, and to explained that for system leadership to have a system-wide benefit then key issues needed to be met. These being clear roles and responsibilities, particularly surrounding leadership positions other than the headteacher, agency and brokerage in terms of supporting other schools and

schools involved not feeling like they were having improvement done to them. Hopkins (2007) also identified tailored development, 'to ensure an approach that is responsive to individual need', (p.164) and addressed accountability and flexibility so that accountability frameworks would support system leadership fully and to ensure adequate funding for supporting partnership schools and community work.

Hopkins (2007) clearly identified that the use of system leadership in a school system setting was a work in progress, moving towards, 'a new educational landscape becoming better defined through a more systematic approach to segmentation and the power of system leadership' (p.165). Hopkins (2007) focuses on the successes found in his research (Waverley School, Mossborne Academy and Valley Park School (p.163)) but also acknowledged that the movement in schools, towards system leadership, had far to go.

Hargreaves (2007) has suggested that Hopkins' (2007) view of system leadership was operational rather than strategic. It offered suggestions on centralised systems rather than effective leadership methodology for use in schools. It has been suggested that the idea of system leadership put forward by Hopkins (2007) is more about, the implementation of government policy rather than its formulation' (Hatcher, 2008, p.25). Hargreaves has stated that system leadership is better related to leading the whole education system, rather than a group of schools and is more a theory for the debate of education and its moral purpose in a wider scale – how leaders of schools create educational societies, rather than an in-school leadership method. Hatcher (2008) explained that networks of schools, whether federations or academy trust, involve a power-struggle among governance and the executive head. System leadership is about reform and new leadership, 'but the majority of networks do not involve new forms of governance. How is power distributed with them?' (Hatcher, 2008, p.26).

Hatcher (2008) went on to expand upon the fact that a system leader was required within school networks to ensure networks aligned with school policies, or network policies with government agendas. System leaders needed to play the advocate between school networks and government. Hatcher (2008, p.28) noted that 'the principal task of networks is the creation and dissemination of knowledge and practice, but that cannot be entrusted to teachers in self-organised peer-to-peer networks because only certain forms of knowledge and practice conform to government agendas.' Thus, system leadership related more to management issues rather than running school systems. Hopkins (2007) explained that system leadership used within networks of schools could be undertaken outside local control, negating the need for local authority involvement in schools. However, Hargreaves (2007) suggested that local authorities were needed to act between networks of schools and government policies, and this was where the true system leader acts, not leading a school network, but as the government and networks go-between.

Hargreaves (2007) provided the example of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT), as a group of system leaders serving this role by having a group of subject leaders, experts, and lead practitioners to work between the local authorities and various school networks.

Hatcher (2008) suggested system leadership and school networks provided a means for a new management method and questioned if this worked in practice within individual schools: 'Networks and system leadership can be best understood as a reconfiguring of state power, attempting to create new vehicles for the implementation of policy under the control of a reliable new technocratic management cadre' (p.30). This opinion was also held by Simon (2015) who stated that networks of schools were used by the government as, 'mechanisms for large scale change both in terms of policy and practice' (p.5).

The debate, and alternative views, with regards to system leadership, include consideration of what the term 'system' in system leadership is referring too. Hopkins (2007) sees the system as individual schools or networks of schools. Some have perceived the system as much more than this (Hargreaves, 2007; Hatcher, 2008; Simon, 2015). If system leadership is used in a wider scale, the key focus of the system leadership model can be used to greater effect, with more opportunities for collaboration, working in the wider community and a wider educational area, such as a county or city. Hopkins (2006, p.3) used the phrases 'system wide' and 'system deep' to encourage the mobilization of school and system resources to bring about improvement so that, 'we see system leaders to offer a vision of how professionals working together can lead educational renewal and the impact it can have on society' (p.3). Whilst Simon (2015, p.7) elaborated and suggested that: 'system wide refers to the coherence and contingency across a policy spectrum, and system deep refers to clarity and coherence as the top and the bottom of the system at the level of policy'. Taking this definition further, the 'system' could include aspects of provision that are interlinked with education, such as health and social care. This could provide a broader and deeper system, that would have the potential to improve pupil outcomes, including academic, personal, social, and emotional.

As Simon (2015) explained, the key issues in terms of system leadership within education lies within the definition of the system. When viewed as a group of schools the system and then system leaders, theoretically, can have greater autonomy, flexibility and be able to respond to change (Simon, 2015). This leads to the key issue within the use of system leadership in the everyday school environment is the question of whether it is an appropriate leadership method at an individual school level. As discussed, Hatcher (2008) and Hargreaves (2007), outlined system leadership as the link between power (government and policy) and school networks. Simon (2015) expressed concerns with the use of system

leadership in small contexts (such as individual schools) and has also raised the question of whether school leaders are capable of being system leaders. Many school leaders will have built their way up from classroom practice to middle leadership then senior leadership and finally a headship position.

The common requirement for a headship in England is the NPQH qualification, and thus consideration needs to be given to the focus and content of this, in preparation for leadership. Up until 2012 it was mandatory for all newly appointed English head teachers to hold the NPQH qualification. It is still a well thought of qualification that prepares a school senior leader for headship (Gunter, 1999; Rhodes *et al.*, 2009). As someone who has completed the NPQH qualification, I believe that the tasks necessary to gain this would not build a system leader from a senior school leader, with a well-rounded knowledge of government policy and the application of this. The NPQH requires two tasks to be completed, one based on a teaching and learning task within your own school and the second task is a curriculum-led budget task completed at a school other than your own. Neither of these requires an overview of governmental policy or focusses on leading a whole school. The National College of Teaching and Leadership was in existence from 2013-2018 and was a way for schools to be provided with tools for leadership improvement, alongside the NPQH qualification to promote system leadership within England. Simon (2015, p.9) stated that this method of encouraging system leadership, via the NPQH qualification, 'is an example of orchestrated, top-down policy to address an issue of government concern and maintain the *status quo*'. There is now a wider suite of National Professional Qualifications on offer to leaders within schools (DfE, 2021), and some of these are starting to bridge the gap between theoretical leadership methodology, tasks for those deemed ready for headship to complete and write up (in 2500 words over an 18-month period) and offer a base for those to take upon wider system leadership roles.

The National Professional Qualifications were reformed in autumn 2021 (DfE, 2021). New qualifications on offer now include a National Professional Qualification in Executive Leadership, with the focus on an 18-month programme to build on expertise to lead improvement and change across networks of schools, an additional qualification above the NPQH qualification. It also is offered at master's level and aims to progress future executive headteachers onto MA or MBA Educational Leadership programmes. Many further and higher education providers are now offering a variety of MA and MBA Educational Leadership programmes, offering an alternative to the traditional NPQH programme. Many of these programmes offer more focus into leadership methodology in Education, again showing the movement of educational leadership as being something to study to gain further understanding before practical application.

Hatcher (2008), Hargreaves (2010) and Simon (2015) have expressed the viewpoint that system leadership is less about leadership methodology used within a school context, rather a reflection of governmental policy and decentralisation of governmental policy concerning schools following academisation post-2010 because, 'the changes in both educational and political contexts, including notably concerns about under-achievement, call for school leaders to self-identify as system leaders' (Simon, 2015, p.4). Hartley (2009) also commented on the validity of system leadership as a leadership methodology, stating how this could look like, 'social regulation rather than radical change' (p.271).

Gunter, Hall, and Bragg (2013) identified that the theoretical idea of one head taking all leadership responsibility, was not feasible in the current school system. They argue that distributed leadership would be a more preferred method for school leadership as the leadership and management is too big a job for just one leader. It is argued that others holding leadership positions within a school add to the effectiveness of the school as a whole and this cannot be done by a sole leader, as suggested by system leadership theory and distributed leadership is what will bring about school improvement (Chapman, 2005; Gunter, Hall, and Bragg, 2013). Gunter, Hall, and Bragg (2013) have argued that seeing a lone headteacher as the single leadership point for a school needs to be questioned because, 'no one leader has the resources of time, energy and expertise to lead alone' (Spillane and Diamond, 2007b, p.8). Spillane and Diamond (2007) found that organisations relied upon leaders having a variety of areas they had responsibility for, rather than one person having leadership responsibility for everything, and this was necessary for a school to work effectively. Currie *et al.*, (2005) stated that it is questionable as to whether one leader would be able to work effectively both inside and outside of the school. This again brings into question the idea of a system leader having impact outside of their own school and across the local community and whether this is possible on their own.

In their recent research focussed on a MAT, Courtney and McGinity (2020) provided arguments based around system leadership being a leadership style more focused on depoliticization, rather than focussing on the key issue of school leadership and explained system leadership has been presented by policy makers as a technical method rather than being a leadership choice for school leaders. Their research focussed on a newly formed MAT and a small group of leaders within this and their role as system leaders in the creation of the MAT. They argued that their findings, 'have implications for policy making and policy scholarship in states internationally where system leadership is being considered or enacted, for example in the USA, where charter schools may be brought and managed together' (p.2). Courtney and McGinity (2020) state that system leadership is not just related to school leadership (Higham, Hopkins and Matthews, 2009), and is not simply about educational reform (Hall *et al.*, 2013) but it is also a political framework for school leadership (Hatcher, 2008; Hargreaves, 2010; Simon,

2015). Whereas Hopkins (2007) has described system leadership as, ‘a social responsibility that school leaders ought morally to evince’ (Courtney and McGinity, 2020, p.3), Courtney and McGinity (2020) have addressed system leaders as a term given to those leading a school whether a CEO, headteacher of more than one school or a Specialist Leader of Education.

Courtney and McGinity (2020) argued that using system leadership as a method to establish a MAT is not school leadership but a method to advance the ‘politico-structural project of multi-academisation, or the legal, discursive, cultural and organisational processes whereby a group of schools is removed from the local authority and privatised through adopting a MAT structure in a contractual agreement with the state’ (p.8). Stating that this is system leadership gives a method for the key leaders involved to believe that these actions are in the best interests of the schools. The formation of MATs is a way of politics intervening in educational systems. System leaders provide a way for these leaders to be responsible for the restructuring of schools into MATs and for using their moral compass for, ‘devising retrospectively a rationale and set of values’ (Courtney and McGinity, 2002, p.14).

## **2.16 Summary**

The chapter has considered the academisation of schools in England and the charter school movement in the USA, and reviewed perspectives and issues concerned with these, and compared these to scrutinise their similarities and differences. A review of literature and research based on educational leadership generally, and on system leadership specifically was then undertaken. Current views on system leadership, and consideration of this as a forward-thinking approach to lead schools, especially groups of schools, were examined. A theoretical framework of system leadership, as developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) has been presented for the key elements of a system leader to be identified. The meaning of system leadership and whether it can be used in a simple school network or individual school has been discussed. The research investigates this, with a focus on two case study schools and leadership, and comparisons with the system leadership framework presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009).

In chapter 3 the methodology for the research is presented, and the data collection methods will be explained in detail. Research paradigms and the use of a case study approach will be considered. Data collection methods including interviews, observation and questionnaires will be reviewed. An exploration of the data analysis process will be undertaken. Ethical considerations will also be reviewed, and how these were used within the research.

## Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

Chapter Three details the research design and methodology utilised in the research. The purpose of the study and research questions are reiterated initially, positions of the research are explored, the research approach, data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations are outlined. Figure 5 outlines the process involved in the data collection methodology.

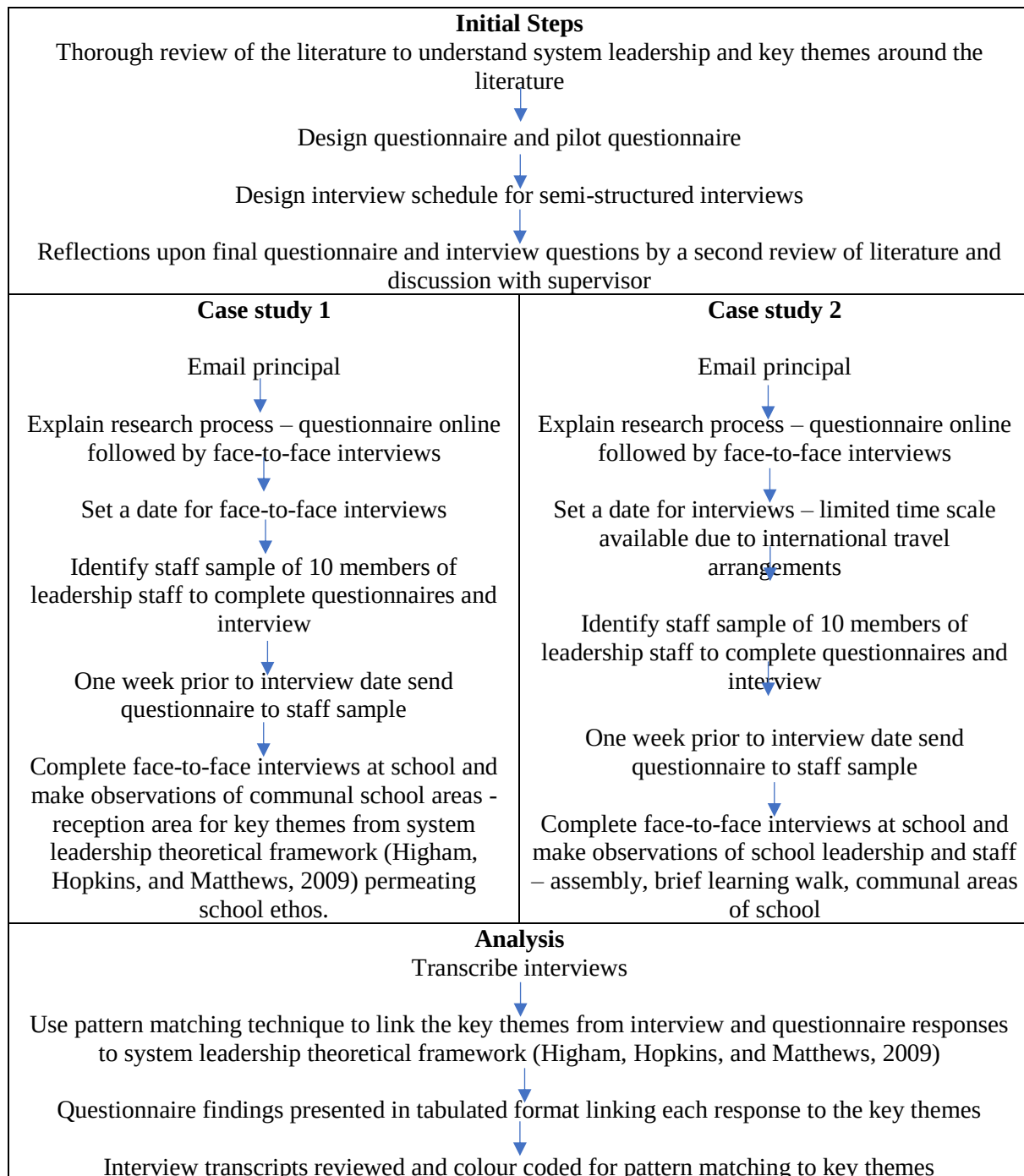


Figure 5: Data Collection Process Outline

The purpose of the research was to investigate ‘system leadership’, the experience of school leaders, and insights into the use, and impact of system leadership, in an academy school and a charter school. This chapter explores the methodology, case study design, data collection methods and ethics employed within the research project. As explained by Blaikie (2000), different research questions need different methodology and data collection methods to be utilised. For the research, qualitative data was collected using interviews, questionnaires, and observations, and analysed, with the aim of answering the following research questions, via a case study approach:

1. What insights do school leaders’ accounts provide on the use of system leadership as an approach to leadership in an academy?
2. What insights do school leaders’ accounts provide on the use of system leadership as an approach to leadership in a charter school?

### **3.2 Methodology and Research Paradigms**

A research paradigm is the description of the position of the researcher when they are studying the social world. In this section I shall explain the position taken when researching the concept of system leadership in two different schools and reflect on my position within the research. The positionality of the researcher has a fundamental influence upon the design process. Berry and Kincheloe (2004) have described how the positionality and initial assumptions of the researcher will shape the outcomes achieved by the research. As a researcher, it is key to understand your own position within the research to ensure that research remains as bias free as possible.

For this research, it was key to be aware of my own axiology when embarking upon the study. It was important, as the researcher, to approach the research with no preconceived ideas of what I would find during my data collection, and to not influence responses in interviews by phrasing questions to gain specific responses. I had ideas around system leadership and was looking for whether a theoretical framework applied to the two cases. I was keen to explore the role of the theoretical framework but was also open to see if the data collected showed anything outside of this framework. As someone working in senior leadership within an academy school in England, I have been part of discussions on system leadership within my school and trust. I have attended meetings with those running the trust at CEO and deputy CEO level, whilst they have provided specific details of how they need their senior leaders to demonstrate system leadership. I have also been on both sides of interview questions for job roles where the question has focussed on system leadership. This, inevitably, created a sense of ‘self’ within how I see the use and thought process of system leadership within my own academy and my own trust. It was

important for me to ‘leave this at the door’ when collecting data for the research, and not let what I consider system leadership in a school should, or does, look like affect my questionnaire or interview questions. I had to ensure data collection was free from bias, and ensure questions were not leading interviewees to answers in a way that would emphasise system leadership keywords and terminology. Recognising and addressing this possible researcher bias was key when formulating the interview questions and questionnaire questions as it was vital for the gathering and analysis of unbiased data (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). To achieve this, it was necessary to acknowledge, at the start of the research that I would inevitably be part of the world which I was researching: ‘...inevitably, the sense we make of the social world and the meaning we give to events and situations are shaped by our experience as social beings and the legacy of the values, norms and concepts we have assimilated during our lifetime’ (Denscombe, 1998, p.325).

Ontology has been described by Cohen *et al.*, (2007) as, ‘assumptions which concern the very nature or essence of the social phenomena being studied’ (p.5). Is it the study of ‘being’ and the basis of ontology lies within the structure of reality and nature of existence (Crotty, 1998). Ontology is defined by the SAGE online dictionary of Social Research Methods (2006) as, ‘a concept concerned with the existence of, and relationship between, different aspects of society such as social actors, cultural norms and social structures...Ontological issues are concerned with questions pertaining to the kinds of things that exist within society’ (no page). In terms of ontology, the research investigated the phenomenon of system leadership in terms of what it is and if it was used in different schools with different leaders, and if it was, whether it matched the theoretical framework of system leadership developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009).

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and the phenomenon that is being investigated. There are differing views about what this involves. Realists would suggest that ‘objects have an independent existence and are not dependent for it on the knower’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p.5). Whilst idealists and nominalists contend ‘that objects of thought are merely words and that there is no independently accessible thing constituting the meaning of a word’, (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p.5). Thus, the world is viewed in different ways by different people and can have multiple realities (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). In this research the view of reality adopted was from a realist point of view. This is reflected in the findings in Chapter 4 where direct quotations from interviewees enable their ‘voices’ to be prominent.

System leadership and its application in a school setting could have been examined in a variety of ways and from a variety of different viewpoints. Epistemology is concerned with our knowledge of the world

(Thomas, 2009) and the questions of what can be or what should be treated as acceptable knowledge (Bryman, 2008). It is driven by two main questions, 'What is knowledge?' and 'What can we know?' (Greco, 2017, p.1). As Socrates asked in the *Theaetetus*, 'what distinguishes knowledge from mere opinion?' (Greco, 2017, p.6). It was important in this piece of research to have knowledge gained by from the participants being more than just their opinions, but backed up with credibility, such as their leadership position.

Epistemology is concerned with looking at the world (Crotty, 1998) and for the research undertaken, making sense of it in terms of system leadership. Epistemology considers 'the very bases of knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be acquired and how it can be communicated to other human beings', (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p.5).

This piece of research comes from an interpretivist point of view. An interpretivist epistemological position relies on the researcher interpreting their findings and therefore incorporates human interest within the research (Ikram and Kenayathulla, 2002). Myers (2008) explained that reality, and the access to it, is through social interactions. Interpretivists construct meaning and they do this by aiming to understand human behaviour and the acceptance that there are multiple realities giving a range of interpretations of reality. This was key to this research, as a variety of participants answered questionnaires and were interviewed, each having their own reality and their own construction of this reality. It was key for the researcher to use these different views of different realities to gain an understanding of the overall use of system leadership, if any, within the two case study schools.

Norma (1994) has explained how an interpretivist researcher looks at reality from the inside. It is key for an interpretivist researcher to recognise that there are individual experiences, and these can be subjective (Lather, 2006). In interpretivist research, unlike positivism, it is key for the researcher to understand the worlds and experiences of those living within the reality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). This piece of research involved the belief that the humans involved had their own constructed reality and the questionnaires and interviews used probed the participants to interpret their meaning of their constructed reality (Merriam, 2009; Alessandrini, 2012). It was necessary to collect data and interpret it, using the voices of the participants, and interpret the meaning within this by pattern matching it to the model of system leadership presented by Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009).

Within interpretivist research, all participants will have a different reality and the aim of this research was to interpret and understand the meaning in human behaviour and knowledge (Neuman, 1997), whilst accepting the knowledge gained is subjective. Interpretivist research mainly uses qualitative data

collection methods such as interviews and observations, ‘the techniques used to apprehend the facts and behaviour associated with humans’ (Ikram and Kenayathulla, 2022, p.8). The research aimed to understand the humans involved, and their views on leadership in order to construct meaning. A purposeful sample was chosen, and data was interpreted using a pattern matching technique, to gain rich knowledge from the voices of the participants.

In contrast, positivism is a paradigm which sits mainly with quantitative research, where a hypothesis is being sought to be proved. Crotty (1998) described how a positivist research epistemology relies on applying systematic procedures to study a phenomenon. It is about testing a model or concept or theory in order to either prove or disprove a theory (Ikram and Kenayathulla, 2022). As someone with a scientific background, I initially struggled with placing myself within a set research paradigm and found a certain level of tension between my own positioning and the positioning of the research. As a science teacher much of my usual research work comes from the view of positivism and this is where, as an individual, I tend to sit. However, it is important to acknowledge that despite being someone who utilises a positivist perspective when undertaking scientific work, this piece of research has an interpretivist epistemology.

### **3.3 Case Study Design**

The research involved using a case study, as I utilised the system leadership theoretical framework developed by Hopkins, Higham, and Matthews (2009). Deductive strategy was initially developed by Popper (1972), who explained how in research, observations are all made from a frame of reference. The researcher has a set of expectations and for useful data to be collected, the researcher must initially have an idea of what to look for. For the research, these notions were provided by the theoretical framework of system leadership presented by Hopkins (2007) and developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). The experience of the leaders and investigating if the leadership style used in their organisation matched the theoretical framework, were fundamental ideas that were explored. Yin (1989, p.23) referred to a case study design as a research strategy, defining a case study as, ‘an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context’. Blaikie (2000, p.217) noted ‘a case study is not just a narrative account of an event or a series of related events; it must also involve analysis against an appropriate theoretical framework, or in support of theoretical conclusions.’ The case studies undertaken were not simply a narrative on observed events but involved the analysis of observations and used these to compare with a theoretical framework.

A deductive case study involves testing a theory, starting the process with an established theory to see if the data collected in further research of a specific instance matches the established theory (Hyde,

2000). Yin (1994) described how the process in case study research is the process of linking data gathered to propositions. Campbell (1975) outlined how data linking to a theory can be pattern matched, and this deductive approach is applicable to case study design where the case study is focussed on testing a theory already in existence, as this piece of research aimed to do (Hyde, 2000). Data which does not match the theory can then be compared to other theories. Hyde (2000) goes on to explain that if the collected data matches the theory being tested it provides further evidence for the proposed theory. The deductive case study approach initially involved setting out theoretical propositions before the process of data collection. In the research, the theoretical framework of system leadership developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) was set out before the data collection processes began, and after data had been collected a deductive comparison of the data to the theory was made, and the 'record of hits and misses' (Hyde, 2000, p.86) to the proposed theoretical statements analysed.

Case study research often takes the form of qualitative enquiry (Hyde, 2000), with a case study focussing on researching a particular phenomenon, or instances of the phenomenon in detail. As Bonoma (1985) explained, case studies use qualitative methods to produce snapshots – and these may be of events, circumstances, people, or behaviours. The choice of these two types of schools was made due to the similarities in the academies movement in England, and the charter school movement in the USA. The case study approach was used to enable the collection of rich, meaningful data (Thomas, 2009) and gain an insight into school leaders' experiences and link these insights into the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical model of system leadership.

Taylor and Sondergaard (2017, p.1) stated: 'case study research involves gathering and describing not only the phenomenon that is of interest, but also its context'. Yin (2014, p.16) described a case study as, 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context'. A case study aims to investigate phenomena within the context of real-life (Yin, 1994). By using a deductive case study approach, the researcher is enabled to study a case that exists in the real-world, in detail; to delve deeply into a scenario and gather rich data from this. This allows the case to be reviewed within its context, unlike experimental design which separated context and phenomenon (Yin, 2014). As Pring (2000, p.40) outlined, a case study has 'emphasis upon the uniqueness of events or actions, arising from their being shaped by the meaning of those who are the participants in the situation'. By using a case study design, qualitative data was collected. Some of the qualitative data collected was descriptive data, detailing the academy school and charter school and their contexts and settings (Taylor and Sondergaard, 2017). This data was important to gain background context and insight into the leaders in each school, and the history of each school and the students at each school, to investigate the leadership model for each context.

Whilst there are issues with a case study design, there are many benefits to using a case study approach in research. A case study framework for the research undertaken enabled a particular aspect to be fully explored; the use of system leadership compared against a framework developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). By using two schools it was possible to gain rich data and to be fully immersed within these two environments to give a well accounted review of the findings. Denscombe (1998, p.62) explained that a case study framework can, ‘deal with the subtleties and intricacies of complex social situations.’ Thomas (2016, p.3) stated: ‘when you do a case study, you are interested in that thing in itself, as a whole’. A range of data collection methods were employed including interviews, questionnaires, and observation. Following the data collection, responses to the interviews and questionnaires were analysed with reference to the conceptual framework of system leadership developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). The details of the theoretical framework used can be found in section 3.4.

For the research, system leadership was the ‘case’, and it was viewed through the eyes of an academy school and a charter school, which gave the case study a multi-dimensional view. The limitations of doing the research with a case study design were understood, however it was felt that the benefits of using a restricted sample to gain greater detail outweighed the need to generalise about findings regarding the use of system leadership (Thomas, 2016, p.10). It is recognised that the data collected was gained from one academy school and one charter school, however, as system leadership is a relatively new idea within educational leadership it was believed that any new findings would add increased knowledge and understanding to the field.

Thomas (2016) described the key to case study research as following a subject-purpose-approach-process methodology. The case study was examined through this lens. The *subject* of this case study was the use of system leadership in two different educational organisations. The organisations chosen were selected because they both exhibited key traits of an academy school and a charter school, such as the autonomous approach key to academy and charter school design. They were two very different schools, and this was key so that leadership approaches in different contexts could be examined. The purpose of this case study was to investigate the insights of leaders’ use of system leadership in the two case study schools. Stake (2005, p.445) suggests a case study is appropriate, ‘if the study is undertaken because, first and last, one wants better understanding of this particular case. It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but instead because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest’.

The explanatory *purpose* of this case study was to understand and explore Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical framework of system leadership and to see if the cases chosen for research reflected this framework and the insights of the system leaders. The use of a case study design meant that it was possible to be able to closely compare the system leadership in both case study schools closely with each other.

The *approach* of this case study was to test a theory. The theory was tested to see if system leadership as explained by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical framework was evident in these two organisations. This is key to using a deductive approach in a case study. This approach is suitable when there is already theory surrounding the case in question. This was appropriate for this case study as the findings were reviewed against a theoretical framework which was already in existence as well as looking for any new insights which the leaders could provide (Taylor and Sondergaard, 2017).

The *process* (Thomas, 2016) of this case study was as a comparative snapshot case study. Taylor and Sondergaard (2017, p.34) detailed this as being a case study which, 'studies multiple units, each at a point in time. The point in time might be a fairly short period of time such as the formation stage of a new venture or a new group.' The purpose for the research was to make comparisons and develop or confirm/disconfirm existing theory based on the framework by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). The comparisons between the two case study schools also enabled the research to gain an insight into what was working well and aspects that were more challenging. The *process* was concerned with how the researcher went about the case study and the data gathering elements necessary for this research. A snapshot of the cases was taken and analysed, having collected data using interviews, questionnaires, and observations. The findings and analysis were used to draw conclusions on whether the leadership in the case study schools showed insights into the use of system leadership, particularly when compared to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework.

The focus when collecting interview data from each case study school was more on a 'day in the life' (Thomas, 2016, p.165) of leaders' experiences in these organisations. The aim of this 'snapshot' of system leadership in place was three dimensional. It was used to illustrate what is in place in terms of leadership at each organisation, and to investigate if system leadership was being used by comparing it to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical framework. Each 'case' (the academy school and the charter school) were both compared to the theoretical framework and compared to each other. The data collected was used to gain an insight into the leaders' use of system leadership in the case study schools.

| Advantages of Case Study approach                               | Disadvantages of Case Study approach                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ability to investigate in-depth                                 | Hard to generalise from findings                                        |
| Attention given to relationships and social interactions        | Not easy to access case study settings                                  |
| Ability to use a variety of data (qualitative and quantitative) | Can focus on the process rather than the end-point product              |
| Ability to use a combination of research methods                | Hard to measure the data collected                                      |
| Suitable for small scale research                               | Difficult to define boundaries and select which data sources to include |
| Investigates phenomena as it occurs naturally                   |                                                                         |
| Flexible approach                                               |                                                                         |

*Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of case studies (Denscombe, 2017, p65-67)*

### 3.4 Theoretical Framework

Thomas (2016, p.23) explained the importance of case study research as having a theoretical framework to view it through. In this study the theoretical framework used to ‘view’ the case study through via the framework of system leadership initially produced by Hopkins (2007) and then further developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) through further research into different schools utilising a system leadership framework.

Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems which are studies holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of the inquiry will illuminate and explicate some analytical theme, or object. The use of this theoretical framework has shown whether there are aspects of the system leadership framework in use in leadership methods in the two educational establishments researched. By pattern matching (Campbell, 1966; Yin, 2003) from the data collected to the theoretical framework, the research goes on to analyse which aspects of system leadership are evident in each case study school and the perceived impact this is having.

### **3.5 Case Study Selection**

Initially, viable charter schools and academy schools were identified and researched using the internet looking at the ethos behind the school, the vision of the school and the reasons for it becoming an academy or to be set up as a charter school. Schools were identified using an internet search for academies and charter schools. Contact was made via email, to twenty academy schools within a geographical area convenient to the researcher, that would enable physical visits to undertake face to face interviews for data collection. Initially, no responses were returned. Following a recommendation provided by the supervisor, a CEO was approached and they were keen to be involved in the research. Following this questionnaire and interview dates were organised.

Initially, a range of charter schools across the USA were contacted via email to explain the purpose of the project and to see if they would participate. However, none responded. This led to many more charter schools being contacted over the following months and still no responses being gained. Finally, one school responded, but after several emails it was clear that the school would not be suitable due to its aims and leadership structure being more of a business rather than educational leaders. Following several months of frustration, focus was made on twenty charter schools in the states of Colorado, New Jersey and Pennsylvania due to these being in geographical area that could be visited by the researcher due to having friends or holidays planned in these areas so that face-to-face interviews could be completed, and these were contacted via email. One principal responded and further details of the research, the data collection methods, and ethical consideration were sent. The principal agreed to participate and a date for questionnaires and face-to-face interviews were agreed.

### **3.6 The Context of the Case Study Academy**

The academy that was chosen is based in the West Midlands in England. It has 630 pupils on roll (Ofsted, 2019) from the ages of 3-11, which is well above the national average. Over half of the children enrolled are of White British background, with Indian children being the largest ethnic minority group at the school. There is a below average number of SEND students and EAL learners. The number of students with an EHCP is average. The number of students entitled to free school meals is 15.4%. There is little movement of staff from the school. It is a popular and oversubscribed school (Ofsted, 2019).

The school performs well above average, with 93% of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading writing and maths in 2018/2019. The average for England in 2018/2019 was 65% and the average for the local authority was 63% (DfE, 2019) 18% of pupils in 2018/ 2019 achieved a higher standard in reading, writing and maths, compared to an England average of 11% and a local authority average of 10%. In 2018/2019 the average scores for reading and maths were also above England and local

authority average (DfE, 2019). This trend continued over the last three years where results have consistently been above average or well above average (Gov.uk, 2019).

The school converted to academy status in 2016 as an academy converter school. An academy converter school is classed as a new school following the Academies Act 2010. The Trust, of which this school is the lead school, was established at the same time as the conversion. The CEO of the trust had been the head of the primary at the time of the academisation. The MAT was established in December 2016, following a successful partnership between the main sponsor school and one of the other primary schools for 18 months beforehand. In the following two years another three primary schools had joined the trust. It was a local MAT, with all schools in a small geographical area to one another. The MAT started its initial work with a local primary (the CEO described this second school as being ‘just around the corner’) to help bring about school improvement. This is a key feature of the traditional MAT ‘design’ – using an outstanding school to improve another school. The MAT had since grown to help other local schools within the area.

The staff of the academy school at the centre of the MAT were very willing to be involved in the research, and this facilitated the ease of accessing key members for both interviews and questionnaire completion. Also, the academy, and then the MAT, were set up for the reasons of improvement, not just school improvement but to have improved the lives of those young people and communities within each school within the trust, so had a real sense of moral purpose at the centre before a MAT was established. The MAT expanded to include nine schools, in one local area. The trust began with the original converter academy (the subject of this case study), which then began to work in partnership with other local schools with the aim of school improvement (School A, website). The trust state their aspiration is, ‘that every child who attends a school within our MAT attends a “Great School”’ (School A, website). Their vision, to ‘the bring inspiration and innovation, with a courageous enthusiasm for excellence, to create amazing futures, together’.

The case study academy described itself on its website as aiming to create a culture of, ‘belonging, where the children are the beating heart of all that we do, they are our motivation and we are their champions’ (School A, website, accessed 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022). These were attributes that could be linked to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew’s (2009) framework of system leadership. The academy states that the teaching team are, ‘dedicated to improve every child’s life’ (School A, website, accessed 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022) and are, ‘committed to continual improvement and development and fully supported to achieve this’.

### **3.7 The Context of the Case Study Charter School**

The charter school involved in the research was a high school based in the mid-west state of Colorado in the United States of America. The school was in a suburb of Denver. The population of the city was approximately 100,000 people (US Census, 2010). Students were aged from 15-19 and had chosen to attend the charter school as they had become disengaged with traditional public schooling, (School B, website, accessed 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022) or in some cases, this school provided their ‘last chance’ (School B, website). This charter school was one of five charter schools within the school district. The student population has grown continually since it was founded. In 1996, the starting student population was 12 students, growing to 25 in 1997. Enrolment continued to grow, gaining 20% more students each year and now the school regularly takes 100-150 students each year (School B, website, accessed 24<sup>th</sup> January 2022). Most of the school students are 17-18 years old with the majority coming from white backgrounds. The largest ethnic minority group of students are from a Hispanic background, (School B, website)

The charter school was formed in 1996 with initially a small cohort of only 12 students. Then in 1997 its founders, ‘saw an opportunity to create a charter high school that would use research-based, alternative strategies to create an innovative college preparatory program’ (School B, website) and the school was granted a charter by the local school district.

The mission and vision of the school is to provide a school a nurturing community that responds to students’ individual needs (School B, website) The school aimed to create an innovative college preparation system, with the aspiration of engaging students who had become disillusioned with ‘normal’ high school. The school’s students had previously been expelled or suspended. The school aimed to engage students in a variety of different ways so that the students were able to be successful in higher education or the workplace. Students were not able to graduate without having a place at college to move on to. It prides itself on having, ‘dedicated, passionate staff’ and encourages applications as it is, ‘a school that cares about you’ (School B, website)

The school serves a small community of a maximum of 150 students who have become disengaged with the traditional public-school system. The school is a no fee charter school. The main aim of the school is to provide a college preparation programme and offer courses different to what would be found in a traditional public school such as life skills and stories and service learning. There is a high teacher to student ratio (1:17) and the school offers individualised curriculums with personalised interventions.

The charter school's curriculum is based on that of the local and state school standards (School B, website) and it is funded by the local school district. The school shows an upward trend over the last four years of students achieving their assigned grades by the end of the spring term (94% in reading and 87% in maths in 2018/2019) (School B, accountability data, 2018/2019). Students, if eligible complete the American College Testing (ACT) qualification. The ACT assessment is a national, standardised test in the USA aimed at university entrance. It is administered by ACT, which is a non-profit organisation. The test covers four academic areas – English, mathematics, reading and scientific reasoning. In 2018/2019, 67% of students at the case study charter school reached the ACT benchmark, and 55% reached the average score for all those taking the ACT in the USA in 2018/2019. 39% of students graduate, compared to a state average of 75% (School B, accountability data, 2019).

The school website, and charter school websites based in the USA, suggested a strong sense of moral purpose amongst school leaders and staff, including the school slogan 'experience a school that cares about you!'. The case study school was at the centre of its community to ensure the engagement of local students and families and had a focus on ensuring that students achieved the best possible outcomes, stating its vision, 'is to have a diverse and varied educational community, full of students who celebrate their individualism while participating in the school community in a meaningful way' (School B, website). This suggested that it would be an interesting case study to be able to investigate and explore how leadership was used in the school, to try to ensure improved outcomes of the students as the school states on its website that they encourage, 'the pursuit of knowledge as an intervention for youth; particularly those who may be "off-track"' (School B, website). It also provided the opportunity to research the moral purpose of the leaders and the staff for working in a school that, it appeared on the surface, might not necessarily attract staff due to the challenging nature of the students.

Both schools in the sample were vastly different to each other, from the countries they were situated in, to the age range they were educating. Before visiting either establishment, it was very apparent from claims made on each school's website that both schools believed they had forward thinking leaders, trying to challenge preconceptions of students in their communities and push them forwards. Following the initial review of website information, it was highlighted that each school had a distinct vision. First contact with the school leader at each school emphasised the vision they had for their school. Initial email conversations suggested the school leaders appeared to have a real moral imperative to ensure that every student had the best possible outcomes, and by doing this staff members had great moral purpose for working in these schools. It was of interest to see if this moral purpose was evident through the staff in both schools, and if this brought about opportunities for staff development and community work. It would also be useful to identify the amount that these two schools were able to work with other schools

to help them bring about improvement based upon the success these schools had in their own specific fields.

### 3.8 Chronology



*Figure 6: Chronological order of data collection*

### 3.9 Data Collection Methods

A variety of qualitative and quantitative data was collected using a mixed methods approach. Creswell and Clark (2007) have described a mixed methods approach as being a method focussing on, collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies' (p.5). A mixed methods approach enabled both a qualitative and quantitative approach to be used and this has traditionally not been the case and researchers have tended to use one approach or another (Denscombe, 1998). A mixed method approach also allowed triangulation of data and analysis. The mixed methods approach allowed data to be collected and analysed, and then the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data collection were integrated so that inferences could be drawn and compared (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007). to the framework of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). The aim was that the data collected through interviews and questionnaires could be pattern matched to the theoretical framework of system leadership (Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews, 2009) and aspects that did match could be viewed in more detail, using the insights given by the qualitative data collected. Thomas (2016, p.187) described evidence as, 'data in support of some proposition'. The proposition for this piece of research was to investigate the approaches and methods being used, and to ascertain if aspects of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical framework of system leadership were in use in the case study schools, and if not, whether any other leadership theories were evident.

The case study approach provided a snapshot of leadership in both the academy school and charter school but using a mixed methods approach would provide more data than a single method. This also meant that the data collected in the questionnaires could then be used to formulate the questions in the semi structured interview schedule. The responses from both questionnaires and enabled me to address research questions 3 and 4 so that an insight into the leadership approach from the different leaders could be gained. This provided the opportunity to probe further, during the interviews, into responses given in the questionnaires. The mixed methods approach thus meant being able to build on what had previously been learned (Denscombe, 1998). The purpose of using a mixed methods approach was to gain a variety of both personal ideas, feelings, and attitudes along with being able to use quantitative data to be able to gain numerical and statistical data to elicit if senior leaders both understand the term system leadership and/or feel they use it within their leadership style or work with other leaders who do. Each method is reviewed in the following sections.

The data collection methods used in the research (interviews, questionnaires, and observations) are detailed further later in this chapter. Denscombe (1998, p.138) noted that 'the mixed methods approach was 'problem-driven' in the sense that it treated the research problem – more specifically answers to the

research problem – as the overriding concern’. This was important for the research as the focus was to look specifically at the leadership approaches being used in both the academy school and the charter school, and to compare this against a system leadership approach. Interview and questionnaire questions were specifically focussed to gather information leading to conclusions to be drawn regarding leadership, with specific consideration of system leadership, as appropriate.

The quantitative data provided information on the opinions of the leaders using a Likert scale to give an indication of their role within their organisation, previous roles and teaching capacity, career development and feelings towards their students’ achievement. This quantitative data was then used to construct the probes used at interview by providing an insight into the opinions of the leaders involved in the research around key themes in Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew’s (2009) framework of system leadership. The qualitative data then provided the rich data of explanations and ideas behind each individual leader so that a picture of different leaders’ responses could be gained and linked to the framework.

A mixed methods approach was useful to triangulate data collected, as suggested by Denscombe (1998, p.139): ‘Researchers can improve their confidence in the accuracy of findings using different methods to investigate the same subject. In line with the principles of triangulation, the mixed methods approach provides the researcher with the opportunity to check findings from one method against the findings from a different method’. A mixed methods approach can be used to try to reduce bias or issues with using just one data collection method. Denzin (1989, p.307) suggested: ‘By combining multiple observations, theories, methods and data sources, [researchers] can hope to overcome the intrinsic bias that comes from single-methods, single observer, and single theory studies.’

### **3.10 Questionnaires**

Denscombe (1998, p.155) described a questionnaire as something which is, ‘designed to collect information which can be used subsequently as data for analysis.’ The purpose of using a questionnaire in this piece of research was that it was deductive, it was informed by previous theory to fit the data to the theoretical framework of system leadership developed by Hopkins, Higham, and Matthews (2009), if applicable. The questions used focussed on key elements of the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew’s (2009) theoretical framework and data collected was used to confirm if elements of system leadership were present and recognised by multiple participants in each case study school. Questionnaires worked well alongside interviews in this mixed methods approach as this allowed more data to be collected by providing initial scoping from the same group of participants giving a fuller scope to the data and making it more informative towards the probes used in the interview schedule. Xerri (2017) has explained how

by using a mixed methods approach such as a combination of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires can provide much richer data. The questionnaire data was collected anonymously. The data gathered from the questionnaire enabled the development of probes to be included in the semi-structured interviews to seek further clarification. By collecting questionnaire data initially, reviewing and analysing this, and identifying key themes and areas for further investigation, it meant that interview questions could be much more focussed, and there would be the opportunity for elaboration of key points and themes. The questionnaire data provided me with general information regarding the participants, such as age, gender, school role. However, it also provided me with data on their opinions on a range of statements linked to system leadership and key themes from Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework.

The questionnaire used was a web-based questionnaire using the questionnaire software Qualtrics. Denscombe (1998, p.159) described the advantages of web-based questionnaires as being: 'the design can take advantage of all the usual web-based features', and 'the responses can be read automatically into a spreadsheet or database, which has the benefits of speed and accuracy in terms of data collection'. Qualtrics has its own data and analysis tool, removing the need to take the questionnaire data from the web-based platform for it to be analysed. This ensured two different things. These being that no data was lost during transfer, and it also saved time during the analysis process. The software was very user friendly, for both researcher and those completing the questionnaire.

The questionnaire featured a range of question styles to ensure that a range of data was collected. By using a variety of question types in a questionnaire it enables the researcher, as Xerri (2017, p.66) explained to, 'enhance the range and detail of the gathered information'. Question styles in the questionnaire included multiple-choice questions, dichotomous questions, open-ended questions and five-point Likert scale questions. Thomas (2016, p.195) described a Likert scale as, 'an easily used tool for measuring attitudes: respondents indicate their levels of agreement to statements provided by the researcher relating to that attitude, belief or characteristic'. Likert scales enable a range of feeling towards a topic to be given by respondents. Also, by using the same Likert scale questions it is possible to group together the responses from each case study school to look at a general pattern for the leadership teams within that school, as well as specific responses. Considering the literature on the importance of moral purpose in system leadership (section 2.13), questions were included on attitudes towards working and teaching across a range of schools and working outside of their own school. Also included, due to the importance of developing people and managing teaching and learning (section 2.12) there were questions based on career development and training others.

The purpose of the bibliographic and closed questions was to gather facts for comparison between respondents. These questions allowed set information to be collected from each respondent, and it was then easy to cross-reference between each respondent. The main disadvantage of these style of questions is the lack of the respondents being able to provide opinions or viewpoints, so open and rating questions were included. The open questions were used to gather responses that Denscombe (1998, p.165) described as able to, 'reflect the full richness and complexity of the views held by the respondent.' It was also decided to use open ended questions when it was not desirable to predict the range of possible answers. Dörnyei (2007, p.107) explained the reason for this as, 'by permitting greater freedom of expression, open-format items can provide a far greater richness than fully quantitative data'. The open-ended questions provided the participants with the opportunity to discuss aspects of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework key to system leadership and be able to discuss their career development in more detail including their visions and information about key aspects of their role within their school, community, or other schools.

The questionnaire used was kept relatively short (15 questions over three pages). This was so that the completion of it would not be a heavy imposition on those completing it, whose time would be limited due to the nature of their jobs, as this led to a higher percentage participate rate. Fallowfield (1995, p.78) stated that respondents, 'might well decline if there are too many questionnaires or items included. It is axiomatic that the quality of data is compromised as the length of time required to complete tests increases.' The questionnaire used can be found in appendix five.

The questionnaire was piloted within a different MAT to the case study group. The pilot MAT was the one in which I worked at the time and was selected due to ease of access, and the likelihood of a good response rate. 20 questionnaires were sent, and 17 responses were received. Very minor changes were made following the pilot questionnaire. An additional question was added to find the role of the respondent as this had not initially been included but it was considered that this would add greater depth to the information to know the level of leadership of the person responding. The use of a pilot questionnaire meant that the length of the questionnaire could be ascertained as suitable for purpose, would not be too time consuming for participants, and in terms of the analysis of the data to ensure that the researcher was aware of limitations in terms of data collection and time management (Rowley, 2014). The pilot was intended to assess the suitability of the questionnaire questions, and the data collected was not included in the data analysed for the research.

The finalised questionnaire was sent to senior and middle leaders of both the academy school and the charter school (twenty leaders in total) and they all responded.

| Advantages of questionnaires                                                         | Disadvantages of questionnaires                                             |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Low cost                                                                             | Pre-coded questions can cause participant frustration                       |
| Ability to collect a lot of data                                                     | Little opportunity for researcher to check on truthfulness of the responses |
| Easy to arrange a self-completing questionnaire                                      |                                                                             |
| Standardised – all participants are provided with the same questions                 |                                                                             |
| Web based questionnaires are easy to analyse using data processing software          |                                                                             |
| When done online, questionnaires are accessible for those who may have access issues |                                                                             |

*Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires (Denscombe, 2017, p. 199-200)*

### 3.11 Interviews

The questionnaire provided quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire data provided an overview of the attitudes of the leaders to a range of aspects based around Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical framework and this was used to form the probes used in the interview questions. The questionnaires also provided quantitative data on each participant such as age and gender. However, qualitative data from interviews was needed to provide rich data giving the reality experienced by each leader in their leadership position. Qualitative data can provide a rich data source to then be used to answer specific research questions posed (Blaike, 2000). The use of words, as is with qualitative data, enables rich explanations and systems which can show a chronological flow tracking events and consequences so that researchers are able to investigate beyond initial thoughts (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Qualitative data is about collecting data based on words (Thomas, 2011) rather than numbers (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.17) defined qualitative research as, 'any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification'. The qualitative data was gathered in the form of the interviews, general observation of each school and its staff and students and some of the questionnaire questions. Hoepfl (1997, p.49) suggested that qualitative data would 'more fully describe a phenomenon is an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective but from the reader's perspective as well'.

Rowley (2012, p.260) described how ‘interviews are generally used in conducting qualitative research, in which the researcher is interested in collecting “facts”, or gaining the insights into or understanding of opinions, attitudes, experiences, processes, behaviours or predictions.’ Interviews were used to collect not just the ideas and opinions of the interviewees, but also to gain insights into the opinions, emotions, feelings and experiences of those involved in leadership roles within the academy school and the charter school. Interviews gave the opportunity to probe further into ideas given by the interviewee. Thomas (2009, p.160) described interviews as, ‘a discussion with someone in which you try to get information from them. The information may be facts or opinions or attitudes.’

This case study design collected qualitative data from interviews of key people working within the case. Case study methodology tends to use what Taylor and Sondergaard (2017, p.70) have described as ‘in-depth interviews’ that are ‘semi-structured to unstructured’. For the research, a series of semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data for analysis. The interview questions were structured to elicit key ideas of leadership in use by the participants. There were also questions designed to focus on the moral purpose of each participant and their attitudes towards working within other schools, the community and wider. The interviews were audio-recorded using the Windows computer based software ‘Voice Recorder’, and then, as suggested by Taylor and Sondergaard (2017) they were transcribed as soon as possible after the interview and then sent to the interviewee to be checked and make corrections, if necessary, if this was requested by the interviewee at the time of the interview. The reason for audio recording the interviews was not just for accuracy in terms of responses to the questions.

Twenty leaders were interviewed, 10 from the academy school, and 10 from the charter school. They were the key leaders from each school, as defined by each principal. The interview questions were based on Thomas’ (2009) interview schedule model (see Appendix 6). Hoepfl (1997, p.52) described an interview schedule being used as it allowed the researcher, ‘to ensure that basically the same information is obtained from each person, there are no predetermined responses.’ The interview schedule was built around the key themes given below (taken from Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew’s (2009) theoretical framework of system leadership) and then a series of questions and probes were mapped around these key themes. The probes used within the interviews were able to add more rich data to that gathered from an anonymous questionnaire. I was able to focus the probes on different roles held by different participants. Thomas (2009, p.164) described probes as ‘encouragements to interviewees to proceed with aspects of their answers’. The schedule was provided to each interviewee prior to the interview, so they were able to think about their responses and be aware of the areas which would be covered by the interview (Brundrett and Rhodes, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as they provided the opportunity to ask a range of questions around certain ‘issues’, and the schedule acted as a guide rather than a fixed script, allowing the interviewer to go in a different direction if the need arose. The purpose was to confirm the initial learning from the questionnaires that system leadership was being used and to gain participant insight into the strengths and effectiveness of this form of leadership. With moral purpose lying at the centre of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew’s (2009) framework, the interviews enabled me to probe into the ideas around moral purpose and what this was, taking the attitudes from the Likert scale question and gaining concrete examples of moral purpose in action. The issues focussed on were those which make up the theoretical framework of system leadership provided by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009):

- Moral purpose
- Personal development
- Strategic acumen
- Leading teaching and learning
- Developing people
- Developing organizations
- Leading an innovation and improvement partnership
- Partnering a lower achieving school
- Leading a network
- Working as a change agent
- Improving a challenging school
- Sharing practice

Denscombe (1998, p.175) described semi-structured interviews as those where the interviewer has a clear list of questions to ask, but the interviewer is ‘prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered, and, perhaps more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised’. The advantage of using a semi-structured interview for this was that any emerging themes could be followed up, unlike a structured interview technique. A semi-structured interview technique was useful in collecting information, data, and facts about the participants (Rowley, 2012) and to compare to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew’s framework.

Once the interview schedule had been developed (see Appendix 6) a convenient time, date and location was found, and the principal of each school was approached through email to propose these. Each

principal arranged the times for their staff to be interviewed so that lost teaching time and cover requirements could be minimised. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The advantage of using interviews included the depth and breadth of information that was collected. This was because responses could be developed and elaborated. Probes were used to pursue issues as they arose, and meant answers could be expanded on, to provide further depth. Semi-structured interviews can provide insights into how the interviewees view the world (Bryman, 2008). They provide flexibility giving the researcher the choice of a path to follow should deviation from a question occur (Bryman, 2008), and this is not possible with structured interviews. One of the potential disadvantages of interviews is the time-consuming nature of interview transcription process. Much rich data can be gathered, but then this must be collated and further analysed (Bryman, 2008). The researcher must also take care with interviews to ensure it is the voice of the interviewee in the data and not their own voice coming through, and therefore an interview schedule provides a useful tool (Thomas, 2009).

| Advantages of semi-structured interviews                               | Disadvantages of semi-structured interviews                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Low costs                                                              | Time and travel constraints                                                               |
| Gives understanding to feelings, emotions, and opinions                | Time consuming to transcribe and analyse                                                  |
| Researcher can focus on complex issues and gain focussed understanding | Interviewer effect – bias can be created                                                  |
| Offers a flexible approach when asking questions                       | Validity of data – as data is from experience of what people say rather than what they do |
| Interviewee can develop ideas and speak widely on key issues           | Hard to achieve consistency across interviews – can affect reliability                    |
| Open ended questions allow for elaboration                             | Cost of travel                                                                            |
| Interviews can develop through the research process                    | Audio recorder can cause inhibitions                                                      |
| Able to generate rich and in-depth data                                | Could be an invasion of privacy if interview is not done in a tactful way                 |
| Simple equipment needed                                                |                                                                                           |
| High response rate                                                     |                                                                                           |
| Direct contact allows data to be checked with interviewee for accuracy |                                                                                           |
| Can provide a therapeutic experience for interviewee to talk           |                                                                                           |

*Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews (Denscombe, 2017, p. 220 -222)*

### **3.11.1 Interview Schedule**

Thomas's (2013) framework was utilised to develop a schedule of questions, which could be modified during the interview. As suggested by Robson and McCartan (2016) this provided a structure for the interview process but enabled some flexibility in terms of being able to follow up, ask for further elaboration or clarification of the interviewee's responses. Based on the literature review, themes were identified, related to each of the research questions. The specific interview questions were then developed based on the themes and possible probes included which could be used depending upon the answers.

Research question 1: What insights do school leaders' accounts provide on the use of system leadership as an approach to leadership in an academy? Key themes from literature review were focussed around Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical framework of system leadership to gain an insight into the thoughts, ideas, and beliefs of each individual leader so that this could be linked to the theoretical framework. The questions were focussed on leading across schools and how this benefits themselves and other staff. Example questions included: Why lead in a school other than your own? Why be a leader in more than one school? Why do you want to be part of an academies trust? Does being part of a group of schools benefit your staff? What do you believe a system leader to be? Does leading in this way benefit the school? (Refer to Appendix 6 for full interview schedule)

Research question 2: What insights do school leaders accounts provide on the use of system leadership as an approach to leadership in a charter school? Key themes from literature review were focussed on Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical framework of system leadership to gain an insight into the thoughts, ideas and beliefs of each individual leader so that this could be linked to the theoretical framework. Questions were focussed on the appeal of working in a charter school, how the school is a part of the wider community and if staff could see benefit in becoming part of a group of schools and to find out if there was centralisation in running wider aspects of the school such as HR and IT. Example questions included: Why do you want to be part of a charter school? How does being part of a charter school help your career development? In what position were you when you joined the school? What is your position now? Are there plans to increase the size of the organisation? How does the school benefit the community it is in? Could more be done centrally? What are the benefits of this? (Refer to Appendix 6 for full interview schedule)

### 3.11.2 Interview Data Collection Matrix Template

During the transcription of the interviews, a tally chart was used in a data collection matrix so that the number of responses by different leaders linked to the key themes from Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical framework could be monitored and key quotations supporting the key themes could be identified. The example of the matrix used during this process is shown in Figure 7.

| School   | Key theme from theoretical framework | Tally of responses linked to this key theme | Key quotations and interviewee information | Broad cross-school themes |
|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| School A |                                      |                                             |                                            |                           |
| School B |                                      |                                             |                                            |                           |

*Figure 7: Interview data analysis template*

### 3.12 Observations

Background and contextual information for each setting was gained using field notes based on observations of the physicality of both schools. Field notes were made as soon as possible following the visits to each school, on the same day, which is what is suggested by Hoepfl (1997). The field notes were typed up using Word on a personal computer and stored in the University BEAR data share data storage area. The data collected included, in both case study schools, the appearance of communal areas and evidence of displays, the layout of any classroom areas seen and the movement around the school. This was used for the researcher to gain a deeper understanding into the physical space of each school. This gave an insight in the ethos of each school, by observing displays and school vision statements around the school. The content for the displays was decided by the leadership team and so it was possible to observe if the school vision was being fed to the school community and other visitors.

The observations were mainly based on the physicality of each school involved in the case study. When visiting each school for the face-to-face interviews I was able to view the communal areas of the schools. These observations were used as a tool to contextualise the different case study schools and how they portrayed themselves to external visitors, and to see if this matched with any aspects of the Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) system leadership model. The observations included noting examples of moral purpose of the school and leaders that were physically present in the school building such as mottos on display or key words on display. This provided context for each case study school, in terms of its setting and what was observed in each school. Physical features, such as posters, displays and any

marketing material (Hoepfl, 1997), were observed and noted. This provided a data gathering tool to record evidence of system leadership in the physicality of the school (Peel, 2020).

The observations in the charter school included an observational walk around the school, led by the headteacher and an assembly where all leaders, teaching staff and students were present. The walk involved visiting three classrooms, where the classroom physicality was observed, as well as brief observations of student and teacher interactions. During the visit, notes were made in a matrix comparing each observation to the model of system leadership presented by Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) (see Appendix 12).

Within the Academy school, communal areas were observed during the visit when the face-to-face interviews were conducted. Areas such as the corridors and reception were observed in terms of their physical appearance and the presence of materials supporting the school ethos and culture. Observations on the physical appearance of the school were made in comparison to Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) model of system leadership (see Appendix 12). The observational data was useful, alongside the interview data, as it allowed the researcher to gain an insight into the context of where those involved in the research (Hoepfl, 1997).

### **3.13 Data Analysis**

Data from the questionnaire was used to calculate the percentage of participants at each stage of the Likert scale for the quantitative questions to gain an insight into the attitudes towards working in other schools, being invested in a range of students and if they felt their career had developed whilst at the school. The open-ended question responses were used to add probes to the interview schedule to find out more about ideas such as the work of the school in the wider community and the role participants had in developing teaching and learning. The questionnaire data was matched to the key themes detailed in 3.11 when analysed. Qualitative data from the interviews was pattern matched to the key themes detailed in section 3.11 (See Appendix 9). This was undertaken by transcribing each interview and then highlighting words and phrases that matched to the key themes detailed in section 3.11 (see Appendix 11). Areas matching to this were then used to compare the leaders in each school and their responses to identify if there were the same key ideas held across the school leadership teams and to elicit if different leadership roles provided different accounts on these key themes.

The data was analysed using a pattern matching approach, aligned with a deductive case study design (Campbell, 1975). This involved comparing observed outcomes to the pattern of the given theory (Bitektine, 2008) by colour coding each key themes given in section 3.11 and then colour coding

questionnaire questions and interview responses in the same colour and identifying patterns linking leadership insights to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework. Colour coding was performed by hand on each interview transcript using a variety of colours and then number of occurrences were put into the interview data analysis matrix. The pattern matching technique enabled data collected to be compared to the presented theory to require, 'a theoretical pattern of expected outcomes, an observed pattern of effects, and an attempt to match the two' (Trochim, 1989, p.360). In this case, the key themes and ideas gathered from the questionnaire and interview data were gathered and compared to Hopkins, Higham, and Matthew's (2009) framework of system leadership so see if the data collected matched a system leadership approach or if alternative approaches emerged. This was then summarised using the data summary matrix template as shown in Figure 8.

| Summary of findings                       |     |                        |            |              |                |
|-------------------------------------------|-----|------------------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
|                                           |     | Data Collection Method |            |              |                |
| Key Issues                                | RQs | Questionnaires         | Interviews | Observations | Central Themes |
| Moral Purpose                             |     |                        |            |              |                |
| Personal Development                      |     |                        |            |              |                |
| Strategic Acumen                          |     |                        |            |              |                |
| Managing Teaching and Learning            |     |                        |            |              |                |
| Developing Organisations                  |     |                        |            |              |                |
| Developing People                         |     |                        |            |              |                |
| Work as a Change Agent                    |     |                        |            |              |                |
| Improve a School in a Challenging Context |     |                        |            |              |                |
| Act as a Community Leader                 |     |                        |            |              |                |
| Partner a Low                             |     |                        |            |              |                |

|                                                    |  |  |  |  |  |
|----------------------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Achieving School</b>                            |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>Lead an Educational Improvement Partnership</b> |  |  |  |  |  |

Figure 8: Data summary matrix template

Pattern matching can be dated back to the work of Egon Brunswick (Hammond, 1966b). The emphasis on research during what Kock (1959) calls the Age of Theory relied upon the emphasis of research being on prediction and control and, ‘in the age of theory there was a general belief in the commensurability of theories’, (Sinkocivs, 2018, p.3). Sinkocivs (2018) has explained how using the pattern matching technique can lead to the research being more purposeful and rigorous. This is due to it involving systematic planning of the research work based on existing theories. It is key that the use of pattern matching is not about trying to get a theory to match a pattern, but an attempt to link a pattern which comes from a theory (Trochim, 1989).

Figure 9 below shows the general theory of pattern matching, which has been adapted from Trochim (1989) and Wible and Sedgley (1999), and then this has been adapted in Figure 10 to show how this approach was used:

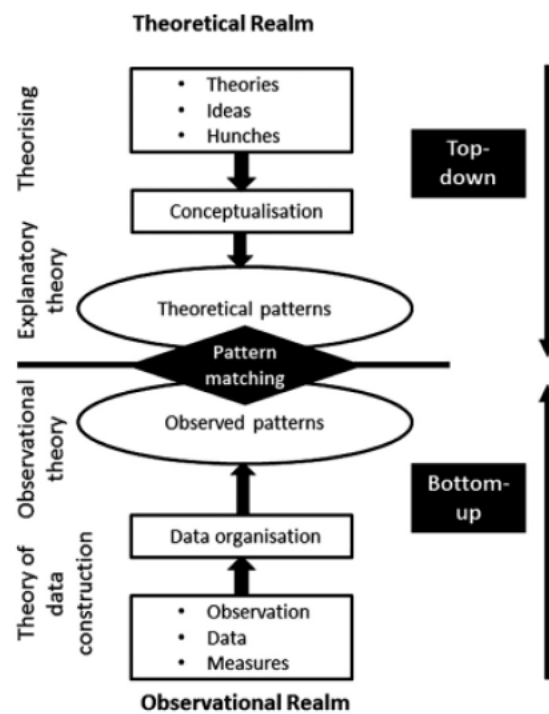


Figure 9: Theoretical pattern matching (Sinkocivs, 2018, p.6.)

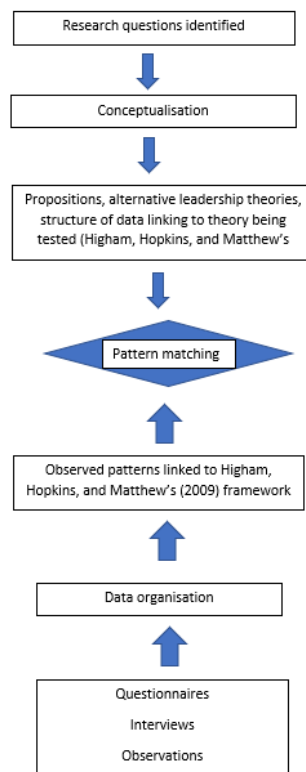


*Figure 10: Using pattern matching for the research, based on Yin's (2009) application of pattern matching to case study design.*

Where data collected showed evidence of matching one of these areas this was recorded, and this has been shown in Chapter 4. Through looking at each individual area of the theoretical framework and key responses being identified, answers to the research questions were investigated, analysed, and summarised in Chapters 4 and 5. The key themes detailed in section 3.11 were colour coded. Questionnaire questions were highlighted by each colour code showing which aspect of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework they linked to. For quantitative data, percentages of leaders at the different stages of the Likert scale were calculated. For the qualitative questionnaire and interview data the same colour codes as used previously for each theme were then used to match responses to each theme when applicable. Responses not matching any of the key themes given in section 3.11 were matched to other leadership theories, if applicable, as explained in section 2.3 (Glaser, 1965). This then enabled data within each category in the theoretical framework to be reviewed in more detail to give insights into each school within the case study, for example, by reviewing the variety of responses linked to 'moral purpose' from different interviewees and comparing the circumstances around these. By doing

this it integrated the diverse properties that could exist within each category (Glaser, 1965) and helped to gain an understanding of each, from the variety of participants involved in the research. Where data collected did not match to the system leadership theoretical framework, this was reviewed and matched, if applicable, to alternative educational leadership theories.

The academy school and charter school were viewed as two separate case studies and initially the data collected was analysed separately. This analysis was used to see if either of the case studies were using a system leadership approach in their schools, whether they were aware of this or not. Following on from analysing each school data separately, comparisons were drawn between the analysis of both case studies to see if any similarities or differences could be identified, and then linked to the type of schools the data had come from, or to see if the similarities meant that links could be made despite being different schools. The insights of the leaders were gained from the personal accounts they gave to the open-ended questionnaire questions and from the face-to-face interview questions.

### **3.14 Ethical Considerations**

It was important to consider the ethical issues around this research before embarking upon the collection of data. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.289) expressed that ethical considerations are important to have considered when fieldwork was involved as, ‘fieldwork and its accompanying analytical work are often quite unpredictable and situation specific’. Ideas changed during the study, from the initial research ideas these developed as the sample schools were identified and the individuals were met and spoken to. These ideas have been put forward by Miles and Huberman (1994, p.289), ‘conceptual foci, research questions, instrumentation and sampling all may evolve over the course of a study’.

Ethics needed to be considered to ensure that the benefits of the research outweighed any costs to participants and to have ensured that any actions undertaken by the researcher did not cause harm to the participants. Participants must have been made clear of the expectations the researcher had of them and their participation in the study prior to them agreeing to take part, and the knowledge of what they could expect after their involvement, such as a right to check through interview transcriptions if they wished, or a copy of the final report if they requested this.

Thomas (2016, p.78) described ethics in research work as, ‘principles of conduct about what is right and wrong’. Researchers must have shown integrity in their research. To have involved people in research you must have gained consent which Thomas (2009, p.149) defined as, ‘the agreement of people to take part in the study’. There are different ways in which consent can be gained depending upon the data collection method being used. For the interviews this was done by participants giving informed consent,

where participants knew exactly what they were consenting to. Respondents needed to be provided with information about the research and what their involvement would be (Denscombe, 1998). Participants were able to opt-in, meaning they made an active choice about being part of the research, whereas those completing questionnaires gave implied consent. This is where participants were told about the research, and you assume consent is given unless they tell you otherwise (Thomas, 2009).

The BERA (2011, p.5) Ethical guidelines for educational research stated that researchers:

...should operate within an ethic of respect for any persons involved in the research they are undertaking. Individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference.

Participants in both the interviews and questionnaires were provided with a participant information sheet (see Appendices 1 and 2). This was to ensure that they were fully aware of the research focus and aims, to provide information; and explain that participants could withdraw from the research at any time, without reason. This followed the BERA guidelines (2011, p.5): 'Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported'. Verbal consent of participation in the research was gained from interview participants, following them reading the information sheet and having aims of the project explained to them. This is referred to as voluntary informed consent. Interview participants also signed a consent form (see Appendix 4). Implied consent was assumed from questionnaire participants when they completed the questionnaire. Data collected was kept confidential, as is considered the norm for this type of research (BERA, 2011, p.7).

For the questionnaires', implied consent was assumed. Thomas (2009, p.150) explained this term as having, 'implied consent, you tell participants about the research and assume that they give their consent unless they tell you otherwise'. Questionnaire participants were emailed the questionnaire participant information sheet, along with an email explaining how the questionnaire needed to be completed, allowing them to consent to completing the questionnaire by choosing whether to complete it or not.

Participants were assured that the data they provided would be kept confidential and to ensure that their anonymity was protected. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.293) have used Sieber's 1992 work to explain confidentiality ('agreements with a person or organisation about what will be done (and may not be done) with their data') and anonymity ('lack of identifiers, information that would indicate which individuals or organizations provided which data'). Anonymity has been ensured by keeping school names and participant names changed (Thomas, 2016). This was done by referring to the two schools involved as 'the academy school' and 'the charter school'.

Interview and questionnaire participants have been referred to by coded letters. Participants were ensured that data they were given would be kept confidential. Thomas (2016, p.82) described confidentiality as, 'about a commitment to respecting the wishes of informants, who may not want what they information they have given you to become public'. Data about different individuals' leadership in their relevant organisation was collected during the interview but this data has not been provided in the interview transcripts so that anonymity has been ensured but it was necessary for the researcher to collect this information so that it has been used only in what Thomas (2016, p.82) stated as, 'drawing your conclusions but keeping the details off the record'.

### **3.15 Reliability**

Reliability refers to whether the research would gather the same results if repeated using the same tools (such as the same interview and questionnaire questions) (Heale and Twycross, 2015). This can be much easier in quantitative research, when using instruments to record and then repeat measurements. However, in qualitative research ensuring reliability required researchers to make judgements about the research being 'sound' (Noble and Smith, 2015). In qualitative research, reliability, 'describes consistency within the employed analytical procedures' (Noble and Smith, 2015, p.34). For the research, questionnaires were issued in the same method to each participant and interviews were conducted using the same interview schedule to ensure that there was consistency in procedures and to limit any researcher bias (Noble and Smith, 2015, p.34). The purpose of this research has been to conduct it with every effort to ensure reliability to provide a piece of research focussing on the phenomena of system leadership in two specific schools, so that the outcome provides an informative and valuable contribution to the existing knowledge of system leadership in education and adds to this by focussing on system leadership in specific school contexts.

### **3.16 Validity**

Validity is concerned with accurately measuring a concept. (Heale and Twycross, 2015). In qualitative research, validity refers to, 'the integrity and application of the methods undertaken and the precision in

which the findings accurately reflect the data' (Noble and Smith, 2015, p. 34). As the researcher, I recognise that multiple realities exist for those involved in this research, and as an outsider my reality will be different to that of those working in the case study schools. I have outlined my own personal experiences at the start of this research to make my positionality clear. I also used a semi-structured interview format so that an open discussion did not happen at interview and specific topics were kept to. The data analysis has been used to accurately reflect the data, using only the opinions of those interviewed and those who completed the questionnaire when the data has been reported on (Noble and Smith, 2015, p.34).

### **3.17 Trustworthiness**

Jordan *et al.*, (2005) explained that trustworthiness, in terms of research, is, 'what makes it rational for people to accept research findings – to build future research upon them, to utilize them to inform public policy, and to use them to guide individual choice and community action' (p.41). Unlike in quantitative research where data can be tested for reliability and repeatability to ensure similar results are obtained, is it not as easy in qualitative research, as when data is collected in qualitative research it may be looking at a specific instance and point in time which may not be reproducible later. However, it is important to ensure that qualitative data is trustworthy.

Trustworthiness of a study refers to, 'the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study' (Connelly, 2016, p.435). Lincoln and Guba (1985) outlined the key criteria necessary for a study to be trustworthy. These are *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, *transferability*, and *authenticity* (added in 1994), but not all procedures are present in each research study. This study was credible, due to using standard qualitative procedures for questionnaires and interviews. Data analysis was completed using standard pattern matching procedures. I believe the findings are confirmable. The findings could be repeated by another researcher if done with the same group of participants. Data, as collected, was discussed with my supervisor to ensure a lack of bias by having only my perspective upon the research. The research is transferable, as I have been able to use my findings in my own work at my current school. The data was also authentic as a range of participant was used showing, 'a range of different realities' (Connelly, 2016, p.436). Appropriate people were selected from each case study school to provide rich data that has given deeper meaning to the phenomenon of system leadership, and increased understanding of this area.

In the research a variety of data collection methods were used with the aim of triangulating the data collected to ensure reliability, validity, and trustworthiness for this piece of research, this is known as data triangulation, where the use of more than one type of data was collected and then compared to

establish patterns in the different data collected. As Cohen *et al.*, (2011) described, qualitative research has no single blueprint as there is no single viewpoint of the world. It looks at behaviour, opinions, the voices of those participating and a detailed view of the phenomena under study, and thus reliability, reproducibility and validity are problematic. Methodology used included accounting for my own personal bias and opinions, having a clear decision trail across the process of data collection, using two case studies so that comparisons can be made and using different data collection methods to compare findings (Noble and Smith, 2015, p.35)

### **3.18 The Role of the Researcher**

As a single researcher, researching an area of interest, and working alone in an educational setting, it is important to understand your role within the research. When collecting data which forms part of a qualitative research project it is key to remember that as a researcher you are not invisible to the world you are researching – you are a member of that world for the point in which you are involved within in. In fact, as stated by Flick (2007), the qualitative researcher takes: ‘part in what they observe’ (p.7). As the researcher I endeavoured to maintain an open attitude throughout the research process (Noryk and Harder, 2010). To do this I had at the back of my mind the theoretical framework of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009), but ensured an open mind that I may find no link to this when collecting and analysing data, and I may find no evidence of system leadership in use in either of my case study schools. This is important as it ensured the research was free from bias and promoted openness. Within interview questions, system leadership as a methodological keyword was only used towards the end of the interview schedule, so that interviewees were not guided towards talking about it but were able to freely discuss their leadership methodology. As the researcher it was necessary to find links, if any, from the human experiences to the theoretical framework providing the phenomenon in this research. When conducting the questionnaires and interviews I adhered to strict ethical guidelines and agreed the principles of research with those involved before commencing data collection. I approached the school leader (CEO/principal) in both case study schools to gain permission to complete data collection for the research with their school leaders, and offered to disseminate key findings and analysis.

### **3.19 Summary**

The chapter has detailed the research design and methodology. The design method of using a case study for the research has been explained as well as the different methods of data collection that were used. The chapter proceeded to explain how the data was analysed when identifying the key themes, if any, that were present and then matching these to the system leadership theoretical framework proposed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). Ethical considerations were then outlined, in relation to the research undertaken. Chapter 4 outlines the findings, discussion and analysis and compares these against

the themes in the theoretical framework of system leadership proposed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). The extent, if any, system leadership was being used in the leadership of either the academy school or the charter school, is detailed; and if it was, similarities and differences in leadership approaches and practice between the two case study institutions are analysed. The voices of the school leaders are shared and analysed to establish their leadership approaches and the impact of this in practice.

## **Chapter Four: Findings, Discussion and Analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the findings from the research undertaken will be discussed and the analysis of the data will be presented. The sections will be structured under the headings identified and reviewed in Chapter 2, linked to the theoretical framework of system leadership presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) and detailed in section 3.11. The data collected for each school from the questionnaire, interviews and observations was reduced, and a pattern-matching deductive approach, as described in Chapter 3, was used to identify key themes and links to the theoretical framework if they were present in the data. This is followed by the summation of key findings and analysis, and the comparison of these across the schools. Within the comparison key insights have been highlighted about the role of moral purpose in school leadership within these case study schools, and how leadership is able to work with a variety of stakeholders such as the local community or as a partner to a low achieving school.

There are challenges in the interpretation of qualitative data (Robson, 2002) and it is important to process the data and then put it into a meaningful piece of information (Fetterman, 1989) which adds new contribution to current research. I present an interpretation of the data collected, and review if this links to the theoretical framework of system leadership presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). The data collected findings from each case study is presented and analysed. Pattern matching responses are linked to the theoretical framework and analysed. Evidence of alternative leadership approaches identified will also be presented.

### **4.2 Academy School Findings**

#### **Overview**

The findings from the case study academy school strongly suggest that there was a strong sense of moral purpose from the leadership team, in terms of what they have achieved within their school, and the place of the school in the community. The school achieved this by working as a change agent with other low achieving schools in the community. The school leaders and staff worked to try to ensure that the children within the community had access to effective educational provision. The leadership team led and managed the school by focussing on learning and teaching, at leadership and classroom level. They worked with other organisations and supported the development of staff across the organisations to build capacity.

One of the key findings from the academy school was how school improvement across partnership schools had been achieved. Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews's (2009) theoretical framework of system leadership presented a theory of how effective system leadership can be put into operation. The analysed data highlighted that many areas of the theoretical framework were evident in the interview and questionnaire responses as well as providing some evidence that the school was effectively promoting school improvement across other schools which the case study school worked with. This added something new to the research apart from the system leadership theoretical framework presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). However, other aspects of alternative leadership styles were also present in the responses, and this shall be addressed later within the chapter.

### 4.3 Academy Questionnaire Findings

Ten members of the leadership team from the case study academy completed the questionnaire. All of those within leadership positions who completed the questionnaire were female (as the school leadership team was 100% female). 50% were aged 46-60, 30% were ages 31-45 and 20% were aged 18-30. Table 1 summarises the key findings from the questionnaire. These are presented with the features of the system leadership model presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) and the key findings from the questionnaire being related to these features.

| Feature of Systems leadership                     | Summary questionnaire findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moral purpose in relation to cross school working | In terms of working with students in other schools, 50% of respondents had contact with students. One response explained how being part of working with other schools in the local community involved, <i>'knowing that those around you will help you grow'</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Personal development                              | 80% of those completing the questionnaire have been involved with training events with other schools within the local area, and 50% have been involved in leading this training.<br><br><i>'It has given me more training opportunities and support in my new role'</i><br><br>All staff felt that being part of a MAT had helped their development.<br><br>One stated that being part of the trust had led to them feeling, <i>'respected, having my opinion listened to, having self-belief'</i> . |

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strategic acumen                               | One respondent noted that being in an academy school had enabled them to be given, <i>'the autonomy to make changes.'</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Developing people                              | 80% of those completing the questionnaire had been involved with training events with other schools within the local area.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Developing organisations                       | 70% respondents stated their school was led by someone running another organisation and that the lead of their school was often at other schools.<br><br>One explained that working within a MAT allowed their own personal visions to be embedded, <i>'in (my) own school and others with the trust'</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Managing teaching and learning                 | One respondent stated being part of the trust meant they had been involved <i>'supporting teaching and learning across the trust'</i> .<br><br>One response explained how being part of a trust enabled them to be involved in <i>'development of curriculum and pedagogy'</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Partner in a low achieving school              | One respondent stated that being part of a trust had enabled them to act as an improvement partner in other schools within the trust.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Lead on an educational improvement partnership | The majority of those completing the questionnaire (70%) felt that the lead of their school was often at other schools.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Work as a change agent                         | The majority of those completing the questionnaire (70%) stated that they had not worked at other schools within the trust. However, 50% of those completing the questionnaire had led training opportunities with other schools within the local community of schools which School A works with.<br><br>Once stated that from being part of trust this has led to, <i>'leading, developing and supporting a team within own school and with the trust sharing of practice and supporting teaching and learning across the trust'</i> .<br><br>One person had been able to work as an SLE across the schools in the trust. |
| Act as a community leader                      | One response stated that being part of a trust enabled them as a leader to support, <i>'the strengthening of parental involvement across the school'</i> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Improve a school in a                          | One response stated that being part of a trust has enabled them to act as an improvement partner.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| challenging<br>context |  |
|------------------------|--|

*Table 4: Academy school questionnaire findings*

All elements of the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) theoretical framework of system leadership were demonstrated by the responses from the questionnaire. The idea of developing organisations and personal development of the staff were noted. 'Moral purpose' was evident in some responses, but not all. This was inconsistent with the interviews, as all of those interviewed discussed the moral imperative, they acted with to ensure all children had access to an effective education. However, in the questionnaires those with higher positions, such as the CEO and the Headteacher had a clear sense of moral purpose in their work within their school and the work they did with other schools.

There was a key feeling that being part of an academy school had led to their own personal development as leaders both in terms of their personal development and being involved in the development of other people, both key themes within the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's framework (2009). Many of the leaders had been involved with work in other schools to bring about school improvement, which was consistent with the interview findings, where all those interviewed had worked in other schools either leading training events or supporting different members of staff. Fullan (2003, p.5) stated that he equated, 'teacher passion, purpose and capacity with student engagement and learning'. The findings from case study questionnaires suggested a purpose and passion in the teachers.

However, some areas such as acting as a community leader and improving a school in a challenging context were only mentioned by one respondent. These areas are positioned in the outer ring of the system leadership framework presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). This could be linked with particular respondents, as within the school context there is one CEO who would be leading the others and be the one most involved in other schools' leadership and the wider community. It could also show evidence of a degree of distributed leadership, showing different leaders are taking on different areas of leadership.

#### **4.4 Academy Interview findings**

##### **4.4.1 Moral purpose**

The inner section of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework of system leadership relates to the moral purpose of leaders within the school, and how this is shown by their work both within their

school, and any other outlets such as other schools, and the wider community. Each leader that was interviewed from the academy school spoke about moral imperative being central to what their school had been doing in their work with other schools in the local community. This was spoken about with passion by all of those interviewed, whatever their position within the leadership team. The interviewees referred to the school, and the Trust that it had formed, as being a family and each school and each pupil being a part of that family.

*'I think it's about moral imperative around if the children here can have a great school why can't the children up the road. ....Our children feel part of the bigger family', (CEO, School A).*

*'When we go in, it's a proper family and it's got that vibe and feeling that we are one', (Deputy Head, School A).*

*'I think if anything becoming an academy makes you reflect on not just having an impact on 596 children at your school, but you are having an impact on five other schools and their children and beyond the city, and there is no greater feeling than knowing that you can have a hand in that. That's very fulfilling', (Deputy Head, School A).*

Each interviewee from the academy school stressed and emphasised the feeling and emotion of being morally invested in their school and other schools they were working with was very clear from the responses of each person to the various interview questions. One interviewee was very emotional about their experience of working as a change agent with other school leaders, teachers, and children.

*'I get quite emotional – seeing people who were at a low point in their career thinking they weren't doing anything right, they didn't have the support and their school was in a mess, and now they are flying. The impact it has and the impact on them as people, their work-life balance, as well as the children', (Assistant Head A, School A)*

Throughout the interviews there was a thread across the respondents of there being a moral investment in the work they had undertaken and future work. The senior members of the leadership team, specifically the CEO, had clearly instilled this into the whole team. Each interviewee had morally invested in the work the academy school had done and was planning to do in the future. The CEO had coached the leadership team, and there had been several whole school CPD days where the school vision had been shared. The CEO and headteacher had also trained other members of senior staff, such as the

Assistant Principal, to become SLEs and work with other staff and other organisations. It was also clear that their moral purpose did not just concern the children but also all the staff involved as well.

*‘Everyone sees themselves as a leader of learning – as a collective not a hierarchy. They are all here for the children. The passion is visibly here’, (Assistant Head A, School A).*

During interviews, respondents were questioned about how they were perceived by parents and pupils within their school, and the other schools in the community they had worked with. They believed that they were not seen just as a teacher or staff member of the academy, but they were also seen as a teacher or staff member of whichever school they were working in by both parents, pupils, and staff members.

*‘Our moral imperative is to achieve and make sure as many children as we can get the same opportunity but in the right way for them.....It’s great to go into other schools and we do meet regularly to see the journey they have been on and to see their children and to see their photographs and to see them in their learning and to see that they are getting a great deal also’, (Deputy Head, School A)*

A strong sense of moral purpose lay at the centre of a system leadership model and the findings from the case study academy suggest that the leadership team were acting with moral purpose in the way they were teaching, managing, and leading others. As Fullan (2003, p.30) stated, ‘the driver should be moral purpose and that all other capacities (e.g., knowledge of the change process, building professional learning communities) should be in the service of moral purpose.’ Leading with moral purpose in the academy appeared to have cemented the aims of the school and the trust, these being to ensure all children received a great education. Also, key to school A leading with moral purpose seemed to have promoted school improvement across the schools that the academy had been working with. This supported the theoretical framework of system leadership presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). This suggested that if a school was led using a system leadership model and applied across other schools, there could be improvements across all areas – teaching and learning, leadership, management and the development of individuals and each school. Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.85) described how system leaders they researched whilst looking at extended schools lead by example, providing community and child centred schools within their school hub. The academy fitted to this description as it was a school working with other schools and pioneering improvement work with other schools in their hub by leading with example.

Despite all of those interviewed being clear that they were morally invested in the academy and the work being done, except for the CEO, none of these leaders were able to explain system leadership, nor the fact they were using it. When questioned about their understanding of the term ‘system leadership’ there was a mixed response:

*‘We get involved in it, so we have grown our capacity’, (Deputy Head, School A).*

*‘We’ve looked at how system leadership works, and it looks at the systems and strategies you put in place’, (Assistant Head 1, School A).*

*‘When we were interviewed to be assistant heads, we were asked about it, but when you are in the role you are just doing it rather than thinking about ‘am I doing system leadership?’, (Assistant Head 2, School A).*

So, it appeared that the leaders of school A were leading with moral purpose but not necessarily doing this because they believed themselves to be system leaders.

#### **4.4.2 Personal Development and Strategic Acumen**

The next section of the theoretical framework presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) relates to the personal development of the staff within the school and their strategic acumen. Strategic acumen has been taken to refer to the ability of those in leadership positions to have made good judgements and having been able to make quick and effective decisions in a strategic manner. The responses differed depending upon the level of leadership position held by the leadership team members that were interviewed. Those with more leadership responsibility, such as the CEO and Headteacher, demonstrated how strategic acumen was used in their leadership within the school for example, how the work put into other schools had led to the increased improvement of these other schools and built capacity in their own school by choosing to centralise certain systems such as HR and finance.

*‘By the end of 2016 they were in the top 10% and they have sustained that position and are now in the top 5% performing nationally’, (CEO, School A)*

The CEO used strategic acumen in restructuring to provide a far more streamlined approach, particularly in support roles such as ICT and HR within the different schools they were working with, as well as streamlining the day-to-day business of teaching and learning.

*'We've shared expectations, curriculum, teaching and learning, provided CPD, provided a network of support so their heads can focus on school improvement so we've got a premise development manager who will lead on all premise work, an ICT director who will ensure their infrastructure is in place, a HR person who will do all their recruitment, a finance person who will do all their finances so they can focus on teaching and learning and school improvement', (CEO, School A)*

All of those interviewed were very clear that their school gaining academy status and then becoming part of a Trust had contributed greatly to their personal development in their profession as educators. All of those interviewed had gained more responsibility and higher leadership positions since the development of the school into an academy, and then a MAT, which they believed was a result of the CPD that they had been given.

*'All the CPD work we did was about enabling staff to reach their full potential. Giving staff the right opportunities', (CEO, School A)*

Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.30) described how a true system leader, before working with other schools, 'first develop a deep and rigorous understanding of systems for improvement in their own school'. Despite School A being an outstanding school, Ofsted (2011), the CEO ensured that their own staff were continually improving and growing, before they started to work with others. All the leadership staff interviewed had worked in other schools in the local community as SLEs. This role had meant that the staff had worked with other staff and students in other schools who at that time were not performing as well. They had helped to coach and mentor staff in the other schools, and this had impacted on their professional development.

*'I think the beauty of it is that you learn from each other. You can share experiences. You can also take from it how you can grow as a leader yourself', (Deputy Head, School A).*

*'The benefits are you can learn from everyone, it doesn't matter where you are on your journey, it doesn't matter what expertise you bring at the time there is always something that someone will say to you or show you that sparks an idea...the Trust has enabled me', (Headteacher, School A).*

*'It's been good for my CPD. I'm always learning. I'm always driving new things. It's having a hand in everything. It's growing my capacity and I'm able to grow the capacity of others', (Assistant Head 1, School A).*

Each member of leadership staff interviewed described how the work they were doing as a school had also developed them professionally, such as acting as SLE's and leading CPD for multiple schools. All had climbed to more senior positions since the academisation of the school, and some further since forming a Trust. All of those interviewed also attributed this to the growth of their school, to enable these opportunities to have arisen. All had been there for a considerable time before academisation, and none showed any signs of wishing to move on as they believed there were still plenty of opportunities available as the school continued to grow and develop.

*'I've been here about 15 years so as a trainee to an NQT to assistant head', (Deputy Head, School A)*

In describing the core capabilities of system leaders, Senge *et al.*, (2015) noted three capabilities related to strategic acumen, showing its place within a system leader. These involved seeing the larger system, reflecting and problem solving. These core capabilities lie with the section of the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) system leadership framework describing system leaders as being invested in personal development and strategic acumen, as the leaders appeared to be doing from these responses. Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) also explained how system leaders tended to have spent time in their posts to enable them to build up community relationships. Many of the leaders had worked at the school for a considerable time, if not, all their educational careers, allowing them to build community relations and work effectively with their communities.

#### **4.4.3 Developing People, Developing Organisations and Managing Teaching and Learning**

The next stage of the system leadership framework presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) related to it developing other people within the school or outside the school, developing organisations and managing teaching and learning. Many of the responses regarding developing people led on from discussions in the interviews related to the personal development of those interviewed themselves. This clearly linked the ideas of system leadership practice in circle two, personal development, to the key themes of circle three. All members of the leadership team spoke about their work within other schools building those other schools as organisations and this also developing the staff within those schools, often by developing and managing the teaching and learning. This appeared to show that through the leadership methods in use people and organisations had been developed.

*'it's people in roles in highly successful schools sharing their expertise and working in partnership with other leaders to bring about school improvement and its supportive for both parties', (CEO, School A)*

Fullan (2003, p.41) described a system leader in a school and suggested: 'We need Principals who develop leadership in others, thereby strengthening school leadership beyond themselves'. The interview responses appeared to show that this is what the CEO of school A had done and was still doing. The CEO had a clear vision of how they wished to develop both the people and the schools within their role. This involved teaching staff, students and supporting roles such as centralising systems such as finance, HR and ICT. When outlining the initial development of their leadership team, when working across other schools, they stated:

*'They have gone and worked as the role of SLE really. They've gone every week to support the growth and development of teachers and leaders.... What we've done very carefully is grown schools and so we haven't sent a deputy over there and been 'off you go'. We've grown the capacity in those schools', (CEO, School A)*

The CEO described their vision of using their leaders in their system to develop other people and then how the development of people in turn developed the organisation, which underpinned the keys ideas of circle three of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's framework (2009). Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009, p.28) went on to describe this aspect in more detail through their description of the system leadership implications of developing people as being, 'development of schools as professional learning communities, with relationships built and fostered across and beyond schools to provide a range of learning experiences'.

*'It's people in roles in highly successful schools sharing their expertise and working in partnership with other leaders to bring about school improvement and its supportive for both parties. So, you grow massively as well as the leaders working in schools in that partnership', (CEO, School A).*

All of those interviewed described how they found that the leadership of the other people, and organisations they worked with, developed through dialogue and conversation, rather than 'look at what

I/we do'. All spoke about growing the capacity of others to help the schools improve, rather than simply 'taking over' as school.

*'It's a journey together and it helps us to grow and evolve and develop the capacity of leaders in our school', (Deputy Head, School A),*

*'Coaching other leaders to see what is a priority for you and your school. What would be your actions? Having those important dialogues', (Deputy Head, School A)*

When discussing how leading in this way has had an impact on teaching and learning and managing this across schools, one of those interviewed described how this has been developed:

*'...particularly on teaching and learning, because there has been a lot of observations, a lot of team teaching in the approach and coaching where staff here have modelled lessons to other colleagues. They've been out to then support them with planning and assessments', (Assistant Head 1, School A).*

The staff that were interviewed spoke about the way their leadership style, and particularly the way the CEO had shown them how to lead was developed by teaching others to build capacity, and this in turn has built improvement.

*'The CEO has been instrumental in that. We have some really strong leaders in our schools, it's just growing their capacity and that's what the CEO has done', (Headteacher, School A).*

As Lalor (2022) described, schools across the globe are facing an aging workforce and need to plan for the future and also develop staff and organisations. Following the global Coronavirus pandemic (2020-2022) it has been particularly significant for school leaders to develop their staff and organisations, and manage their teaching and learning capacity, to prepare for the unexpected. Having a system leadership approach to improving schools by investing in the teaching staff and the organisation as a whole enables capacity to be built and school improvement to occur (Hallinger, 2018a; Heffernan, 2018). The CEO of School A invested in their staff and developed them through training and supporting other schools and this was evident from the responses relating to the approach to training, supporting the fact that School A was focussed on developing people, organisations and teaching and learning.

System leaders must also be focussed on the leaders of the future. They are placed in a position to be able to develop leaders from inside their school systems. The CEO of School A was clearly committed to this, showing this key element of system leadership. This focus on developing and growing future leaders within and across schools has been found to have a significant impact on teaching and learning across these schools (AITSL, 2018).

#### **4.4.4 Working outside of your own school as a leader**

The final, outermost, section of the system leadership framework based on Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) and used in this research project related to the key themes of:

- being a partner in a low achieving school;
- being a lead in an educational partnership;
- having worked as a change agent;
- having acted as a community leader;
- having improved a school in a challenging context.

During the interviews, these themes were mentioned by respondents and linked back to how these helped them grow as a leader, alongside being involved with a low achieving school because of a moral belief that all children deserved the same deal. The CEO built a MAT around School A in order to help other schools in the locality grow their capacity and improve as they were not performing as well as they should have been in either national tests or Ofsted inspections. The CEO described some of the schools that the leadership team in School A had been working with:

*‘School Y was named in 2015 as one of the worst performing schools in the country. This town had three and school Y was one of them. By the end of 2016 they were in the top 10% and have sustained that position and are now in the top 5% of schools performing nationally. If they were inspected tomorrow, they would be outstanding. School Z went into special measures so badly. It was probably one of the worst reports this city has ever had and their outcomes are almost significantly above the national picture’, (CEO, School A).*

This demonstrated how the academy had worked as a partner in a low achieving school, led the partnership, worked as a change agent, and improved a school in a challenging context. This demonstrated four of the five key themes of the theoretical framework and linked back to developing organisations. The CEO, and other members of the leadership team, explained how this was achieved through the development of the staff in the academy and the schools they worked with. Higham,

Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.67) described a key feature of system leadership as leaders, ‘leading beyond their individual schools to contribute to the wider local level through sophisticated collaboration’. Leaders in School A promoted and supported improvement across other schools in their locality. Gurr and Drysdale (2018) supported this aspect of system leadership, identifying that system leaders were able to embed their effective leadership across schools, as well as within their own, and by doing this school improvement occurs. This was evident with the schools that School A had been working in partnership with. This illustrated that the leaders in School A were impacting across the system due to their leadership style, ‘without effective school leadership, the level of impact of system leadership is likely to be limited’ (Gurr and Drysdale, 2018, p.223). This enabled capacity to be built (Fullan and Knight, 2011).

*‘We are a national teaching school, one of the first designated in the country and for years we’ve worked as systems leaders and can see the benefit of working with a range of schools using your leadership teams effectively can lead to rapid and sustained rates of progress and amazing outcomes for children’, (CEO, School A).*

*‘..it has enabled the children of our other schools to go to a better school. There has been a lot of positivity in the community around’, (CEO, School A).*

*‘I think we’ve always been quite a strong lead in the community of working with other schools and having teacher days joint and delivering different sessions, but I think obviously because we are now an academy and a teaching school the work is just pouring in so it’s having a greater impact’, (Assistant Head 1, School A).*

*‘I see it as exciting to support so many different schools’, (Assistant Head 2, School A).*

Three of those interviewed, the Deputy Head and both Assistant Heads, had all been involved as SLE’s, working with other schools as change agents to help them improve. They took what they had learnt from being leaders in School A and used this to coach and mentor other members of staff at schools needing improvement, or in a challenging context. Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009, p.68) described this as a key approach to system leadership, ‘perhaps the most powerful form of lateral accountability is a widely shared collaborative ethos for mutual improvement. This is the conviction that partnerships should be collegial and have an impact on the identified needs of all partners.’ By doing this schools

had improved, as described by the CEO, and this led to a growing strength within the community. Assistant Head 2 from School A described their first work with another school facing challenges:

*'I learnt a lot. Once I got into it there were mixed emotions. It was quite a daunting task and then it became quite frustrating', (Assistant Head 2, School A).*

#### **4.5 Academy Interview Analysis**

It was clear that each leader that was interviewed from School A acted within their leadership position with moral purpose to the children in their school, the children in the other schools, and the staff and community across their own school and other schools they had worked in. Throughout each interview respondents had a vision of creating a family, and everyone belonging to that family.

The responses corresponded with those outlined in Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews's (2009) framework. Interviewees acted with a moral purpose; this had led to their professional development. As they developed as leaders, they felt able to work with other leaders and schools and develop these, often by managing and helping to build on the teaching and learning. This was done by members of the leadership team working as SLEs in other schools. They went into the schools, to work with leaders and classroom teachers, to review and modify classroom practice and curriculum building and moderation of work. They were acting as change agents, whilst partnering low achieving schools and helping these to improve. The leaders of School A demonstrated what Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009, p.71) described as 'collaborative advantage. Through their work as an established leadership team, in a successful school reaching out to work with others, with the aim of school improvement, 'the thrust for such system leadership is usually provided by the lead school's leadership team'. The leaders within School A demonstrated a passion for school improvement, both within their own school and across others. Key to this was building capacity across all the schools, as capacity building enables the improvement of teaching and learning (Naicker and Mestry, 2016).

School improvement was led by leaders through developing the capacity of leaders and staff in other schools. This was one by using leaders as SLEs in other schools that they were working in partnership with. The SLEs had a variety of different jobs depending upon the different schools they were working with. These included reviewing the schemes of work to ensure they were fit for purpose, lessons observations, moderation of key skills and members of staff from other schools visiting. This was done to demonstrate different teaching and learning methods through the teachers being observed by others. The CEO developed the organisations by centralising systems so that school leaders were able to focus on leading schools, as well as this also supporting teaching and learning through the centralisation of

ICT systems and recruitment of new staff. The Headteacher of School A described how the CEO had been the key to the success of the leadership in operation in the school.

*'The CEO has been instrumental in that. We have some really strong leaders in our schools, it's just about growing their capacity and that's what the CEO has done', (Headteacher, School A).*

From the responses to the interview questions, it was clear that each of the leaders from School A were using many, if not all, elements of system leadership features identified by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) in their framework of system leadership. However, during the interviews it was clear that although the leaders were demonstrating the use of system leadership in their own practice, they were not able to describe exactly what system leadership was except for the CEO.

It was clear from the interview findings that the CEO of School A had identified future leaders who would be successful, and using these leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning both across their school and others, they were clearly invested in this process. Their interview answers demonstrated a clear moral purpose with a desire to improve outcomes for all students (Hargreaves, 2007; Lalor, 2022).

#### **4.6 Academy Observations**

The academy was in an urban area, in a traditional Victorian school building. It was observed that staff interacted respectfully towards each other and to students. I saw very little of the students during my time at the school due to being involved in the interviews. The visions and values of the school were evident from the display areas around the reception area. The school values, and the values of the trust were seen on promotional materials and were the focus of display areas. Key terms such as 'respect', 'collaboration' and 'integrity' were evident in the areas of the school seen. This can be seen in Appendix 12 and 13)

#### **4.7 Summary of Academy Findings and Analysis**

From the data gathered from both the questionnaires and interviews it was very apparent that system leadership was very much in use in the case study academy school. This was very evident in the role of the CEO, who had a clear moral purpose at the centre of all that they were doing, both in their own school and the schools they were working in partnership with. There was both clear evidence of many of the layers of the model of system leader provided by Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009), but

also in terms of how Fullan (2003) describes a system leader, in that the CEO had created a clear vision that every child gets a great deal, by working with other Principals at the same level to ensure that this is the drive for each school that the academy worked with. The CEO had, as Fullan described (2003, p.47) ensured that, ‘moral imperative becomes a palpable, collective endeavour’.

The academy, on the surface, appeared to be very much a place where system leadership was evident in the style of leadership described by members of the leadership team. The school itself stated on its website that students in all the school and the schools they worked with, received the best education possible, through inspirational staff who received high quality professional development. The moral purpose demonstrated in the review of the data appeared to show a very strong sense of moral purpose within the leadership team of the academy. This fitted with the model of system leadership. Also, the leadership staff very much put their trust into their CEO for guidance and followed their leadership example. As Fullan (2003, p.43) described, ‘regional trust with a strong press for moral purpose produces very tough cultures that work diligently inside and outside the school to get results.’

The findings from the academy school appeared to have shown that the leadership was working with moral purpose to move forward, not only their school but others in the community, by the development of people and organisations and this led to school improvement. This fits with Fullan’s (2005, p.15) description of moral purpose in school systems, ‘it must transcend the individual to become an organisation and system quality in which collectives are committed to three aspects of moral purpose: (1) raising the bar and closing the gap of student learning; (2) treating people with demanding respect (moral purpose is supportive, responsive, and demanding, depending on the circumstances); and (3) altering the social environment)’. This was a key addition to the system leadership framework presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) brought about by this piece of research. This model showed the different levels of system leadership that could be seen in effective system leaders. What was analysed from the findings of the academy school questionnaires and interviews was how this could be put into practice, to ensure that effective leadership could be shown to promote improvement within schools.

Hargreaves (2003) stated that the effective use of system leadership in schools could lead to transferring innovations between schools and allow for the movement of leaders at all levels in the system. Alongside the description of system leadership working effectively, taken from Fullan (2004, p.6) it had the purpose to, ‘reconcile the power and action of the centre, with the ideas, wisdom and engagement of the field’. This was evident in the academy school and the data collected in both the interviews and the questionnaires. The CEO of the trust was very much as the centre using their experience to have impact

on those around them to move different schools, including their own, forward. As stated by Fullan (2004a, p.9) a key indicator of successful system leadership being used was shown, ‘when individual school heads become almost as concerned about the success of other schools as they are about their own school’. In the academy school it was evident from the responses of both the CEO and other senior leaders that there was notable concern for the success of other schools that they were working in partnership with, as well as their own school.

The way in which system leadership was evident in School A was very similar to Hallinger’s (2018a) description of how system leadership could be used most effectively when it wrapped around school leadership, and considered the local factors for different schools such as socio-cultural and economic factors. School A had used the vision of the CEO to develop leadership capacity across schools, but used the leaders in the different schools to continue their roles, whilst having system leadership across the schools, developed by the CEO, wrapping around the trust. This enabled schools to improve, leaders to build capacity and the leadership to be sustained across the system (Lalor, 2022).

#### **4.8 Charter School Findings**

##### **Overview**

The charter school was established with the specific aim of re-engagement of students for whom mainstream, traditional public-school education had not engaged the students. The school was led by a headteacher, and members of the leadership team. During the interviews with the headteacher and other school leaders it was clear that they were all very morally invested in the school and the students.

#### **4.9 Charter School Questionnaire Findings**

| <b>Feature of Systems leadership</b> | <b>Summary questionnaire findings</b>                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moral purpose                        | 100% of responses stated that they were working for the benefit of the students.<br>80% of the responses stated that they felt the school was part of the community.                                                            |
| Personal development                 | 100% of those who responded had been involved with training with similar schools within the same school district.<br><br>‘Training currently tends to be led by those from the school district rather than individual schools.’ |

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                | <p>None of the staff who responded to the questionnaire had led any of this training, although 60% had led training within their own school and one explained that:</p> <p><i>'this enabled me to build on my leadership experience'.</i></p> <p>All of those who responded felt that working for a charter school has aided their own personal development.</p> <p>One explained how, <i>'I am able to teach in a way I want to and help to develop the correct curriculum for the students I teach'.</i></p> |
| Strategic acumen                               | <p>One respondent believed that working for a charter school gave them the autonomy to make changes when it was necessary, <i>'I am able to run the school in the way best for my staff and students'.</i></p> <p>One also stated: <i>'when I have a vision for a new program or strategy, I work with my team to plan, implement, refine'.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                            |
| Developing people                              | <p>100% of the respondents had been involved with training events help in partnership with other similar schools.</p> <p>One of the respondents explained that working at this school had enabled them to grow as a leader due to: <i>'daily experience managing staff to build their skills to serve our students. Also, I've grown as a leader through program development initiatives'.</i></p>                                                                                                             |
| Developing organisations                       | <p>None of the respondents believed that their school was run by someone who was also running another organisation.</p> <p>None of the respondents felt that the person running their school was also at other schools.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Managing teaching and learning                 | <p>100% of those who responded believed that through working in a charter school they had been involved with the management of the teaching and learning within their own school, <i>'we are involved in the decisions about what we teach and how we teach it'.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Partner in a low achieving school              | <p>No-one who responded to the questionnaire believed that they were working in partnership with a low achieving school.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Lead on an educational improvement partnership | <p>None of those who responded believed the person who runs their school was often at other schools.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Work as a change agent                         | <p>None of those who responded had worked across other charter schools within the local area/school district.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                           | One of the respondents believed it would be good to work more collaboratively with similar schools: <i>‘if there was the time to work together that would have many benefits.’</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Act as a community leader                 | All of those who responded to the questionnaire believed that they worked as a part of the wider community within their role at the charter school: <i>‘we work with over 50 local partners from universities to charities. We were even gifted a horse!’</i> .                                                                                                                                  |
| Improve a school in a challenging context | 70% of those who responded felt that they were working to improve a challenging context. <i>‘Our students have come from schools where it hasn’t worked for them. That brings its own challenges. We need to engage them’</i> .<br><br>One of the respondents stated that the role they believed the school played in the local community was, <i>‘dropout prevention and crime reduction’</i> . |

Table 5: Charter school questionnaire findings

The findings from the questionnaire showed that those who responded felt that they had the autonomy to make changes in their school to make the teaching and learning relevant to those in the school. There was also a belief that they were working for their students to provide them with an education which could not be provided elsewhere, and they were morally invested in this. The staff believed they were working as part of a larger community, and in a challenging context in terms of the student demographic. Those who answered the questionnaire did not see their school as one which frequently worked with others, or with a leader who led across other schools. The respondents felt that there was limited time to be able to work with other similar schools, but it would be a benefit to be able to do this.

#### 4.10 Charter School Interview Findings

##### 4.10.1 Moral Purpose

The headteacher had previously worked in business management for what they described as a multi-billion-dollar business and had moved into a career in education following volunteer work in the charter school, and then being offered the opportunity to work as a teacher there. They described this opportunity as being:

*‘more meaningful than working for a billion-dollar company’, (Headteacher, school B)*

It seemed clear that the headteacher of the school felt very much that the purpose for themselves and their staff was to be there for the students. The students attended due to having been unsuccessful in

mainstream school. They had often arrived with a variety of issues that included family problems, solvent abuse, low attendance, and alcoholism and were very disengaged with education. However, due to the work of the staff and the investment the staff morally had in the students, led by the headteacher these students were re-engaged with education. In fact, they were not permitted to graduate without an acceptance to university which showed a large change in their attitude to education from their arrival point and the headteacher firmly believed this attitude change to be due to the staff investment in the students:

*‘They are morally invested. The culture and community here foster that investment. We create such deep connections with each student and their story’ (Headteacher, School B)*

Leadership staff also believed their purpose was to provide a stimulating education for those ‘off-track’ in previous educational establishments.

*‘We want the students to succeed. We are about what happens to them’ (Senior leader A, School B)*

The moral purpose of School B in ensuring the success of all students, driven by the Headteacher, demonstrated the key themes in Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) model of system leadership. For a school to be a great school, the thread of moral purpose must guide their goals (Hill, 2011) with leaders across the school working together for the same aims and vision (Fullan and Knight, 2011; Lalor, 2022). This was evident in School B with the leaders in school sharing the vision of the Headteacher and all working for a common purpose, to ensure the success of all their students.

#### **4.10.2 Personal Development and Strategic Acumen**

Being a leader of a charter school had been a change of lifestyle for the headteacher and the other members of staff within the school. None of the staff originally started their careers as educators and many ended up with teaching positions at the charter school after a time of volunteering with the students at the school, and then being offered positions. This was possible in a charter school as teachers did not need to hold teaching qualifications, they just needed to be classified as ‘highly qualified’ in their subject area, which meant holding a degree relevant to what they were teaching. This enabled the headteacher to have a much wider field of candidates when teaching positions became available, to ensure that the staff chosen were the ones right for the students, school, and ethos. The headteacher explained how the

opportunity to volunteer initially at the school then enabled their pathway to headship providing personal development for themselves:

*'I chose to work in a charter school. I started as a volunteer and was then offered a teaching position. It was more meaningful than working for a billion-dollar tech company', (Headteacher, School B)*

*'This school has offered me something in a job I could have got from nowhere else', (Curriculum leader 1, School B)*

*'Innovation is a function of our leadership', (Curriculum leader 2, School B)*

Since charter schools are able to choose their own curriculum that suited their students best, the staff very much felt that this freedom in teaching matter then fed into their own personal development. They were able to teach courses they would not be able to in a mainstream public school, and they felt that this had developed them as educators.

*'Trying different classes. We like teaching controversial classes. You don't get to do that in mainstream public schools', (Headteacher, School B).*

*'We have a curriculum to reflect our students, where they have been and where they are going.' (Senior leader 1, School B).*

The headteacher was responsible for the decision making within the school on a day-to-day basis with strategic acumen. Due to the autonomy that being the leader of a charter school gave the headteacher a lot of decision making was made at this level, rather than at governance level as in traditional public schools. The headteacher also used their leadership team and their ideas to develop the correct curriculum for the students. This was a flexible model, enabling students to access a wide range of alternative courses such as equestrianism, gardening and sailing alongside traditional classes such as English and mathematics. The development of a flexible curriculum enabled students to take courses in which they would find success. This in turn led to improvement of results, and hence school improvement. The curriculum development enabled capacity to be built across the school, and the school leadership enabling this to happen (Gurr and Drysdale, 2018).

#### 4.10.3 Developing People, Developing Organisations and Managing Teaching and Learning

It was clear that the charter school very much thrived, and almost survived, due to working together and developing together to strengthen the organisation. The fact that the school had grown so much since it was founded in 1997 from just 12 students to 150 (its maximum) in just over twenty years showed that as an organisation it had developed. The headteacher developed as a teacher and then into a leader through the school.

*'I've certainly developed a lot in my leadership style and skills and by learning how to work with staff. My role is to foster, nurture and support', (Headteacher, School B).*

One main role of the headteacher at the charter school was to oversee the curriculum and manage the teaching and learning within the school. Due to the school being a charter school this left much of the control and choice of the headteacher in terms of the curriculum on offer. The chosen curriculum was able to play to strengths of both teaching staff and students and therefore led to their development, tying in all aspects of this part of the system leadership framework.

*'We are able to teach our students what they need to be taught so that we can develop both them and ourselves', (Curriculum leader 1, School B)*

*'I like autonomy, so I give a lot. I let them teach what they want, how they want. We meet a lot to share best practices. We learn from each other', (Headteacher, School B)*

*'We get to give our thought and ideas, as well as the students. We are very much listened to', (Senior leader 2, School B)*

Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.66) described this practice as part of the system leadership approach (see Figure 2).

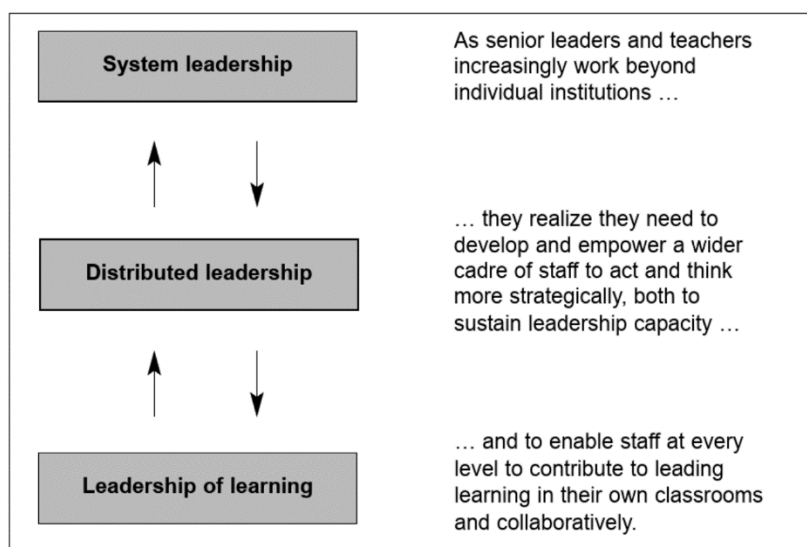


Figure 11: Leadership for collaborative capacity building (From Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews, 2009, p.66).

The headteacher of the charter school used distributed leadership to feed into the system leadership model. Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009, p.66) described this as to, ‘effectively orchestrate the skills of colleagues, draw them into the decision-making process and, in doing so, build their ability to take on wider leadership roles’. Through distributing teaching and learning to the other leaders and including teaching staff, the headteacher was allowing them to feed into both their own development and the development of the school and allowing themselves to focus on the wider school issues and concerns. Due to the nature of the charter school as a standalone school, leadership carried out effectively in this way permitted a way for the school to build capacity and grow, without responsibility resting on the one school leader.

The headteacher of the charter school set a clear direction for staff and students, and this was the key capability for a system leader in this section of the system leadership framework presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). They described this as (p.28), ‘total commitment to enable all learners to reach their potential with a strategic vision that extends into the future.’ It was clear that this school and staff, led by the headteacher had very clear commitments to the students and staff to ensure all developed to their full potential.

*‘One of the requirements for graduation is they have an acceptance to university’,  
(Headteacher, School B)*

*‘The students enjoy being here, they want to achieve and succeed. They achieve what they thought was not possible’ (Senior leader 2, School B)*

There was a clear emphasis of development of the students in order to ensure that they achieved success. This in turn led to whole school improvement. The capacity building through the use of a flexible curriculum ensured effective school leadership was being demonstrated. Gurr and Drysdale (2018) described how this was key in order for system leadership to be able to have an impact. School leaders who are effective set a clear direction for their school, and this was evident in School B. This enabled leaders of the future to follow by example and would in the future lead to capacity in leadership being built in School B due to the clear vision being set by the headteacher (Hopkins, 2008; Lalor, 2022).

#### **4.10.4 Working outside your own school as a leader**

Fullan (2003, p.47) explained that: ‘the overall environment must improve for schools to continually improve (changing the context is key). This was the one area of the system leadership model in which the charter school was not as developed on as with the other areas. It was clear that this was an area the staff were keep developing further and had started to work on.

*‘...we meet with other charter schools to share what’s going well and to see if we can support each other. There are opportunities for us to collaborate’, (Headteacher, School B)*

However, the charter school was heavily involved in working outside of their own organisation in terms of collaboration with higher education (local universities) and within their local community. Work had been done, and was ongoing, to improve the local community through the work of the school as a beacon of the community.

*‘We collaborate a lot with the local university. We take students there for different experience and different activities. We have a local non-profit week. We work with our students and community to take them out into the community’, (Curriculum leader 2, School B)*

*‘We have 50 or more partners we work collaboratively with. The local community know what the school is and what we are about’, (Headteacher, School B)*

This supported the Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) system leadership framework’s description of extending an organisation in terms of the developmental system leadership implications described (p.28) as, ‘welfare services and high expectations.’

#### 4.11 Charter School Interview analysis

Hopkins (2007, p.139) stated that there were four drivers of system reform. These were personalised learning, professionalised teaching, intelligent accountability and networking and innovation, and explained that, 'the key to every school's being a great school is the way in which leadership moulds the four drivers to context and produces organizations capable of sustained improvement'. The charter school, from the evidence gained, showed these four pillars.

In terms of personalised learning, Hopkins (2007, p.53) described this as, 're-imagining the education system around the learning needs and talent of young people'. It was clear that this was what the charter school was doing.

*'We talk about students. Who we are worried about and the interventions we are putting in place,' (Headteacher, School B).*

The students at the school had been unsuccessful in the traditional public-school system and had chosen to come here to fulfil their potential in a different environment that was personalised for them in unique ways. This may have been using the therapy dog present in the school at all times of the school day. Or unique classes on offer compared to the traditional public-school system. Or that students were pushing themselves as they knew they could not graduate without securing a place at university, as well as working within their local community. As Hopkins (2007, p.57) said, 'Personalised learning occurs within an 'in and out' of school context where schools in a local community and beyond share'.

The autonomy given to the Headteacher due to the school being a charter school very much permitted personalised learning to take place, as well as professionalised teaching leading to intelligent accountability. Through being able to control their own budget the charter school was able to direct their finances where it mattered and leave certain aspects centralised such as HR and payroll, to focus on the teaching and learning within the school.

The headteacher of School B had a clear vision for what they wished the school to achieve. This was evident in the interview responses and the moral purpose of the curriculum by ensuring the curriculum enabled every student to succeed. This was measured by all students having a college place at the end of their time at School B. The experience of the headteacher enabled the vision to pulsate across the school and inspired the other leaders within the school aiming to develop them into leaders of the future (Service, Dalgic and Thornton, 2018). Senge, Hamilton and Kania (2019) described how effective

system leaders develop others through trust and a collective capacity. This was clear in the interview responses from leaders in School B.

#### **4.12 Charter School Observations**

Upon arrival at the school, there was an informal feel with staff and students mixing on a Monday morning and discussing their weekends. The school building was in a business unit on a trading estate area on the outskirts of a large, urban town in Colorado, 30 minutes from downtown Denver. There was mutual respect between students and staff. The building was not a traditional school building, but focussed around a central meeting room, which was also used as a canteen area and teaching space. There were several small classrooms coming off and a conference room at the back of the school. There was limited outdoor space at the school site.

The therapy dog was at the school reception area, along with staff members, to welcome students into school. Many students went to the dog before joining the rest of the students in the central meeting room. The day started with an assembly (or ‘gathering’) where students were invited to talk and present. Some sang and others read poetry and the Headteacher welcomed all students back after the weekend. There was a community feel to the assembly, with staff and students supporting and respecting each other.

When briefly walking around the school it was noted that class sizes were small. Teaching was relatively informal and there was much discussion in the classes between staff and students. Both staff and students addressed each other by first names, adding to the feeling of mutual respect. Communal areas featured the ethos of the school, key words and also success stories of former students. There were also posters advertising volunteer work within the local community, and fundraising work previously completed by members of the student body (see Appendices 12 and 13)

#### **4.13 Summary of Charter School Findings and Analysis**

The charter school and its leader appeared to show a real vision in working to provide extended services into its community. The school aimed to remove barriers to the education of the young people who were attending, and to help to reduce risks to the student’s well-being. As Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.75) stated: ‘Systems leaders have influence beyond their immediate bailiwick’. The leader of the case study charter school, and the previous leaders who originally established the provision, did so to provide for the community, for those students at risk within education and within their community. The school demonstrated aspects of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew’s (2009, p.85) description of a system leader working in the extended community, ‘they are transformational, and champion child-

family-, and community focussed schools, commonly having pioneered work in their own school as a necessity for the school's survival as a viable provider of education'.

The staff of the charter school showed a real moral purpose in their work with the young people at the school. From the observations undertaken of the school environment it was clear that the school was a central part of the lives of staff and students, and the focus was on being there for the students and celebrating them being present in the school and giving them worth in both the school community and their local community. The reason that the school was initially set up in the 1990's was as an educational establishment to provide those with the necessary education for their next steps a place to go, when traditional public schools had not been the place for them. This is also true of many typical charter schools who have found their place due to the community and parental demand for a different option for education, as stated by Bradford (2018, p.10): 'A charter school, especially an independent one, can often fill a specialized niche'.

The one area of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework of system leadership which did not clearly appear through the data collection activities undertaken was the theme of working across schools to lead improvement. Whilst there was a desire for this from staff, due to the independent nature of the school, but this had not yet been possible. The school appeared to be acting as a community beacon and worked within the local community and in partnership with further and higher education but was not leading within its own field of charter school.

#### **4.14 Insights**

Appendices 11, 12 and 13 provide summary matrices used to summarising the data collected across both case studies. The findings from both case study schools demonstrated many aspects of the theoretical framework of system leadership posed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). Both clearly were being led by leaders who had moral purpose at the centre of all they were doing. Moral purpose lies at the centre of the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework, as well as other theories of school leadership (Fullan 2003, Hopkins, 2007; Senge *et al.*, 2015). Though this can be seen differently in different system leaders, their commitment, or moral purpose, radiates to others within leadership roles around them to enable trusting and collaborative relationships (Senge *et al.*, 2015). The moral purpose of the leaders in both schools were apparent through the analysis of the data.

The leaders acted with the interests of their students, staff and communities, and this aspect is the fundamental focus of a system leader (Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews, 2009). As explained by Fullan (2003, p.29), 'Moral purpose of the highest order is having a system where all the students learn, the

gap between high and low performance becomes greatly reduced, and what people learn enables them to be successful citizens and workers in a morally based knowledge society. The role strategically placed to best accomplish this is the Principalship'. Fullan explained that moral principalship was set aside from leading and managing a school – it was something different (p.30), 'many aspects of the current Principalship do not pertain to moral purpose at all. Being a competent manager, engaging in good public relations, and even getting higher test scores do not constitute moral purpose. What I am saying is that the driver should be moral purpose and that all other capacities (e.g., knowledge of the change process, building professional learning communities) should be in the service of moral purpose'. The school leaders appeared to be this kind of moral leader, fitting with a description of a system leader.

In terms of the other aspects of the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework of system leadership, both schools put emphasis on the role of personal development, for both staff and students. Staff in both schools had been able to develop their own expertise to benefit teaching and learning. Leaders understood the necessity of developing the people working within their schools to develop their organisations. The importance of this was described by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.28), 'development of schools as professional learning communities, with relationships built and fostered across and beyond schools.'

Both schools developed their staff and the teaching and learning within the curriculum, and this is key to building leadership capacity (Lalor, 2022). This enabled professional learning to occur and leaders to be developed. This is key in future proofing schools and education, and system leadership is a way in which this can be done effectively (Service and Thornton, 2019). Both school leaders evidenced working with their leadership teams in order to improve teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning were key to whole school improvement. Leaders acting in this mentoring fashion towards leaders of the future were embodying system leadership at the development stage. 'Experienced leaders who contribute in this way to the professional development of aspiring leaders through mentoring and coaching contribute to system leadership by enabling leaders to be active learners and assist in creating professional learning communities focussed on improving school leadership' (Lalor, 2022, p.18). This ensured both schools were committed to developing leaders to future proof their school and ensure sustainability.

The outermost element of the system leadership model presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) related to working out of your own school context. This was clear within the academy school which had formed a variety of partnerships, including ones with low achieving schools, to facilitate them for improvement to be seen. However, this was an area that appeared quite limited in the charter

school. They had a role in developing their local community but not across other schools. They had worked to improve their community but not to improve other schools. Much of this was due to the academy being part of a Multi Academy Trust and developing their system leadership as part of this. In terms of the charter school, it was a more independent, standalone school. It could be explained that charter schools were set up to be independent of the state and district, and therefore would work less across other schools. However, in the United States, charter schools are beginning to work more with other charters and more CMOs and EMOs are being formed. As explained by Bradford (2018, p.11), ‘chartering is a movement that began with the aspiration of starting many kids of schools, but it may have morphed into one that is only adept as starting one type of school: a highly structured school that is run by a CMO or EMO and whose goal is to close achievement gaps’.

Whereas academy schools in England have been encouraged, and in some cases following Ofsted inspection, given little choice to join with other schools in partnership, this was not the initial plan for charter schools. The findings in this case study research showed that the academy school in question appears very much to follow Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew’s (2009) framework of system leadership and has had a great impact on itself and the schools it in in partnership with, due to the way the school has been led. DfE (2010) stressed the importance to English schools, in particular academies, of the benefits of system leadership within education. However, this has not been the case in the USA with charter school which initially were set up as independently run schools away from the boundaries and constraints of local governance. System leadership has not been pushed through them, despite many now starting to join into CMOs and EMOs and seen improved outcomes by doing this as Bradford (2018, p.10) stated, ‘the large CMOs have come out ahead. Overall, schools run by them have produced greater gains in student learning on state assessments.’

Whereas both types of schools were set up to promote more autonomy for the leaders of those schools, there has been a difference between the two countries in the push for how this was undertaken. The way in which the government in England pushed for networks of schools following academisation differed from that of the USA and the autonomy of charter schools. I believe therefore the difference in leadership was seen in the two case study schools. Only additional time would tell if the system leadership used in the academy school in England would continue to grow and have moral purpose at the centre if the Trust was to extend, and if taking on more and more schools would still see a pattern of school improvement outside of its own. Similarly, with the charter school, in time there may be more reason for the school to join in a network of schools, in which case the initial starting of system leadership that were evident in the data collected from the school may grow further to have a reach beyond the one school and its community and develop moral purpose across other schools.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this concluding chapter the research purpose and research questions will be reviewed, and the key findings from the research and data analysis will be summarised. The limitations of the study will also be considered. The contribution of the research to knowledge, understanding and the application to practice will be considered. Finally, the chapter makes recommendations, including recommendations for further research.

### **5.2 Research purpose and design**

The aim of this study was to define the term system leadership and then use this as the lens to view leadership insights in an academy school and a charter school by means of a case study design. Data was collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observations. The participants included senior and middle leaders within both case study schools. The use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews provided thick data about the insights of the leaders' use of system leadership as a leadership approach.

By using a pattern matching approach these insights were compared to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) system leadership theoretical framework to identify areas of commonality and difference.

### **5.3 Research questions**

To address the aims of the research, two broad research questions were developed. The literature review and the data collected were then used to address these questions, and also the overall aims of the research.

- What insights do school leaders' accounts provide on the use of system leadership as an approach to leadership in an academy?
- What insights do school leaders' accounts provide on the use of system leadership as an approach to leadership in a charter school?

### **5.4 Assessment of Key Findings and Analysis**

The key findings and analysis are summarised in the following section.

In Chapter 2 key ideas and themes related to a definition of a system leader were explored. This has been summarised well by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.19) as follows:

a wider resource for school innovation and improvement, making more of our most successful leaders by encouraging and enabling them to: identify and transfer best practice; reduce the risk of innovation in other schools; and lead partnerships that improve and diversify education for students within and across localities.

The DfE 2003 Every Child Matters agenda and the push by government for the use of school improvement partners (SIPs) in the DfE (2010) white paper, *The Importance of Teaching*, aided the development of system leadership in schools in England. This promoted school leaders to work for the well-being of students in their own schools, but also for students in other schools or communities. System leadership related to creating alternative solutions by giving leaders more autonomy away from central or local government. Fullan, (2004, p.7) described well the purpose of effective system leaders in education, ‘to change organizations and systems will require leaders to get experience in linking other parts of the system. These leaders in turn must help develop leaders within similar characteristics.’

However, what I have found to be key whilst completing this research project is what is classed as the ‘system’. Within this project I classed the two schools under the case study structure as the ‘systems’ under investigation. This followed from the definition of system leadership gained from the theoretical framework of Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009) used for this project and focussing on the school leaders accounts and insights from their own school or schools within their system (e.g., a MAT). However, Simon (2015) has explained that this may be too simplistic an interpretation of a ‘system’ and for system leadership to be effectively researched more definition of ‘system’ is required as, ‘it is not clear whether such collaboration is mean at the local (either neighbourhood, county or local authority) or national level’ (p.12).

Whereas the ‘system leader’ referred to by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) is one who is working in a school, or school network. They use the term as one whom is in school, working with students, staff, and the community. This differs from the way that Hatcher (2008) discussed a system leader, referring to this as a new creation of professionalism by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews and arguing that a system leader was an operational position rather than a strategic position (Hargreaves, 2007), with their role lying in government politics rather than directly in an educational establishment. For some, system leaders are those working directly in schools, for others they believe it is a political role. Or, as described by Senge *et al.*, (2015), system leaders can be present in a wide variety of organisations not just education. It is not the role of the leader or where they work that leads them to system leadership, but the characteristics their leadership demonstrates. Senge *et al.*, (2015) cite the example of Darcy Winslow who worked in the advanced research department at Nike. Darcy showed

the characteristics of a system leader by working for those with moral purpose, creating capacity through innovation and bringing about companywide change in areas such as zero discharge of chemicals that are hazardous.

Both academy schools and charter schools came about as a move from traditional public schools and to provide more autonomy for school leaders. Both types of school arose from a need for improvement and a change to the usual schooling system. Both school types are publicly funded and non-fee paying. Both school types also have more freedom than traditional state or public schools in terms of the curriculum they offer. They can both appeal to their community with their curriculum offer and provide the education needed by local students. Initially, both schools often had a larger than usual cohort of disadvantaged pupils attending them. Charter schools also have a disproportional number of Hispanic and black students compared to public schools (33% and 26% respectively (Valant, 2019)). Both schools also offer communities choice. You can apply to either type of school irrespective if it is your most local school. They offer more choice to parents in terms of the educational options available. The autonomy held by both types of school enables curriculum choices and greater accountability to allow them to be schools of choice.

However, in terms of formation, this is different between the schools. Schools in England can choose to become academies, and schools who received an 'inadequate' Ofsted grading must become an academy (Gov.uk, 2021). However, charter schools are formed by members of the community wishing to start a charter school submitting a charter petition to a charter authorising agency. A charter is a contract agreed upon by those who run the school and the entity authorising the school being in existence (e.g., school districts or the board of education). Charter schools cannot be formed in some US states and current schools cannot just choose to become charter schools, such as a school in England wishing to become an academy. Also, charters are reviewed approximately every five years, unlike academy status (Chabrier *et al.*, 2016) and the charter can be removed from a school.

As both have developed, they have faced many controversies. Charter schools tend not to be unionised as traditional public schools are in the USA. Some believe that charter schools are taking students, and therefore funding, away from traditional public schools (Valant, 2019). Charter schools have also been criticised for being more selective than they should be over student enrolment and showing bias for certain backgrounds. Jason (2017) argued that charter schools cannot be generalised as there is such variety among them. Charter schools can also be specialised and have a specific focus such as single-gender, online schools, or no excuses schools with a focus on academic performance and excellent behaviour. Charter schools have faced criticism for inadequately serving children with a special needs background, segregating racially, and failing to deliver on performance. Despite this, however, in many

areas charter schools are the schools of choice with some having to run a lottery system for entry (such as the nationwide KIPP charter schools).

Academy schools have also faced criticism. Due to any school being able to convert to an academy, there has been criticism that schools now compete for students. Also, many schools converted to academy status not for educational, but financial reasons. Like charter schools, academies can set their own teachers' pay scale and have more responsibility over hiring and firing of staff.

What was key in the research was looking deeply into the data collected from each case study school and using the accounts of those working within the schools. There was evidence pointing at the fact that there was a positive link between successful schools and high-quality leadership (Naicker and Mestry, 2016; Lalor, 2022). The insights gained from both the academy school and the charter school pointed to highly effective leadership and this having a positive impact on each school, in terms of academic improvements, staff development and building an effective school and curriculum for the students, with a focus on moral purpose.

The next section focusses on the research questions used in the research and summarises the key findings.

- What insights do school leaders' accounts provide on the use of system leadership in as an approach to leadership in an academy?

For the academy school, the first change to the school described by the leaders involved in this research was the move to academisation, and then to forming a MAT with other local schools in the community. As described by Senge *et al.*, (2015), system leaders, in comparison with other leaders, 'focus on creating the conditions that can produce change and that can eventually cause change to be self-sustaining (p.29). The leaders within the academy school all described how they were morally invested within their own school and the other schools within their trust to ensure a successful academy and then a successful trust. This moral purpose is central to a system leader, whether the other areas of the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2007) theoretical framework are present or not.

For the data collected from the academy school it was found that leaders showed a moral imperative towards both their school and other schools and students they worked with. Different leadership levels showed various aspects of the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework of system leadership. It was evident that by working in collaboration with other schools, as an improvement partner, that change had been brought about in underperforming schools the academy had been working with. The evidence that was gathered led me to focus this on evidence of system leadership being used, but I must be aware of personal bias due to researching system leadership and my focus being solely on the features of a system leader and I must accept the possibility that the partnership could be what

Mordaunt (1999) described as a predatory partnership, ‘based on the desire for domination and where the exercise of power leads to the achievement of the controlling body’ (given in Simon, 2015, p.15).

Leaders within the academy school did not refer to the term system leadership, however they did discuss many of the features of a system leader as proposed by the theoretical framework of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). Leaders described working across other schools as SLE’s to help improve the teaching and learning, which led to improvement in results of these other schools. They described being change agents by doing this, and by improving community relationships. The strategic acumen of the CEO led to the movement of the academy school to work with other schools and build a MAT around their school as the beacon school. This brought about a change within the academy school as they became members of a network, working to improve and change teaching, learning and student outcomes in other schools.

The CEO of the academy school used their moral purpose and vision clearly to build capacity within leadership in their own school. This in turn aided to building capacity across the other schools within the trust, impacting upon school improvement of the schools they were working in partnership with. This gave an insight into how the effective school leadership methodology in the academy school was using system leadership as a way to wrap around the leadership across the trust schools, who all had their own leadership teams (Hallinger, 2018a).

- What insights do school leaders’ accounts provide on the use of system leadership as an approach to leadership in a charter school?

From the charter school there is limited evidence to suggest that system leadership plays a part in the overall leadership of the school. The school was initially set up as a pathway for those students for whom the traditional school system was not working. The ability of being a charter school enabled a curriculum to be set up to work with those disaffected by education up to that point. The school has made little change to its original charter from being set up in 1997. Its foundations are rooted in changing the pathway for students who are heading to the juvenile justice system.

The data collected from the charter school show elements of the theoretical framework of system leadership suggested by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009), particularly the moral imperative. The headteacher and other leaders use their strategic acumen to develop their staff and students and to work strategically across the community. Curriculum leaders play a part in curriculum development to ensure

it meets the needs of the students, again showing the moral imperative held by the leaders within the school.

The school leaders' accounts at the charter school provided an insight into moral leadership being used for the leadership and management of the charter school, which focusses more on keeping things in the present rather than creating change. Elements presented by the leadership showed aspects such as authenticity, balance, and a degree of systematic thinking to create a school learning community. The school carries with it a moral obligation for its' students (Wong, 1998). The charter school involved in Wong's (1998) research demonstrated this, having been set up to provide a pathway for those lost in the educational system, and ensuring that the students graduated and had college places offered to them.

Much of what has been discussed and analysed in this research has suggested that effective leadership can be developed using system leadership, and the components that underpin this approach. Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009, p.130) stated 'teaching, learning and well-being must be the unrelenting focus of reform'. To bring widespread change and reform within school systems, a leadership approach that enables leaders to lead across schools and communities is what is necessary. Using this leadership method at all levels of school leadership, could support this. As Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) have gone on to describe, system leadership is a leadership method which involves leaders at all levels engaging more authentically with both teaching and learning and student relationships, so that capacity for change and improvement is built. This echoes the description of system leaders discussed by Senge *et al.*, (2015), who stated that system leaders working at all leadership levels collaboratively are capable of introducing system wide change, 'ineffective leaders try to make change happen. System leaders focus on creating the conditions that can produce change and that can eventually be self-sustaining' (p.29).

Both charter schools and academy schools provide prime arenas for system leadership as a school leadership methodology. Hargreaves (2011, p.15) noted: 'If standalone schools remain the basic organisational unit of a school System, extended moral purpose remains a piece of rhetoric, a utopian dream. When the cluster is the basic organisational unit in a school System, extended moral purpose becomes both feasible and the key driver of the transformation, initially at the local level, into a self-improving school system'. The formation of both academies and charter schools was initially to bring about a more autonomous, changed school system. System leadership provides a leadership pathway to instigate change that can be self-sustaining if adopted by those in leadership positions throughout. Many academy schools and charter schools both came about to provide a new environment for students, to enable a change in the learning process or for there to be change to schools once deemed as failing. The

use of system leadership, with school leaders invested in each student working across stakeholders has the potential to move all schools forward.

It is useful to consider what system leadership can bring to educational settings. This research has shown that where system leadership was evident across the leadership of a school, there appeared to be a clear impact across a system, whether this be a school and its community or multiple schools working together. System leadership does not need large systems to be effective, what it needs is leaders who are morally invested in the aims of the school which they lead. System leaders must be prepared to work with other stakeholders outside of their own school within their community to bring about change. Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) presented their research on three inner-city schools, Robert Clack, Greenwood Dale and Plashet. All were schools in deprived areas, facing complacent staff and little responsibility was held by the leaders. Over the course of a decade, new leadership with new vision for improvement saw GCSE results in all schools grow approximately 50% for 5 A\*-C grades. The leaders in all three schools set about a change vision for each school serving their communities, reviewing the teaching, and learning and developing the staff. This led to improvement in results, behaviour and whole school teaching and learning (this improved from 42% of teaching staff being graded as good or better in 1993, and by 2005 80% were at this level (Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews, 2009). These cases provided evidence that when leaders work together for the purpose of improvement, change happens. When leaders invest themselves to bring about their vision, change happens, with the leaders of one of these schools then moving to act as a school improvement partner later with other schools needing improvement. This shows that system leadership, when used across schools innovates change and brings about sustained improvements. Within this research, the academy school showed evidence that by working together as a group of leaders and partnering a lower achieving school, improvement of that school happened.

This piece of research led to consideration of whether leaders and staff working in the case study schools were aware of the leadership methodology. The analysis of data highlighted that the use of system leadership can move a school forward, whether this be through helping others to improve (school A), or with the focus of helping students to improve (school B), with moral purpose lying clearly at the centre for both schools. However, it must be asked, for those in leadership roles to use system leadership effectively is there a training need? Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009, p.133) put forward the argument that those leaders who were involved in school improvement across their own and other schools tended to see system leadership emerging, as they as leaders, 'learn much about the process and are motivated to share this knowledge with other schools'. Nine years later, the work of Close, Kendrick and Outhwaite (2018, p.2) on researching how consultancy work can impact on the skills required for

school leaders to be effective systems leaders, explained how to develop systems leaders within schools. This suggested there needed to be a framework, as becoming an effective system leader did not just happen.

Close, Kendrick and Outhwaite (2018, p.79) stated that ‘the effective exercise of system leadership depended on certain understanding and proficiencies about which there was considerable knowledge from the field of consultancy’. For example, do the values and coaching that lie within a system leadership model come naturally to teachers who have become leaders within schools? Close, Kendrick and Outhwaite (2018) identified a training need around these and used models in consultancy work to build development activities for leaders in schools. These involved ethics workshops, skills workshops, system leader learning sets and ‘wider picture’ updates. The research findings of Close, Kendrick and Outhwaite (2018, p.82) led to the initial conclusions that, ‘all system leaders working across schools in school-to-school support, regardless of role, function or seniority, are consultants, and so consultancy research should be used to inform professional development’. So, I believe from this research that for school leaders to fully release and understand their potential as system leaders, teacher training needs to embed this approach and make it common and understood practice more than just ‘coming about’ once teachers are qualified and moving through the leadership structure within a school. Teacher training and then further qualifications (such as the NPQH programme in England) should include work of system leadership and the traits of a system leader.

Effective leaders linked their schools to communities, whether this be other schools within a community, or the community in which the school resides, as described by Murphy *et al.*, (2007, p.194) ‘effective leaders are attuned to and expert at linking the school to parents and others in the extended school community’. Effective leaders will develop and promote and nurture a community of professional practice. This was evident in the school leaders interviewed, and demonstrated in the way they were able to, as Murphy *et al.*, (2007, p.431) described, ‘actively manipulate the environment in the service of better education for children and their families’.

There was evidence of many aspects of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew’s (2009) framework of system leadership in use at the charter school, particularly aspects such as moral purpose and strategic acumen. However, as a stand-alone charter school there was not enough evidence to say that system leadership was the main leadership methodology in place in this school as there was little evidence of working in partnership with other schools and aiding their improvement as a leader of change. However, the moral purpose of acting for the students was evident within the origins of the school and still evident within the teaching and leadership body today.

School development and improvement can involve many components, as considered in the research undertaken. The improvement in results and achievement for students, was evidenced in the data collected in school A. However, school improvement is also about a positive ethos surrounding a school (Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews, 2009) particularly in context with the local socio-economic factors of that school. Both school A and school B appear to be creating a positive ethos, driving forward standards by ensuring the correct curriculum model for the students attending these schools.

Hatcher (2008) critiqued system leadership as being something more existent at policy and governmental level, rather than a leadership methodology. It demonstrates operational leadership, rather than strategic leadership (Hargreaves, 2007). However, Hopkins (2007) has explained the different levels in which system leadership can be demonstrated. These being as follows:

- At school level – by working across schools to raise attainment and narrow the gap
- At local level – working across the community, with a focus on at risk groups
- At national level – working with social justice moral purpose and having a commitment to every learner.

This demonstrates that system leadership can indeed be at policy level, but also system leaders can be working at school and local level. There were clear elements of this at both school A and school B, both fitting different system leadership roles as presented by Hopkins (2007), these being a lead in an educational partnership (school A, an executive head partnering a school facing difficulty), a lead in extremely challenging circumstances (school A and B), community leadership aiming to work between the school community and local community (school B) and acting as a change agent (school A and B). System-wide change focusses on a school not working in isolation, but alongside other schools or communities, causing system-wide improvement across a broader educational partnership. Both school A and school B demonstrated that they were impacting their communities (school B) and other schools (school A) (Naicker and Mestry, 2016).

## **5.5 Limitations of the Research**

Much of this research has centred around the moral purpose and moral imperative needed by a system leader to bring about change. However, as Fullan (2003, p.71) described, ‘when it comes to the reality of large-scale, sustainable moral imperative, the system is a source of trouble. Current policies, structures, incentives, practices.’ It must be remembered that the findings from this study alone can show only what has happened in two schools and it cannot be taken for the wider system, as there are many factors that act upon the wider system that this research did not cover. The findings from this study must be handled with care. Due to using a case study design framework, the findings can only be considered for this case, one academy school and one charter school. As case studies consider in detail specific

institutions, we cannot use them to generalise and say these findings would represent the use of system leadership in all academy schools in England and all charter schools in the United States of America.

The analysis and interpretation are key to this case study research to draw out what Taylor and Sondergaard (2017, p.86) described as ‘the truth’, or in case research ‘the reality’. This piece of research that has been undertaken was a small-scale research project looking at two very specific cases and investigating if system leadership was in use in two separate schools, using the insights and accounts of the school leaders. This was completed by comparing answers to a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to the theoretical framework of system leadership posed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) which gave the researcher those factors most prevalent in a system leader. The conclusions drawn have brought together these findings and linked this to the research questions posed at the start of the research and compared the findings to other literature on effective leadership. These conclusions are intended to demonstrate the key leadership values held by each of the leaders in the schools involved in the case studies and it is hoped by the researcher that the findings are of interest to relevant audiences such as leaders within academy schools, charter schools, educational leadership bodies and academic researchers.

A key issue with a case study approach, to investigate a research focus and questions, is whether the approach has provided enough rigour. Also, the researcher must have taken care not to generalise from the findings of a case study. Yin (2014) believed that the findings from a piece of case study research cannot be used to generalise theories rather than, ‘extrapolate probabilities’ (p.24). As Pring (2000, p.41) stated, ‘from such an intense study of the particular, it is not possible to generalize to other situations, although the graphic descriptions may alert one to similar possibilities in other situations.’ Another problem with case study design is that the research may have taken too long and produced a large amount of what Yin (2014, p.21) stated as ‘unreadable documents.’ However, this can be minimised by using a clear plan and framework for the case study design.

However, there can be issues with a case study design. Taylor and Sondergaard (2017, p.87) stated that with case studies, ‘the data does not speak for itself. Analysis and interpretation are critical to drawing out ‘the truth’ or in case research ‘the reality’’. As this was a multiple-case study, with data being collected from two organisations, the data collected from a situation such as this is as explained by Yin (2014, p.57) ‘considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust’. Thomas (2007, p.115) has described an issue with case studies as being that ‘you are choosing this very restricted sample to be able to gain greater detail, but at the expense of being able to make useful generalisations to a broader population’. This meaning that a case study must be looked at as its

own entity and as the sample is small what was found in this case study will not necessarily apply to all similar schools. Whilst a much larger sample would need to be investigated to be able to make generalisations, the data collection, analysis, identification of key themes and impact could usefully be shared and disseminated.

Case studies can also cause issues due to the involvement of the researcher within the ‘case’ when data has been collected. As Denscombe (1998, p.63) described, ‘it is hard for case study researchers to achieve their aim of investigating situations as they naturally occur without any effect arising from their presence’. This is known as the *observer effect*, which Denscombe goes on to describe in further detail as the fact that those being researched may behave differently to normal as they are aware of the presence of the researcher. Despite this, I felt that a case study design best suited the research, to enable two schools to be investigated in detail. As Denscombe (1998, p. 55) elaborated, ‘it lends itself to the study of processes and relationships within a setting’, and a view of the relationships between leaders in each setting was key to the research. The philosophical background to the research paved the way for a case study design frame, following a deductive methodology. Data was collected to enable the phenomenon to be understood from the viewpoint of the participants, through data pattern matching to the key themes of system leadership, within the theoretical framework developed by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009).

It has been noted that due to the small sample size involved in this project that generalisations cannot be drawn from this research project, and it gives an insight into what has happened in terms of leadership in one academy school and one charter school, and this leadership has been compared to the theoretical framework of system leadership presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009). The opportunity to repeat this research with a higher number of academy schools and charter schools would be valuable, as this may help to provide conclusions that could be more generalised.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

Leadership styles are continually changing within the field of education, and the methods adapted by different leaders and educational institutions will evolve, dependent on many factors relevant at that time and context. This could result in further research being challenging to compare directly to the reviewed findings. Rather the key themes identified would need to be considered in other institutions, and their unique contexts considered. Further research could also focus on whether system leadership is an educational leadership method or a managerial business model that has been adapted for education, ‘one that is applied to an equally tangled web of arrangements within and between schools and between schools and other organizations’ (Simon, 2015, p.14).

A further area of study could be to focus on just one country and more schools within that country to provide further data linking one country to system leadership; or possibly to look at other countries or educational systems. A longitudinal study in the future may provide useful data by looking at leadership patterns over a more extended time, to see how moral purpose is demonstrated by leaders within an institution and focussing on how leaders learn how to lead.

## **5.7 Dissemination of Findings and Contribution**

Dissemination is a key part of research. There has been a growing body of work on system leadership within different school systems, however this is the first piece of research focusing in detail on an academy school and a charter school and making comparisons across them. This thesis can offer an insight to a variety of school leaders in different contexts on the use of system leadership in a practical setting, rather than as a policy making tool as argued by Hatcher (2008), as demonstrated by the two case study schools.

The findings and conclusions from the research will be shared with the senior leadership teams in the schools that were involved in the project, and the MAT for which the researcher works for. This will be done by sharing this thesis with those involved in the project electronically and the researcher shall present the findings to the MAT where the researcher is currently employed in a face-to-face setting. An outline of the research and the findings have also been shared by myself at the researcher conference held at the University of Birmingham held in November 2020. The findings will be shared via an online presentation to stakeholders of the trust for which the researcher currently works for. The current MAT which I work within has just taken on a new trust of schools, and the findings should also be shared across the leadership teams of these schools. This will further encourage system leadership across the trust, and the importance of this when schools are working as change agents, as the new schools have joined the current trust in order to improve performance of these schools. It would be useful to meet with the new leadership teams and present the findings and key themes from the research.

The research looked in detail at two very different case study schools and if system leadership had been implemented, knowingly or not, in these institutions, and the impact the leadership teams have had and if this has matched with a system leadership model produced by Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009). The uniqueness of the research has come from the contrasting of two different types of school settings in two different countries and their use of system leadership within the settings. This is the first piece of research to directly compare an academy in England and a charter school in the USA, and to review

these against the system leadership model presented by Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2009) via means of case study research.

The research has given a unique insight into the similarities and differences of academy schools in England and charter schools in the USA and the issues surrounding the two types of schools, in terms of how and why they were set up, and how they are organised, managed, and led. This has provided very useful and interesting knowledge and understanding that has positively impacted on my professional development and can be shared with others. It was shown by the academy school that the leadership team, by working with moral purpose across schools, were able to move forward their school and other schools in the community by developing staff to lead school improvement. This is an addition to the Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) framework as it demonstrates that aspects of the framework can be weaved together to have greater affect rather than being in different spheres of influence. The charter school gave a valuable insight that the leaders were using moral purpose not just to lead the school and students, but also when employing new staff. The headteacher explained that they choose staff with more importance focussed on those who would fit the students, school, and ethos over those with relevant qualifications as they felt they could develop the teaching and learning within staff who showed moral investment in the aims of the school. It was also clear from the leaders at both schools that becoming a system leader does not just happen. This has provided me with the insight that system leadership should be included within leadership training programmes, such as the NPQH, and then developed within schools through line management of middle leaders.

In terms of contribution, this piece of research has added to my own leadership methodology and development. Through the literature review, my own role has been significantly impacted with the layers of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's system leadership framework (2009). For example, part of my role is the line management and direct responsibility for ten middle leaders. Two of these were new leaders when taking their roles, and I have used system leadership methodology to develop leadership traits within these people – encouraging them to develop student centred curriculums, and strategies for developing those they lead, keeping moral purpose in the forefront of their actions.

My own leadership role involves working with up to 42 local primary schools and our local community (including religious organisations, safeguarding organisations and social care). My understanding and development of system leadership has impacted the way I do this aspect of my role. I approach the local stakeholders with moral purpose in terms of the students at my current school and ensuring a better community for them. I work as a change agent in local primary schools, offering bespoke workshops and working with their teaching staff to develop the transition curriculum.

I have worked with my school leadership team to change the ethos and culture in my current school, and by working with the principal and pastoral vice-principal, we have developed a behaviour system based on Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) ideas of moral purpose – keeping the students at the centre to ensure the strategies used are fit for purpose and improve challenges rather than creating more.

I worked across my trust to develop a new Personal, Social and Health Education Programme (PSHE). The curriculum redesign was initially led in my current school by myself leading the whole staff. The design of our bespoke PSHE programme involved planning every lesson (it is a 100-lesson programme spanning years 7-11) with the students at the centre. Staff were provided with training by me to develop them outside of their subject specialisms to produce a high quality PSHE programme to which they were morally invested in. My planning for this programme was done using the system leadership framework of Higham, Hopkins, and Matthews (2019) with the initial focus being on students at the centre, then developing the staff and using my strategic acumen to develop the programme and curriculum. The success of this led to me providing the training for PSHE to all new teaching staff across our trust and impacting on our community perception of PSHE by leading community sessions based at the school, working with the local stakeholders and governors to develop a bespoke programme reflective of our school community.

The research had contributed to my own personal development as a leader and focussed on having a system leadership approach in the school setting – viewing all aspects of education as a system to develop whilst keeping the student and staff wellbeing at the centre. I will disseminate my work further within my own trust (as discussed earlier) and also more widely. I am keen to produce a paper focussing on the case studies within this thesis, and also to present at further educational conferences. In 2022, Lalor produced a paper titled, *Exploring learning for school leaders: A literature review in the context of system leadership*. This review features many of the same ideas as this thesis, such as how the development of effective future school leaders provides a system wide opportunity and system leadership being a theory through which effective leadership can be embedded across and within schools and school system (Lalor, 2002). I have already contacted the author of this piece of research in order to discuss our ideas within the field of system leadership, with the aim of further links within the field, to disseminate the research.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix One**

#### **Participant Information Sheet – Interviews**



#### **Participant**

#### **Information**

#### **Sheet – Interview and Questionnaire**

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### **Leaders and Leadership in Education**

**Thank you for agreeing to consider being part of this research project.**

#### **Background**

You are invited to take part in this research project, which is for my doctoral programme of study – Leaders and Leadership in Education Doctorate EdD – at the University of Birmingham. The research project will be studying the area of System Leadership and comparing its use in an Academy Trust in England to a Charter School Management Organisation in the United States of America. Please read the information below before you commit to being part of the study. If you have any questions or queries please do not hesitate to contact me on the email address given on this information sheet. Participation in this research project is voluntary.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The aim of this study is to compare how System Leadership is used in an Academy Trust in England and a Charter School Management Organisation in the United States of America. I will be reviewing what the literature says about System Leadership, and then through interviews and questionnaires given to leaders of both institutions I will aim to review the leadership style against the model of System Leadership presented by Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009)

#### **Who has reviewed the study?**

This has been submitted to the University of Birmingham Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Review Committee for their approval.

**What does participation involve?**

If you agree to be part of this project, I would initially ask you to complete the attached consent form and return this to me via email. I will then contact you to arrange an interview. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. It will be audio recorded to later be transcribed. The interview will either be face-to-face or via a video call, such as Skype. This will be organised when I contact you. You will then be asked to complete an online questionnaire.

**Can I withdraw for the study?**

You are under no obligation to take part in this research, and can request to withdraw up to 2 weeks from the date of your agreement to take part. Any request to withdraw should be put in writing to the researcher whose details are provided below. Following your withdrawal from the study, any information you already provided will not be used in the analysis or final report, and any record of the data you provided will subsequently be destroyed.

**What if there is something I am not happy about?**

If you have any concerns please contact the researcher whose details follow. Should you wish to make a formal complaint, please contact my supervisory team who will take the matter forward for you:-

Dr. Tracy Whatmore

**Good Practice and Research Quality**

All data collected will be anonymised and no identifying features will be made available. Any reference to an individual or an organisation will be referred to by a numerical or coded value.

With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed within eight weeks of your interview. If you would like to review a copy of the transcript for accuracy, please indicate this on the consent form. The audio recordings and transcriptions will be stored for ten years on the University of Birmingham's Cloud storage – Bear Data Share.

### **Feedback**

You may request a copy of the summary findings of this report on the consent form. This will be sent to you at the conclusion of the study.

Contact:

Researcher, Helen Coles-Hennessy, Doctoral Student



Supervisor: Dr. Tracy Whatmore



## **Appendix Two**

### **Participant Information Sheet – Questionnaires**



#### **Participant Information Sheet – Questionnaire**

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### **Leaders and Leadership in Education**

**Thank you for agreeing to consider being part of this research project.**

#### **Background**

You are invited to take part in this research project, which is for my doctoral programme of study – Leaders and Leadership in Education Doctorate EdD – at the University of Birmingham. The research project will be studying the area of System Leadership and comparing its use in an Academy Trust in England to a Charter School in the United States of America. Please read the information below before you commit to being part of the study. If you have any questions or queries please do not hesitate to contact me on the email address given on this information sheet. Participation in this research project is voluntary.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The aim of this study is to compare how System Leadership is used in an Academy Trust in England and a Charter School in the United States of America. I will be reviewing what the literature says about System Leadership, and then through interviews and questionnaires given to leaders of both institutions I will aim to review the leadership style against the model of System Leadership presented by Higham, Hopkins and Matthews (2009)

#### **Who has reviewed the study?**

This has been submitted to the University of Birmingham Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Review Committee for their approval.

**What does participation involve?**

If you agree to be part of this project you will be sent a link to complete an online questionnaire. You will not need to give your name during the course of the questionnaire and all data given will remain anonymous.

**Can I withdraw for the study?**

Once you have undertaken the questionnaire it will not be possible to withdraw from the project as the data you will have provided will be confidential.

**What if there is something I am not happy about?**

If you have any concerns please contact the researcher whose details follow. Should you wish to make a formal complaint, please contact my supervisory team who will take the matter forward for you:-

Dr. Tracy Whatmore [REDACTED]

**Good Practice and Research Quality**

All data remains confidential.

The data collected will be stored for ten years on the University of Birmingham's Cloud storage – Bear Data Share.

**Feedback**

You may request a copy of the summary findings of this report on the consent form. This will be sent to you at the conclusion of the study.

Contact:

Researcher, Helen Coles-Hennessy, Doctoral Student  
[REDACTED]

Supervisor: Dr. Tracy Whatmore



**Appendix three**  
**Invitation to Schools Exemplar Letter**

Researcher: Helen Coles-Hennessy

Supervisors: Dr. Tom Bisschoff;

Dr. Tracy Whatmore

4<sup>th</sup> March 2018

Dear

I am a part-time EdD student currently undertaking research at the School of Education, University of Birmingham, focussing on leadership in schools.

I hope to be able to undertake an interview with you, as a senior leader of X on a date convenient to you. With your permission, the interview would be audio recorded and then transcribed within 8 weeks of the completion of the interview. Should you wish for a copy of the transcription, please tick the box on the consent form. You will also be asked to complete an online questionnaire following the interview.

The data gathered from the interviews with senior leaders will be analysed, as part of my research, in order to produce a doctoral thesis, entitled System Leadership in an Academy Trust in England and a Charter School Management Organisation in the United States of America.

All names of participants and organisations will be kept confidential in the thesis, and referred to by a numeric or coded value. The thesis will be published upon completion, as well as a paper being published during the write up period. Copies of both of these will be made available to participants if they request them.

The purpose of the research is to examine the use of System Leadership in an Academy Trust in England and a Charter Management Organisation in the United States by senior leaders and

middle leaders in both organisations. The aim of both the interview and questionnaire will be to gain an understanding of the type of leadership methods being used and how effective these are within each organisation. There will be a comparison of the use of leadership methods and the intended outcomes by both organisations and their leaders to identify and review similarities and differences.

The research will involve senior and middle leaders from both organisations being interviewed, either face-to-face or via video conferencing, by the researcher and then they will be asked to complete an online questionnaire.

The intended outcomes of the research project are to gain new insight into how different organisations, in two countries, may be utilising similar leadership methods where a number of different schools are under the leadership of one main trust or management organisation, and how effective this is in ensuring successful outcomes for the different schools within the trust and management organisations.

Signing this consent form does not oblige you to participate and if at some stage of the research you wish to withdraw your consent you are able to do so. All research is voluntary, and following the signing of this consent form you have a period of 2 weeks to withdraw from the project.

The University of Birmingham's Code of Ethics will be adhered to during the course of this research project.

All data will be kept confidential and each participant will be assigned a unique code as an identifier. Each organisation will be anonymised and referred to as A and B. All data will be stored on password protected University of Birmingham devices and data will be password protected within the documents it is stored in. Data will be stored for ten years following the completion of the project. All data will be stored on the University of Birmingham Cloud storage – Bear Data Share. All signed consent forms will be scanned and stored electronically.

Thank you for your involvement in my research and I hope that you will feel able to sign below, and complete the consent form.

With very best wishes

Helen.

I have read and understood the written details provided for me about the research, and agree to participate in the project.

Signed:

Date:

Signature of researcher:

Date:

**Appendix Four**  
**Consent Form – Interviews**



**Consent  
Form**

---

**Thank you for agreeing to being to be part of this research project.**

I the undersigned voluntarily agree to take part in the questionnaires and interview on leadership in higher education which is being undertaken by a doctoral student of the University of Birmingham

✓

□

I have read and understood the **Participant Information Sheet** and **Ethical Consent Letter** provided. I have been given an explanation by the researcher of the study, and of what I will be expected to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions on all aspects of the study and have understood the advice and information given as a result.

□

I understand that any information which is collected during interviews will be stored in line with the University's strict guidelines, which protects the secure storage of all data in its original form for a period of 10 years (or up to 20 years where data is of major social, environmental or heritage importance).

□

I understand that I can withdraw at the latest from the project within 2 weeks from the date of my agreement to participate and without needing to justify my decision. If I withdraw from the study, I understand that my data will not be used.

□

In the event of needing to complain, I understand that I should contact, in the first instance the researcher, Helen Coles-Hennessy, or in the event of this not being satisfactory, supervisor, Dr Tom Bisschoff. ☐

I confirm that I have read and understood all of the above and freely consent to taking part in this jointly funded study. I have been given enough time to consider whether I want to take part and agree to comply with the instructions and restrictions of the study as explained by the researcher. ☐

I would like to be sent a copy of the interview transcript to ☐

I would like to be sent a summary of the research findings upon conclusion of the research project ☐

Contact:

Researcher, Helen Coles-Hennessy, doctoral student, [helencoles-hennessy@hotmail.com](mailto:helencoles-hennessy@hotmail.com)

Supervisor, Dr Tom Bisschoff

Name of  
volunteer  
(BLOCK .....  
CAPITALS)

Signed .....

Date .....

Name of  
researcher      Helen Coles-Hennessy

Signed      .....

Date      .....

## **Appendix Five**

### **Questionnaire**

**Researcher: Helen Coles-Hennessy**

**Supervisor: Dr Tracy Whatmore**

#### **Questionnaire information**

The questionnaire will be completed online via Survey Monkey

Completion and return of the questionnaire will be taken as consent by the participant to take part in this research project.

All findings will be anonymised – no names will be collected

The data collected will be stored under password protected conditions on a University of Birmingham device.

#### **Questionnaire**

1. Please select your gender  
Male  
female
2. Please select your age group  
18-30  
31-45  
46-60  
60+
3. Please select your position within your school/organisation  
Executive Principal/CEO  
Principal/head teacher of more than 1 school  
Principal/headteacher of 1 school  
Deputy headteacher  
Assistant headteacher  
Head of department/subject area  
Head of year/grade

For the following questions please select from 1 to 5 which best matches your response.

1-strongly agree

2 – agree

3 – neutral

4 – disagree

5 – strongly disagree

4. The school I work in is ran by someone who also runs other organisation

1 2 3 4 5

5. The Principal of the school I work in is often at other schools

1 2 3 4 5

6. I teach or have taught in a variety of schools within the Academy/ Charter School for which I work

1 2 3 4 5

7. I want all the students at the different schools of the Academy Trust/Chart School for which I work to achieve well

1 2 3 4 5

8. I have very little contact with students in other schools in the Academy Trust/Charter School for which I work

1 2 3 4 5

9. I have been involved in training events with staff from other schools organised by the Academy/Charter School for which I work

1 2 3 4 5

10. I have had chance to develop in my own career due to being part of an Academy/Charter School

1 2 3 4 5

11. I have lead events to help train other members of staff in the Academy/Charter School in which I work

1 2 3 4 5

For the following questions please feel free to type a response in the boxes

12. Do you feel you have been able to grow as a leader due to your school being part of an Academy/Charter School? If so, please explain your answer
13. Have you been able to see your visions turned into processes in place where you are employed? If yes, please give an example of this.
14. Can you give any examples of how you have worked within your role outside of your school – such as working with the community, acting as an improvement partner in another school or sharing curriculum innovations?

## Appendix Six

### Interview Schedule

Researcher – Helen Coles-Hennessy

Supervisor – Dr Tracy Whatmore



#### Interview Schedule

Information for participants to be given in addition to the Participant Information Sheet at the start of the interview:

- Brief outline of project (as per participant information sheet)
- The interview will be audio recorded. Within 8 weeks of the interview data the interview will have been transcribed. If you requested a copy of this on the consent form this will then be sent to you so you are able to check the information. You should then confirm you are happy with the transcription within 2 weeks.
- If you do not wish to answer a question during the interview you do not have to.
- Thank you for taking part in this research – it is voluntary.

| Research Area     | Issue/Topic          | Possible questions                                                                                                                                                | Possible follow-up questions                                                                                | Probes                  |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| System leadership | Moral purpose        | <p>Why do you want to be part of an academy /Charter School?</p> <p>Why lead in a school other than your own?</p> <p>Why be involved in more than one school?</p> | Do you feel the same about students and teachers in the schools which are in the trust but not your school? | <p>How?</p> <p>Why?</p> |
|                   | Personal development | How does being part of an academy /Charter                                                                                                                        | In what position                                                                                            | If position has         |

| Research Area | Issue/Topic                                     | Possible questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Possible follow-up questions                                                 | Probes                                                                               |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|               |                                                 | <p>school help your career development?</p> <p>How did you become involved?</p> <p>Has it already?</p> <p>How would you like it to in the future?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>were you when you joined the trust?</p> <p>What is your position now?</p> | <p>changed – how?</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>What was the process?</p> <p>Where to next?</p> |
|               | Leading teaching and learning/developing people | <p>How does being a leader in a school in an academies trust/Charter School impact upon your staff?</p> <p>Are you able to access staff in the other schools with different areas of expertise?</p> <p>Does being part of a group of schools benefit your staff?</p> <p>Does being part of a group of schools attract new staff to your school?</p> | <p>Could more be done in bringing about joint CPD?</p>                       | <p>Why/Why not?</p> <p>How?</p>                                                      |

| Research Area | Issue/Topic                                   | Possible questions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Possible follow-up questions                                                                                                                                                       | Probes                  |
|---------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
|               | Developing organizations/networks             | <p>Are there plans to increase the size of the trust/organisation?</p> <p>How does the school/trust benefit the community/communities it is within?</p> <p>Which external agencies are centrally used by all the schools?</p> <p>Is this a benefit?</p> <p>Which systems are centrally managed? (e.g., HR/finance)</p> | <p>Could more be done centrally?</p> <p>What are the benefits of it being done centrally (if it is done this way)?</p> <p>Are there benefits with using external agencies now?</p> |                         |
|               | Using system leadership to lead and manage    | <p>What do you believe system leadership to be?</p> <p>Would you call yourself a system leader/system thinker?</p> <p>Does leading in this way benefit the schools?</p>                                                                                                                                                | <p>Could the trust make more use of a system leadership model?</p>                                                                                                                 | <p>How?</p> <p>Why?</p> |
|               | Using system leadership to create improvement | <p>How do the schools in help each other to improve?</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <p>What are you doing to help create</p>                                                                                                                                           |                         |

| Research Area | Issue/Topic | Possible questions                                                              | Possible follow-up questions                       | Probes |
|---------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------|
|               |             | <p>Who leads on this?</p> <p>Where does the data for improvement come from?</p> | <p>improvement in schools other than your own?</p> |        |

## **Appendix Seven**

### **Example Interview Transcript**

Interviewee C

I: what is your role within the trust?

C: I am currently head of school and I'm also SENCO and a designated safeguarding lead. All of my teaching has been at this school starting as an NQT. So, I have been part of the growth of the school initially. When it became one of the first 100 teaching schools I was here when it was designated and subsequently, we went over to be an academy then a lead school as the academy and the trust is now growing.

I: What was your position when the trust was developed?

C: We restructured when we became a MAT. I was deputy. When other schools came on board the head became CEO, so I became head of school and someone else became deputy.

I So has it been a positive thing for your career becoming part of a trust?

C: Massively. The trust is being part of a trust. The benefits are you can learn from everyone, it doesn't matter where you are on your journey, it doesn't matter what expertise you bring at the time there is always something that someone will say to you or show you that sparks an idea which you then go away and talk to them about a little bit more. So, for us, it's been massive. Enabling us to continue to move forward because we are a school where no two years are ever the same. People think when you are an outstanding school, that's it. But it's not it. This outstanding school today is very different to the outstanding school it was three years ago and that's because we have had the opportunity to work with so many different people, to say 'yes what we do it right' but also have you thought about this idea. That's the benefit of the position I'm in and also for our staff to work with other people.

I: Have you had much to do with the other schools in the trust?

C: Because of the nature of our job roles, we have done school to school support. Before it came into the trust one of the schools was a special measures school, so we did a lot of work with them before they became one of our schools. More of my role has been facilitation. People come here, you facilitate teacher days, sessions with individual teachers. Where we have grown our own SLE's they have more often gone out and about. The CEO has been instrumental in that. We have some really strong leaders in our schools, it's just growing their capacity and that is what the CEO has done.

I: How do you think she has done that?

C: She's a fantastic role model. I think her style of leadership is that she has great faith in you and she coaches as she goes, but in such a way that you don't realise you are being coached. She has belief and she knows just when to model and demonstrate. She knows when to pose a question. She's done a lot with the other leaders in our other schools. That's not to say they didn't have the capacity in the first place. It's just nice sometimes to have a dialogue with someone to say you are doing the right things.

I: As head of one school, do you feel like you want everyone in every school to achieve.

C: That's why one of the first things we did when we became a teaching school and we were giving school to school support, but our children here have the best opportunity. Our moral imperative is to achieve and make sure as many children as we can get the same opportunity but in the right way for them. When people come here, they will often say 'tell me what the secret is, tell me what to do' and we're very clear that you can't be told what to do because it won't fit your school, your community, what your staff it. So actually, our role is support, to guide, to say 'you could look at this', but what people have to do is tailor it to meet the needs of your children. It's great to go to the other schools and we do meet regularly to see the journey they have been on and to see their children and to see their photographs and to see them in their learning and to see that they are getting a great deal also.

I: Do you have shared CPD days?

C: Sometimes. We've done more with one of our schools than the other one. Just because of numbers. We recently had our first MAT celebration evening. We had all of the staff from the five schools. Nearly 200 staff. One of the key things we do is moderator and have key dialogue so it's not just at senior leadership level the CPD is happening, it's happening peer to peer as well?

I: As head here has it helped your classroom teachers and assistant Principals and deputies?

C: Massively because everybody, when you work in one school you can be a little bit this is what's it's like. People assume people do the same things in the same way that you do but because peers can have dialogues, ideas start to bounce, and networks have been set up. People email now. This idea of collaboration is huge. It's lovely because each school is individual and unique, and you can't assume that this is the way everybody does it.

I: Do you think it has helped your place in the wider community and do you think it's had an impact on the other schools and the communities they are part of?

C: I think we are all part of a family. We talk about our MAT as being a part of the family. I think for people to be part of the family they need their community. One of the schools is very close to us so we have children, and their next-door neighbour goes to the school up the road, which is brilliant for the community as they now know that all the children are going to great schools.

I: Do you think that's the thinking of the community?

C: I think the only issue we have is the schools that were special measures, when they academy conversion happens, they are waiting to be inspected now. There is the element that when people google you get the special measures which is completely unfair and people in the community do not see it as that anymore. The window is open for the schools to be inspected so that they get the judgement they deserve.

I: Do you see your career growing from the result of being part of the trust?

C: I don't think I will ever go anywhere else. That's purely and simply because I have been here so long that I am now teaching children of children which is a great place to be. For me personally, this school is for me so I don't think I will go anywhere else. But the trust has enabled me. If we hadn't become a trust I probably would have stayed as a deputy and been happy with that. So my shift has happened. I thought I would still be teaching in the classroom but being here has enabled me to grow and I think head of school is where I want to stay. I don't want to go to an Executive post.

I: As head of school do you think having certain things centralised has helped you do your role?

C: Definitely. We have centralised services such as educational psychologist, so we have an EP working across some of our schools (not all as they don't have the capacity) so you know in an emergency you can tap in. It's not like when you used to have to go through the local authority and you had to wait three weeks. ICT, we have an ICT director who is able to look across all the schools to make suggestions. The buy in centrally is massive and you haven't got to wait for services. It enables people to work much better.

I: Has it helped with students who may have needed another school?

C: Not yet, because parental choice – parents go where parents want to go.

I: Could you see that happening in the future?

C: I think the expertise long term. I think one of the schools has a resource base so in the future I may be able to source things from the other schools.

I: Do you think that your trust uses system leadership and what are your ideas of what system leadership is?

C: I suppose for us it's about what expertise we have got and how we use that expertise to best benefit the other people in our trust which will then ultimately impact on the children. I think, for us, because that has always been our moral imperative the system leadership runs through. If you ask some of the

staff they would wonder why it was called that, but if you ask them about support and helping and developing capacity that's what everyone is involved in.

## Appendix Eight

### Colour Coding used for Pattern Matching to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) System Leadership Framework

| System Leadership Theme/Colour Code Used |                                             |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1.                                       | Moral Purpose                               |
| 2.                                       | Personal Development                        |
| 3.                                       | Strategic Acumen                            |
| 4.                                       | Managing Teaching and Learning              |
| 5.                                       | Developing Organisation                     |
| 6.                                       | Developing People                           |
| 7.                                       | Partner a Low Achieving School              |
| 8.                                       | Lead an Educational Improvement Partnership |
| 9.                                       | Work as a Change Agent                      |
| 10.                                      | Improve a School in a Challenging Context   |
| 11.                                      | Act as a Community Leader                   |



## Appendix Nine

### Questionnaire Pattern Matched to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) System Leadership Framework

1. Please select your gender

Male

female

2. Please select your age group

18-30

31-45

46-60

60+

3. Please select your position within your school/organisation

Executive Principal/CEO

Principal/head teacher of more than 1 school

Principal/headteacher of 1 school

Deputy headteacher

Assistant headteacher

Head of department/subject area

Head of year/grade

For the following questions please select from 1 to 5 which best matches your response.

1-strongly agree

2 – agree

3 – neutral

4 – disagree

5 – strongly disagree

4. The school I work in is ran by someone who also runs other organisation –

5

5. Principal of the school I work in is often at other schools

5 6 7 9

6. I teach or have taught in a variety of schools within the Academy/ Charter School for which I work

2 5 6 9

7. I want all the students at the different schools of the Academy Trust/ Charter School for which I work to achieve well

1 3

8. I have very little contact with students in other schools in the Academy Trust/Charter School for which I work

9. I have been involved in training events with staff from other schools organised by the Academy/Charter School

2 5 6 9

10. I have had chance to develop in my own career due to being part of an Academy/Charter School

2 6

11. I have led events to help train other members of staff in the Academy/Charter School in which I work

2 4 5 6 9 10

For the following questions please feel free to type a response in the boxes

12. Do you feel you have been able to grow as a leader due to your school being part of an Academy/Charter School? If so, please explain your answer.

2 5 6

13. Have you been able to see your visions turned into processes in place where you are employed? If yes, please give an example of this.

2 6 9

14. Can you give any examples of how you have worked within your role outside of your school – such as working with the community, acting as an improvement partner in another school or sharing curriculum innovations?

2 5 6 7 9 10 11

## Appendix Ten

### Example Interview Transcript Pattern Matched to Higham, Hopkins, and Matthew's (2009) System Leadership Framework

Interview Transcript C

Interviewee C

I: what is your role within the trust?

C: I am currently head of school and I'm also SENCO and a designated safeguarding lead. All of my teaching has been at this school starting as an NQT. So I have been part of the growth of the school initially. When it became one of the first 100 teaching schools I was here when it was designated and subsequently we went over to be an academy then a lead school as the academy and the trust is now growing.

I: What was your position when the trust was developed?

C: We restructured when we became a MAT. I was deputy. When other schools came on board the head became CEO so I became head of school and someone else became deputy.

I So has it been a positive thing for your career becoming part of a trust?

C: Massively. The trust is being part of a trust. The benefits are you can learn from everyone, it doesn't matter where you are on your journey, it doesn't matter what expertise you bring at the time there is always something that someone will say to you or show you that sparks an idea which you then go away and talk to them about a little bit more. So, for us, it's been massive. Enabling us to continue to move forward because we are a school where no two years are ever the same. People think when you are an outstanding school, that's it. But it's not it. This outstanding school today is very different to the outstanding school it was three years ago and that's because we have had the opportunity to work with so many different people, to say 'yes what we do it right' but actually also have you thought about this idea. That's the benefit of the position I'm in and also for our staff to work with other people.

I: Have you had much to do with the other schools in the trust?

C: Because of the nature of our job roles we have done school to school support. Before it came into the trust one of the schools was a special measures school so we did a lot of work with them before they became one of our schools. More of my role has been facilitation. People come here, you

facilitate teacher days, sessions with individual teachers. Where we have grown our own SLE's they have more often gone out and about. The CEO has been instrumental in that. We have some really strong leaders in our schools, it's just growing their capacity and that is what the CEO has done.

I: How do you think she has done that?

C: She's a fantastic role model. I think her style of leadership is that she has great faith in you and she coaches as she goes, but in such a way that you don't realise you are being coached. She has belief and she knows just when to model and demonstrate. She knows when to pose a question. She's done a lot with the other leaders in our other schools. That's not to say they didn't have the capacity in the first place. It's just nice sometimes to have a dialogue with someone to say you are doing the right things.

I: As head of one school, do you feel like you want everyone in every school to achieve.

C: That's why one of the first things we did when we became a teaching school and we were giving school to school support, but our children here have the best opportunity. Our moral imperative is to achieve and make sure as many children as we can get the same opportunity but in the right way for them. When people come here they will often say 'tell me what the secret is, tell me what to do' and we're very clear that you can't be told what to do because it won't fit your school, your community, what your staff it. So actually, our role is support, to guide, to say 'you could look at this', but what people have to do is tailor it to meet the needs of your children. It's great to go to the other schools and we do meet regularly to see the journey they have been on and to see their children and to see their photographs and to see them in their learning and to see that they are getting a great deal also.

I: Do you have shared CPD days?

C: Sometimes. We've done more with one of our schools than the other one. Just because of numbers. We recently had our first MAT celebration evening. We had all of the staff from the five schools. Nearly 200 staff. One of the key things we do is moderator and have key dialogue so it's not just at senior leadership level the CPD is happening, it's happening peer to peer as well?

I: As head here has it helped your classroom teachers and assistant Principals and deputies?

C: Massively because everybody, when you work in one school you can be a little bit this is what's it's like. People assume people do the same things in the same way that you do but because peers can have dialogues, ideas start to bounce and networks have been set up. People email now. This idea of collaboration is huge. It's lovely because each school is individual and unique and you can't assume that this is the way everybody does it.

I: Do you think it has helped your place in the wider community and do you think it's had an impact on the other schools and the communities they are part of?

C: I think we are all part of a family. We talk about our MAT as being a part of the family. I think for people to be part of the family they need their community. One of the schools is very close to us so we have children and their next door neighbour goes to the school up the road, which is brilliant for the community as they now know that all the children are going to great schools.

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## Appendix Eleven

### Interview Data analysis Matrix

| School   | Key theme from theoretical framework | Tally of responses linked to this key theme | Key quotations and interviewee information                                                                                                       | Broad cross-school themes                                                           |
|----------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| School A | Moral Purpose                        | 10                                          | ‘moral imperative’ (CEO)<br>‘part of the bigger family’ (CEO)<br>‘it’s a proper family’ (Deputy)                                                 | Being part of a bigger family, working across schools                               |
|          | Personal Development                 | 10                                          | ‘That’s very fulfilling’ (Deputy)<br>‘the impact on them as people’ (Assistant Head 1)<br>‘you can grow as a leader yourself’ (Deputy)           | Many staff at school for many years and moved through leadership levels             |
|          | Strategic Acumen                     | 2                                           | ‘premise development manager...ICT director... HR person’ (CEO)<br>‘It’s growing their capacity, and that’s what the CEO has done’ (Headteacher) | At more senior level.<br>Idea of capacity, and linked departments such as IT and HR |
|          | Managing Teaching and Learning       | 8                                           | ‘Everyone sees themselves as a leader of learning’ (Assistant Head 1)                                                                            | References to SLE, supportive partnerships                                          |

|  |                                           |   |                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                 |
|--|-------------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | Developing Organisations                  | 3 | ‘you are having an impact on five other schools’ (Deputy)<br>‘It’s great to go into other schools’ (Deputy)                                                                          | Commented on by those who spend more time working across the trust (CEO, SLEs)                  |
|  | Developing People                         | 7 | ‘seeing people who were at a low point’ (Assistant Head 1)<br>‘enabling staff’ (CEO)<br>‘coaching other leaders’ (deputy)                                                            | Discuss growth of own careers<br>Discussion over working in other schools and providing support |
|  | Work as a change agent                    | 4 | ‘It’s growing my capacity and I’m able to grow the capacity of others’ (Assistant Head 1)                                                                                            | Linked to working across schools and developing people.<br>Self-reflective practice             |
|  | Improve a school in a challenging context | 2 | ‘it’s people in roles in highly successful schools’ (CEO)<br>‘supportive for both parties’ (CEO)<br>‘They’ve gone every week to support’ (CEO)<br>‘It’s exciting’ (Assistant Head 2) | CEO most involved in this process,<br>discussion by those who had worked as SLEs                |
|  | Act as a community leader                 | 5 | ‘always been quite a strong lead in the community’ (Assistant Head 1)                                                                                                                | Discussed place in the community and the place of                                               |

|  |                                             |  |                                                                                                     |                                                                                              |
|--|---------------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |                                             |  |                                                                                                     | other schools in community.<br>Talked about inviting parents in, involving them in processes |
|  | Partner a low achieving school              |  | 'It's people in highly successful schools sharing their expertise and working in partnership' (CEO) |                                                                                              |
|  | Lead an educational improvement partnership |  |                                                                                                     |                                                                                              |

## Appendix Twelve

### Observation Summary Matrix

| Key Issue                                 | Observations in School A                                                                        | Observations in School B                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Moral Purpose                             | Trust values displayed around key areas of school such as in reception – key words were evident | Key words evident around school building such as ‘kindness’ and ‘community’ giving a sense of moral purpose to the school community.<br>School dog walking around interacting with students and staff |
| Personal Development                      | Nothing observable                                                                              | Nothing observable                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Strategic Acumen                          | Trust aims clearly on display in reception, as well as brochures available for visitors         | Nothing observable                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Managing teaching and learning            | Teaching and learning displays and displays of student work evident in school, communal areas   | Teaching and learning displays evident around school areas                                                                                                                                            |
| Developing organisations                  | Nothing observable                                                                              | Nothing observable                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Developing people                         | Nothing observable                                                                              | Nothing observable                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Work as a change agent                    | Evidence of school being part of a wider trust – trust name on display in reception area        | Displays featuring ‘success’ stories of former students on display in communal areas                                                                                                                  |
| Improve a school in a challenging context | Nothing observable                                                                              | Nothing observable                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Act as a community leader                 | Nothing observable                                                                              | Displays in communal areas of local communities and                                                                                                                                                   |

|                                             |                    |                                     |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
|                                             |                    | work done by students to help these |
| Partner a low achieving school              | Nothing observable | Nothing observable                  |
| Lead an educational improvement partnership | Nothing observable | Nothing observable                  |

## Appendix Thirteen

### Data Summary Matrix

| Summary of findings                   |     |                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                       |     | Data Collection Method                                                |                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                   |
| Key Issues                            | RQs | Questionnaires                                                        | Interviews                                                                                                                                     | Observations                                                                      | Central Themes                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Moral Purpose</b>                  | 1,2 |                                                                       | Moral purpose, student centred, moral imperative                                                                                               | Present in displays (school A), evident in school gathering (school B)            | Moral imperative linked throughout in both schools, acting in students best interests                                             |
| <b>Personal Development</b>           | 1,2 | CPD opportunities, growth within organisation                         | School A – leading CPD across trust, involved in CPD, developed Both schools – growing talent from within, long term staff, low staff turnover |                                                                                   | Staff promoted from within at both schools                                                                                        |
| <b>Strategic Acumen</b>               | 1,2 |                                                                       | Evident with CEO (school A) and headteacher (school B)                                                                                         |                                                                                   | CEO and headteacher both showed strategic acumen e.g. shared services, central admin. Staff at other leadership levels less aware |
| <b>Managing Teaching and Learning</b> | 1,2 | Involved in developing curriculum, choosing courses (both schools)    | School A – development of curriculum, improvement in results. School B – involved in curriculum decisions                                      | School B – learning walk – community specific curriculum, bespoke teaching models | All leadership staff across both schools involved in development of T and L                                                       |
| <b>Developing Organisations</b>       | 1,2 |                                                                       | Leaders at both schools could explain benefits of working where they did and involvement at other schools/in the wider community               |                                                                                   | School A already involved in this. School B – less involved but headteacher talked about wanting to grow                          |
| <b>Developing People</b>              | 1,2 | All leaders had been developed from within their current organisation | Leaders from both schools discussed their original position with the school and their current position and progression made                    |                                                                                   | Progression at both schools linked to CEO/headteacher working with them and providing support – linked back to moral purpose      |

|                                                  |     |  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----|--|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Work as a Change Agent</b>                    | 1,2 |  | CEO (school A) and headteacher (school B) could discuss involvement as a change agent. School A – linked to working with other schools, improving student outcomes, improving teaching and learning in others. School B – working in the wider community, changing the outcomes of students |                                                                                   | Linked back to moral purpose – belief in both schools for doing this for the students.                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Improve a School in a Challenging Context</b> | 1,2 |  | All leaders in both schools spoke of their work in their own school. Leaders of both schools could link to the context of the schools                                                                                                                                                       | School B – school gathering celebrated students success when faced with adversity | Challenge presented different for both schools but interviews evidenced how improvements had been made. School A – improving students outcomes across the MAT, School B – improving student outcomes, college acceptance, a fresh start |
| <b>Act as a Community Leader</b>                 | 1,2 |  | Evidence from both schools of work in the community                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                   | Community acceptance and presence discussed by both school leaders                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Partner a Low Achieving School</b>            | 1   |  | School A – moving to being a MAT, selecting other schools, improvements made.                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                   | Evidenced in school A due to being part of a MAT. Headteacher of school B discussed possibility of joining a group of charter schools and understood the benefits this could bring                                                      |
| <b>Lead an Educational</b>                       | 1   |  | CEO of school A discussed leading the                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Evidence of MAT in school displays                                                | Improvement in results, moral                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

|                         |  |  |                                                                                                                                                                                     |  |                                      |
|-------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Improvement Partnership |  |  | MAT and what this entailed.<br>School B – leaders discussed improving student outcomes by working with other schools and taking students for which mainstream was no longer working |  | imperative in community and students |
|-------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|