

**Malcolm Groves, Andrew Hobbs**  
and **John West-Burnham**

# Leadership for Tomorrow

Beyond the School  
Improvement Horizon



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The Beauchamp Papers (2013–2015), a free, online series of think pieces, research, and practical case studies of change, published by Schools of Tomorrow. See: <http://www.schoolsoftomorrow.org/styled-3/>.

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# Preface

This book is about and for school leaders who understand that they must live and lead in overlapping, often conflicting, and frequently ambiguous and uncertain worlds – which we broadly choose to characterise as the worlds of today and tomorrow – and who want to be better able to do that. It is also for anyone who in any way holds school leaders to account, as well as those who may look to lead the schools of tomorrow.

It is the result of nearly a decade of thinking, research, and observation of leadership practice which we have undertaken in a range of settings. We have written up some of this experience previously in a series of pamphlets called *The Beauchamp Papers*, developed for those school leaders who were involved in establishing a new research and development network of schools in England under the name *Schools of Tomorrow*. We have drawn on their work in writing this book. Whilst the book is focused on changes within the English educational system, we hope that the lessons derived from this will be of interest to leaders in other school systems.

The five leaders featured in this book have been the subject of intensive study over a number of years. Each has been the subject of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with at least one of the authors on more than one occasion over a three-year period (2013–2016), as have members of their leadership teams. School documentation has also been examined.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, the views of other stakeholders, including students, have been sought. In addition, the work of two of the leaders has been the subject of more intensive study and research over a longer period as part of a doctoral thesis completed by Malcolm Groves at the University of Warwick.

What we have attempted to do here, however, is to draw all this thinking and practical experience together into a coherent whole. We have sought to project the meaning and implications forward into a new phase of school improvement, in the hope that this will assist others, both in the UK and internationally, engaged in leading or wishing to lead their schools beyond today's limited school improvement horizon.

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1 All school information is correct as of December 2016.

Part One:  
**The Case for Change**

# Introduction: Three Horizons

In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, leaders of schools in England have been caught up in an almost bewildering vortex of swirling cross-currents and riptides as national policy has veered first in one direction, then in another. The forces which have given rise to this instability are, though, not unique to one country. They are better understood as part of a much wider phenomenon, even though some responses may be peculiar to English politics. In general, we cannot seem to agree on the purpose and rationale of our education provision.

Education is a significant example of an ‘essentially contested concept’. These, according to Gallie’s definition of the phrase, ‘inevitably involve endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users’ (1955: 169). For Guy Claxton and Bill Lucas (2015), this dispute in education is characterised as being between three groups. The romantics (roms) are so defined because of their belief in the innate goodness of children, who, by virtue of this innate quality, have no need for didactic teaching or adult authority. The traditionalists (trads), on the other hand, are so called due to their view of teachers as respected sources of culturally important tried and tested factual knowledge which they pass on to children and then test receipt of through formal examination. A third group, the moderates (mods), Claxton and Lucas suggest, reject this simplistic duality, understand complexity, do not believe in quick fixes or appeals to nostalgia, and so think, tinker, and explore so as to better understand the nature of learning. This book is essentially written from a mod viewpoint.

Educational discourse abounds with polarising spectrums – traditional or progressive, academic or vocational, skills or knowledge, and many more. This often contested theoretical space is also inevitably the territory in which school leaders exist and live, and through which they must move, having the direct responsibility to chart a course in the best interests of the young people in their care.

We believe, though, that there is now something more fundamental happening to education than suggested by these long-held, strongly argued debates. We think the present upheavals are in fact symptoms of a more terminal problem with our present concept of schooling, designed as it was to serve the purposes of different times and often reflecting the mindset of an analogue, pre-digital age.

A good analogy to help understand this can be borrowed from the energy industry. According to Curry and Hodgson (2008), the challenge of achieving a sustainable energy supply can be conceptualised using the lens of three different horizons (see Figure 1). The first horizon represents the way we generate and use energy at present. It is inefficient, damaging to the environment, short-term, and ultimately unsustainable. A third horizon represents the outlook of those who have seen these limitations and are trying to create alternative, viable, sustainable solutions to meet future

energy needs. These might include, for example, solar and wind power, hydrogen cells, biofuels, and changing consumption patterns. Such solutions are currently still experimental, are not yet proven, may be contradictory, and none are yet to scale or fully tested. However, at some point in the future, a new way forward will emerge from this experimental cauldron to supersede the unsustainable status quo.

Between these points lies another conceptual horizon, termed the second horizon, falling as it does between now and the future. This is the space in which leaders try to make sense of and navigate between the failing, unsustainable present and the as yet uncertain future, in order to create a meaningful future for their organisation, and, in the case of schools, for those in their care. For one big difference between running a school and a running an energy business lies in the fact that what school leaders do and how they do it directly shapes individual lives now, as well as impacting on the futures those individuals are able to create for themselves.

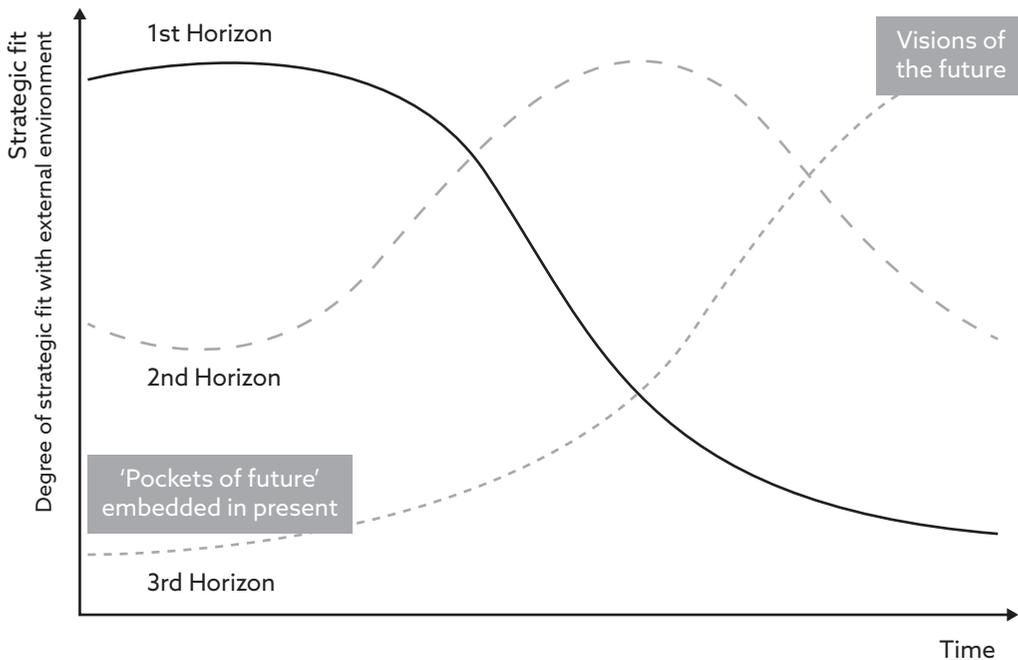


Figure 1: The three-horizon model (Curry and Hodgson, 2008: 2)  
Reproduced with kind permission of the *Journal of Futures Studies*

The parallel of the original model for education leadership is uncanny. As Claxton and Lucas (2015) show, there is a strong body of opinion which recognises that our present concept of schooling in

terms of its purpose and our understanding of quality are reaching the end of their useful life. There is, as well, a range of alternative thinking going on, frequently small scale, unproven, and often on the basis of individual enthusiasms. Think perhaps of studio schools, some free schools, or project-based learning (PBL) amongst many other initiatives.

But for a school leader, there is never going to be a completely clean slate from which to start, a day in the future when everything can begin afresh and be wholly reconstituted from the ground up. There are always real children to be educated today, who have a single best shot at their own future. There will always, legitimately, be government expectations to meet, although these may be more or less helpful. So leaders of change have no choice but to build their future plane in the sky as they fly it, rather than work on it in its hangar.

For these leaders, the role of leadership is therefore not confined simply to responding to the short-term demands of today, driven by government accountability alone. Leadership must mesh this with a clear vision of what is needed for tomorrow and a determination to find practical and effective ways to start moving towards that – within the constraints of today.

This means living and leading in two worlds at one and the same time, and it means living with the tension and ambiguity which that necessarily involves. Of course, the balance between the two worlds may shift according to context, circumstance, and capacity. But leadership for tomorrow is actually an integral part of leading effectively today. Furthermore, leading for today will ultimately not succeed if it fails to lead for tomorrow as well.

The central task of this book is to show how some leaders are already setting about using this tension creatively to start to fashion better futures for the children and young people in their care. In doing this, we hope to encourage others in positions of leadership and influence to go further in building their own and their schools' capacity to live and grow successfully towards the second horizon, bringing together and into a new relationship the worlds of today and tomorrow.

## The origins of *Leadership for Tomorrow*

This book's origins lie in many places. It began, most obviously, through the work of a small group of school leaders in England, who met together one day in November 2011 at Beauchamp College, Leicester, to ponder whether there was any contribution they could make to collectively shape a better future for their schools. As a result, they formed a small research and development group, which they came to call Schools of Tomorrow,<sup>1</sup> to support schools and school leaders who wanted to explore second horizon thinking and practice. Their experience and practice has directly informed the development of this book.

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1 See [www.schoolsoftomorrow.org](http://www.schoolsoftomorrow.org).

Another, more removed, origin lies in the intriguing story of the American township of Roseto (Gladwell, 2009). This close-knit Italian-American community in Pennsylvania was the focus of health studies for nearly 50 years, after it was noticed that heart disease was much less prevalent there than in the nearby similar community of Bangor. Wolf and Bruhn (1993), reviewing studies made of Roseto between 1935 and 1984, conclude that mutual respect and cooperation contribute to the health and welfare of a community's inhabitants, and that self-indulgence and lack of concern for others have the opposite effect. They found that belonging to a tight-knit community was a better predictor of healthy hearts than low levels of serum cholesterol or abstaining from tobacco use.

More recently, Holt-Lunstad et al. (2010), looking more broadly at data from 148 studies totalling 308,849 participants, echoed the link between relationships and health, concluding that the influence of limited social relationships on mortality risk is comparable with other well-established risk factors, and exceeds many.

There is one further significant feature to pick out from the story of Roseto. The leadership of the parish priest, Rev. Pasquale de Nisco, was crucial in forging and sustaining the social networks and trust which underpinned Rosetan life in its early days (Bruhn and Wolf, 1979: 13–20). Arriving in Roseto in June 1897, he found a disorganised, disparate group of Italian immigrants clinging to their land, knowing little English and almost nothing of their new country. There was no coordination of effort and no grasp of citizenship. De Nisco set up spiritual societies and organised festivals. He also initiated projects to improve the diet of the population through planting gardens and vineyards and raising livestock. Gradually Rosetans developed a sense of civic pride and began to build civic amenities. Additionally, increased enterprise meant more employment opportunities. The town had started to come alive through the priest's leadership, and that social interaction, Wolf and Bruhn demonstrated, had profound implications for physical health.

The story of Roseto is illuminating as a specific case study of the significance of social capital and its impact on one aspect of human development over time, as are the unique circumstances which allowed that to happen. Of course, Roseto was not perfect, and some would now regard it as an unduly restrictive community, not one we might choose to live in ourselves. However, it reminds us that so-called outliers can reveal important insights for 'normal' practice. It also says something important about the significance of leadership in building and shaping social capital, for better or indeed for worse.

Building social capital is something we believe to be critically important for leadership. Although a complex and to some extent contested concept, most definitions of the term would include the following elements:

- A high degree of consensus around norms and values that actively inform day-to-day interactions.
- A shared language with a specialist vocabulary that enables open and lateral communication.
- A strong sense of shared identity and interdependence working through rich networks and a sense of mutual responsibility.

- Active involvement and participation in the working of the community – standing for office, voting, and accepting civic responsibility.
- A commitment to openness and sharing ideas and wisdom.
- A shared sense of purpose and optimism for the future.

Field (2008: 1) helpfully sums up the complicated concept of social capital quite succinctly:

The theory of social capital is, at heart, most straightforward. Its central thesis can be summed up in two words: relationships matter. By making connections with one another, and keeping them going over time, people are able to work together to achieve things that they either could not achieve by themselves, or could only achieve with great difficulty. People connect through a series of networks, and they tend to share common values with other members of these networks.

But could changes in social capital influence educational outcomes in ways similar to their reported impact on health? If so, what forms could this influence take, how does it arise, and what might that impact be? Particularly, what does it mean for individual leaders who want to secure the best outcomes for all their pupils, and for the nature of their leadership? These questions are particularly pertinent for leaders who grasp the significance of the second horizon, at a time when new concerns have been raised about how well we are educating our young people in the context of a globalised economy. A context which is increasingly competitive at both a national and personal level, but also reveals major issues of fairness and sustainability. The influence and significance of social capital is a key theme to which we will frequently return.

## Significance in the present context of English schools

One of the first actions of the coalition government which took office in the UK in May 2010 was to change the name of the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to the Department for Education (DfE). This gesture was intended to symbolise a renewed focus on the core business of teaching and learning. The subsequent White Paper (Department for Education, 2010: 8) stressed that: ‘Our school system performs well below its potential and can improve significantly. Many other countries in the world are improving their schools faster than we are.’

As part of the government’s refocusing of expectations on schools, a number of inherited policies which suggested that schools had some wider role in support of families and communities were changed or abandoned. The distinct funding for the specialist schools programme, which required such schools to share skills and resources across their communities, was no longer ring fenced, expectations around extended school provision were removed, and focus on the Every Child Matters agenda was much reduced.

A raft of other policy changes have included a focus on a narrower range of educational outcomes in terms of definition of attainment, with a stress on academic rigour in a reduced range of curriculum subjects. There is also a greater reliance on test-based assessment, with an associated return to norm-referencing, by which only a given percentage of students succeed, rather than criterion-referencing, offering success for all who meet a given standard, as in a driving test or passing a music grade.

At the same time, significant changes were made to the academies programme inherited from the previous government, with the focus shifting from academy status as a mechanism for improving those underperforming schools operating in very challenging environments to one which outstanding schools were encouraged to adopt. By the time of the 2016 White Paper, *Education Excellence Everywhere* (Department for Education, 2016), there was an unequivocal wish by government for all schools to become academies within the framework of a multi-academy trust (MAT), even though they subsequently rowed back a little from the notion of explicit compulsion.

This direction of travel is perceived as part of a move towards a self-improving school system. This notion of system leadership, and the related concept of self-improving schools, is strongly articulated by Hargreaves (2011: 8), who stresses the connections between schools in supporting each other to reach school-focused ends:

A maturity model of a self-improving school system is a statement of the organisational and professional practices of two or more schools in partnership by which they progressively achieve shared goals, both local and systemic.

System leadership is also strongly focused within that maturity model around the role of the head teacher (Boylan, 2016). Such thinking has been a key element in government policy in England since 2010. According to the White Paper of that year, *The Importance of Teaching*:

The primary responsibility for improvement rests with schools ... Our aim should be to create a school system which is more effectively self-improving. (Department for Education, 2010: 13)

Many subsequent government reforms were directed towards such ends. For example, the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) was established in 2013 'to enable and support the development of a self-improving, school-led system', although, as Greany (2015: 7) observes, the addition of 'school-led' alongside 'self-improving' is notable, since the two concepts are not necessarily the same. The principle was also endorsed by leading UK professional associations, such as the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) in their *Blueprint for a Self-Improving System* (Cruddas, 2015).

This book, however, will argue that the notion of system leadership thus described offers only a partial picture of what is needed if its place and purpose is to effect long-term improvement. We suggest that there is an additional need to understand system leadership more broadly: acting between the school, the learners, their families, and communities, causing each to interact differently with the others so as to promote both broader and improved learning outcomes. This inevitably highlights

the need for greater understanding of complexity, a key theme of this book, and an associated deeper understanding of change and how it happens.

For many years, school improvement has been focused on the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms. The necessity of that focus will not in any way be challenged here. Rather, our argument is that, whilst necessary and important, on its own it is not sufficient either to develop fully that broader set of skills and attitudes which will equip young people to flourish in a rapidly changing world or to bring about sustainable long-term change in schools, especially within local cultures of educational indifference and low aspiration.

Behind many of these often government-imposed changes to classroom practice – in relation to pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment – lies a very strong policy concern to ‘narrow the gap’ in terms of the impact of social disadvantage on educational attainment. We believe this is sincere and right in intent, but will argue that the resulting strategy has only partly diagnosed the treatment needed, addresses symptoms not causes, and will, therefore, ultimately not be able to succeed.

## Counter-indicators

The suggestion that schools may have some wider role than teaching and learning, important as this is, and that there could be benefit in schools focusing more explicitly on their role in developing social capital, might therefore be seen as going against the grain of much current national education policy. But this idea is certainly not new. A range of counter-indicators over the last two decades have pointed to the possibility of a closer connection between high social capital and educational attainment than recent government policy initiatives would suggest. We briefly highlight just three here.

Firstly, research published by the Audit Commission (2006) in England concluded that schools, particularly in the most deprived areas, need to be proactive in building social capital in order to overcome socio-economic disadvantage and bring about school improvement. Their report argued that the issues of school improvement and renewal are inseparable from neighbourhood improvement and renewal, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas. It concluded that, whilst schools are profoundly affected by their neighbourhoods, they equally have a key role in promoting cohesion and building social capital. We shall examine the implications of this further in Chapter 1.

Secondly, a series of reports by UNICEF has indicated a possible connection between children and young people’s well-being and their learning. The study attempted to measure the well-being of children and young people in 21 countries using the following criteria: material well-being, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviours and risks, and subjective well-being.

Using the 2007 report as an example, the UK was in the bottom third in all aspects of well-being except health and safety, where it was ranked 12th (UNICEF, 2007). It was the only country, apart from the United States, to be ranked in the bottom third in all but one aspects. Of those countries in the top third for educational well-being, four out of seven were also in the top third for at least four other aspects. We shall explore the significance of this further, and look at more recent data, when we turn specifically to well-being in Chapter 5.

Finally, there is a small though growing critique of the assessment measurements by which school effectiveness has come to be judged, whilst the data these generate form the underpinning of many government policies. Gorard (2009: 756) argues, from a viewpoint of deep statistical understanding, that when it comes to the statistical models used to measure school effectiveness:

the field as a whole simply ignores these quite elementary logical problems, while devising more and more complex models comprehended by fewer and fewer people.

He continues by relating the statistical problem to a critique of current models for school effectiveness, that it:

encourages, unwittingly, an emphasis on assessment and test scores – and teaching to the test – because over time we tend to get the system we measure for and so privilege. (Gorard, 2009: 759)

This leads him to his key conclusion:

One clear finding that is now largely unremarked by academics and unused by policy-makers is that pupil prior attainment and background explain the vast majority of variation in school outcomes. (Gorard, 2009: 761)

We will return to the significance of this crucial and fundamental point in Chapter 1.

In the context of recent policy change, these criticisms and counter-indicators suggest it might be a particularly apt time to try to understand more fully the ways in which social capital and educational outcomes may be connected, the influence one may have on the other, and the possible implications for school leaders who understand the imperative to look towards tomorrow.

To help us do that, we have divided the book into three parts. These parts deliberately interweave theory and practice, though we are mindful of the wisdom attributed to Yogi Berra: ‘In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice. In practice, there is.’

Much of the theory is concentrated in Part One. Its main concern is to set out and justify the principles and values from which we are working, as well as signpost the evidence which highlights the limitations of first horizon thinking and justifies why we think it is destined to fail. Part Two is more concerned with practice. It uses case studies based on interviews with five leaders to look at how those principles and values are being developed in real schools today. Part Three then attempts to bring theory and practice together to construct approaches to school improvement moving forward, which are at one and the same time values based and evidence informed.

Although there are significant lines of argument that run through the book in what we hope is a coherent and cumulative way, you may also want to chart a less linear route through it for yourself and dip into the three parts in a different order. For our part, we will try to assist you by providing regular signposts backwards and forwards to connecting parts of the book. This is intended to be a reflective book. It is not speculative, but rather grounded in solid evidence. We have referenced the book fully so that you can pursue any aspect in further depth or check our interpretation, if you wish. Throughout the book, we will also seek to create opportunities for your reflection as a reader, and we encourage you to pause at suitable stages to draw on and compare your own ideas and experience.

David Hargreaves (2001: 493) has criticised traditional models and understanding of leadership and school improvement, arguing that they largely ignore what he termed ‘the impact of the moral excellences and the underpinning social capital on the optimisation of intellectual capital’. He cited, by way of example, the common description of a head teacher’s leadership as ‘purposeful’, finding it ‘worryingly bland’:

It is not *any* purpose that matters: the nature and perceived legitimacy of the goals involved is critical to the purposefulness that a leader demonstrates. Moreover, leadership is concerned with the means of realising the goals, both their efficiency and morality, not only the goals themselves. (Hargreaves, 2001: 491)

The five school and MAT leaders that we shall meet in Part Two, who inhabit the second horizon – bridging today and tomorrow – understand the impact of both moral purpose and social capital. They have thought deeply about the nature of their goals. As a result, they are reaching for a deeper and broader understanding of the purpose of schooling, and therefore of what constitutes true quality.

Before we look in some depth at their experience, we want to do three particular things in Part One to set out a justification and context for their work, and to help us understand the bigger picture in which they are operating.

Firstly, we want to pursue further Hargreaves’ question of moral purpose by setting out the values and principles which underpin our understanding of leadership for tomorrow, along with the reasoning and evidence which gives rise to these. We will also start to introduce what we see as some of the implications for leadership flowing from these values and principles, which we will then glimpse in the practice of these leaders.

Secondly, we will look a bit further into the present direction of travel of the English school system, currently engaged in perhaps the biggest systemic upheaval in a hundred years, to try to enhance the understanding both of those who have to lead schools successfully through this confused and in many ways contradictory landscape, as well as those from other countries who may want to draw important wider lessons from this experience and will in any case be facing similar tensions from competing horizons.

Continually adding improvements to existing models of schooling isn't enough. We need a more radical reconceptualisation of schooling's function and purpose.

We need school leaders who can look beyond the horizon and lead on the strength of lessons learned from the here and now.

In *Leadership for Tomorrow* Groves, Hobbs, and West-Burnham expertly examine what needs to change if schools are really to equip children and young people to thrive in our ever-changing world, and explore in both practical and theoretical terms the nature of the change leadership which can make this happen.

Rooted in the direct experience of innovative and successful school leaders, *Leadership for Tomorrow* presents a wide range of strategies and case studies that will enable and inspire leaders to future-proof their school improvement approach and to fashion better futures for the children and young people in their care. Furthermore, by sharing their research-informed insight into – and vision for – the evolving nature of education, the authors hope to encourage leaders to go further in building both their own and their school's capacity to live, learn, and grow successfully.

Suitable for school leaders, those preparing for leadership, and those with an interest in leadership development and policy.

A brilliant book that will galvanise readers in their efforts to lead our schools forward and towards tomorrow.

**Richard Gerver, speaker, author, broadcaster**

*Leadership for Tomorrow* is the most uplifting and optimistic book I have read on the theme of present-day and future school leadership.

**Professor Emeritus Brian Caldwell, former dean of education, University of Melbourne, Principal Consultant, Educational Transformations**

A refreshing look at the role of leadership in schools, looking forward to how leaders can bring their communities together towards a deeper understanding of education and the needs of society in the future.

**Professor Megan Crawford, Director, Plymouth Institute of Education**

Sets out a wealth of thoughtful propositions to help school leaders feel their way towards the future.

**Sir John Dunford, Chair, Whole Education**

A comprehensive yet concise, well-researched, well-synthesised, lucid, and eminently practical book.

**Charles Fadel, founder, Center for Curriculum Redesign, author of *Four-Dimensional Education***

**Malcolm Groves** is a co-founder and managing director of Schools of Tomorrow. He has over 40 years' experience in education, encompassing primary and secondary phases, youth work, and adult education. He has been an Ofsted inspector, local authority inspector, school improvement partner, NPQH assessor, and national adviser to SSAT. Malcolm has a doctorate in school leadership from the University of Warwick.

**Andrew Hobbs** was joint managing director of Schools of Tomorrow until March 2016. Andrew has almost 40 years' experience in education, working in schools and in policy development. He held a number of senior leadership roles before becoming a secondary head teacher. For the last ten years, Andrew has worked as a consultant and project manager, leading and managing change programmes and the reorganisation of schools. Andrew has particular expertise in change leadership and management, learning approaches to workforce and organisational development, and developing community cohesion.

**John West-Burnham** is an independent writer, teacher, and consultant in education leadership. John is the author, co-author, or editor of 27 books including *Rethinking Educational Leadership* and *Leadership Dialogues* and he has worked in 27 countries. He is a director of three academy trusts, a trustee of two educational charities, and is an honorary professor in the Institute of Education, University of Worcester.

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