

Executive Summary

GatenbySanderson
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DEMOS

Building
everyday
democracy

The Leadership Imperative

Reforming children's services from the ground up

The Argument:

The *Every Child Matters* reform agenda represents one of the most significant changes to local children's services in living memory. Seeded by ongoing frustration at the failure to level the playing field for the country's most vulnerable children, the development of the policy took place in the shadow of several high profile preventable child deaths, most notably Victoria Climbié's. As a result, the new legislation and the accompanying guidelines call for a major overhaul in almost every aspect of children's services provision.

Reform in this area is always politically controversial. But, in one sense, the changes brought by *Every Child Matters* have been exceptional. The professionals responsible for delivering the new services have embraced their overarching aims. The five goals identified through consultation reflect the long-held views of workers from a spread of backgrounds, who share a belief that a continuous improvement in outcomes from schools, social services and paediatric healthcare will be possible only if they work together far more closely, removing the discontinuities in support that impede children's progress.

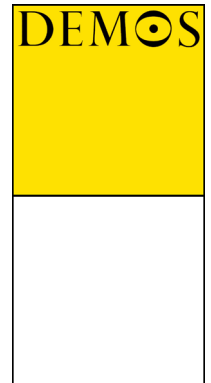
The danger for *Every Child Matters*, then, lies not in an outright rejection from the people being asked to deliver it, but in the day-to-day difficulties of making it work on the ground. Entrenched patterns of professional behaviour lead to scepticism and distrust of the capabilities of professionals from other backgrounds. The temptation to return to familiar habits in the face of major uncertainty can be powerful. In other words, changes to structure and policy that are intended to generate a transformation of working practices can too easily be neutralised by prevailing professional identities and behavioural norms.

To guarantee that this is not what happens, we need to look beyond the conventional levers of control offered by making national policy and adjusting structures of authority, accountability and control. It is only by changing the culture of children's services that lasting success will be achieved. Through the operating context that it creates for children's services, central government can do much to encourage positive cultural change. But the solutions also rest on other foundations, and vary across each different local authority setting.

Therefore, whilst this pamphlet addresses the role that central government can play in helping bring about this necessary cultural change on a large scale, our primary focus is the leadership that will be required at a local level.

Local Leadership:

We argue that for leaders to address the three key challenges facing children's services (standardisation; separation; risk aversion) through cultural change, local leaders will be required to:



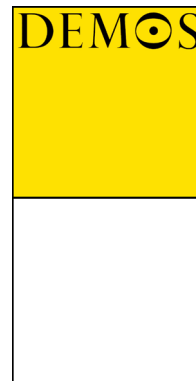
1. *Establish good foundations early on:*
 - a. Creating clear frameworks for decision making and establishing a shared set of outcomes for services in a local area
 - b. Involving a wide range of interests (including different professionals and organisations, and young people themselves) early on in decision making, without mistaking momentum and trust with a need consensus
 - c. Using this process to establish a shared direction of travel, and to ensure that the inevitable disagreements between professionals are useful rather than adversarial.
 - d. Using structural changes to send clear signals about the direction of change required, rather than seeing them as instruments of change in themselves.

2. *Recognise and respond to negative reactions to change:*
 - a. Understanding that resistance to change can often be underpinned by professional values, including concern over upheaval and it's possible impact on young people,
 - b. Devising strategies that reflect this, such as using small groups to pilot new approaches.
 - c. Pacing change at a rate that does not overwhelm people, recognising we often overestimate what can be achieved in the short-term, at the expense of the long-term.

3. *Reconsider risk and find safe spaces for learning:*
 - a. Helping to ensure that risk management does not obscure professional judgement, through encouraging professionals to consider the risks of inaction (or creeping risk) as much as the risks that come with a particular course of action.
 - b. Creating open learning cultures and safe spaces for learning, to ensure that individuals and organisations are able to learn from failure rather than simply manage their own reputations.
 - c. Specifically, learning from the use of 'critical incident reporting' in the NHS offers as one way of systematising this.

4. *Pursue succession strategies that recognise this shift away from the stereotype of 'the charismatic leader'.*
 - a. Recognising that many leaders climb up organisational ladders through promoting and personalising their own achievements, only to find that a more open and subtle style of leadership will be needed when they get there.
 - b. Rewarding team players with innovative approaches to internal promotion and capacity building.

We also suggest that national policy can support the efforts of local leaders in the following ways:



Local and Central Government

- i. Advice and compliance should be separated where possible, to create a more open and constructive set of relationships between government advisers and local authorities.
- ii. With this clearer delineation in place, authorities should be allowed to commission their own advice from central government or elsewhere, with ring-fenced budgets to ensure continued investment in R&D.
- iii. More secondments between central and local government should be encouraged, to ensure a greater degree of mutual understanding.

Local Authority Inspection

- iv. Inspection of Children's Services should be moderated through the Children and Young People's Plan with accountability assured through the yearly APA, and the more comprehensive JAR every three years, in order to create more bespoke systems of accountability.
- v. Authorities should be given the 'right to recall' inspection teams, to gather strategic advice after inspection teams have published their reports, in order to support the learning required to shift to a new approach to the delivery of Children's Services.
- vi. Government should mandate inspection teams to share excellent practice from other authorities when this strategic advice is offered.
- vii. One member of every local authority inspection team should be working elsewhere in an authority, preferably in the management tier directly below the director of children's services, in order to support the transfer of excellent practice, and to build the capacity of the next generation of leaders.

School Inspection:

- viii. School inspection should reflect these changes, as schools are simultaneously asked to do more and do better. Schools should be required, as part of their self-assessment, to assess the quality of their working relationships with other service providers.
- ix. The 'right to recall' could be afforded to schools, providing the opportunity for a strategy day after the official report for the school had been published.
- x. Inspectors could be made explicitly responsible for transferring excellent practice on these strategy days, allowing schools to learn from each other how to do more and do better simultaneously.
- xi. Peer inspection could be woven into the Ofsted process, with at least one member of the team having spent at least 60 days a year working in a school.
- xii. Inspection could be tailored to each school, with professionals assigned to schools on the basis of their experience, ensuring that those who had worked in large schools in urban areas were inspecting exactly that type of school.