

The importance of culture, climate and conditions – making our schools brilliant places to work

Evidence to the Teaching Commission

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Teaching as meaningful work

- Teachers shape the next generation – they shape minds, nurture potential, and help children to lead good lives.
- The work of those who educate is fundamentally meaningful. And it is a privilege to do meaningful work – work that connects us with what it means to be human and to an ethic of service.
- Education is the building of who we can be as a society.



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Teachers and leaders are trusted

- Teachers and schools are valued and trusted by parents and wider society.
- The Ipsos Veracity Index is the longest running poll on trust in professions in Britain. Teachers feature in the top six most trusted professions.



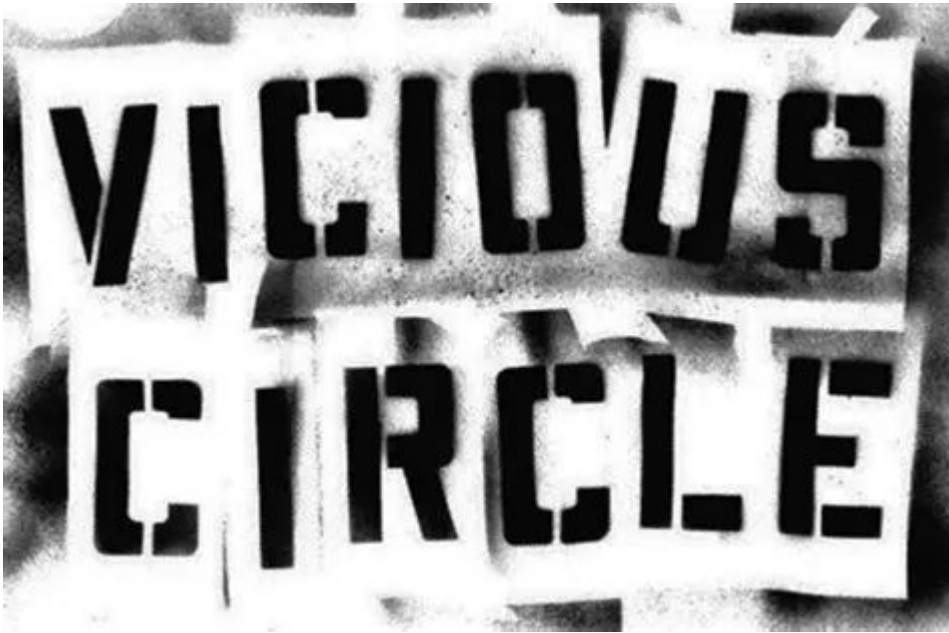
The provocation

- ... But the current conditions of our school leaders, teachers and support staff are not sustainable.
- Data from the Education Support Teacher Wellbeing Index (corroborated more recently by The Working Lives of Teachers) tells us that 78% of all education staff report being stressed.
- This rises to 89% of all leaders and 95% of headteachers.
- And 36% of teachers report experiencing burnout.

Government must...



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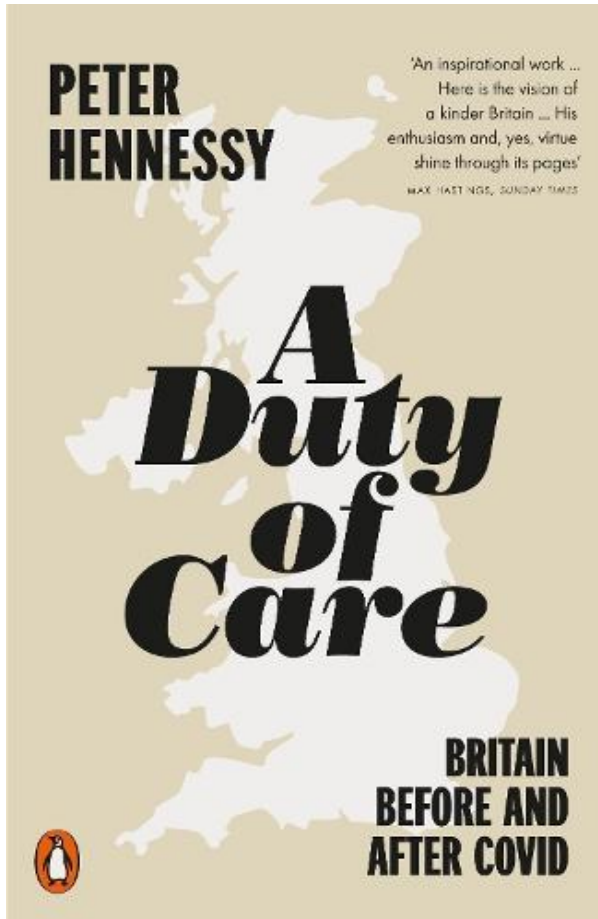




A duty of care

- As employers, we have a duty of care to those we are responsible for – adults and children.
- This is a duty of care we must exercise as a principle in its own right – the ethics of being a good employer.
- But it is also important because of the recruitment and retention crisis we face.

...located in a wider conversation about what sort of society we want



Peter Hennessy says: "The great question of UK politics ... is whether we can find the pessimism-breaking policies, the people, the purpose, the language, and the optimism to shift [our current] system and replace it with something much closer to who we are and, above all, who we can be."



The evidence

- We do have the evidence for good working conditions that contribute to retention.
- Our thinking at CST is anchored in the rapid evidence review conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).
- EEF reviewed the evidence base on school leadership, culture, climate, and structure for staff retention.

Nguyen, D., Huat See, B., Brown, C. and Kokotsaki, D. (2023). Reviewing the evidence base on school leadership, culture, climate and structure for teacher retention – rapid evidence review. EEF



Three interrelated leadership approaches

There are three interrelated leadership approaches and associated practices highlighted in the report:

- Prioritising professional development;
- Building relational trust; and
- Improving working conditions.

Prioritising professional development

The evidence on professional development is strong. The EEF's rapid evidence review finds that there are some practices that contribute positively in particular to teacher retention:

- Providing constructive feedback to support teachers to innovate and work collaboratively to address specific challenges they may be facing.
- Giving teachers opportunities - and removing any barriers - to accessing professional development opportunities.
- Cultivating leadership potential by supporting early career teachers to innovate in their practice or take part in mentoring opportunities.



Building relational trust

To support teacher professional wellbeing and job satisfaction, a range of evidence from this review advocates for compassionate leadership characterised as being caring, encouraging, and listening.

Viviane Robinson refers to three interrelated capabilities of the leader:

- Using knowledge
- Complex problem solving
- Building relational trust

Robinson, V. (2017). *Capabilities required for leading improvement: Challenges for researchers and developers*. Research Paper.



Improving working conditions

- Supporting teacher professional autonomy (or agency?)
- Promoting collegiality, including inclusive participation in decision-making, mutual and reciprocal support, as well as shared power and responsibility.
- Developing an equitable support and recognition system that recognises colleagues' efforts and contributions.
- Establishing an effective communication structure, including clear communication channels and a clear vision for your school or trust.
- Supporting teachers - particularly those in the early stages of their career - to manage pupil behaviour and enforce school rules.



The trust as a protective structure

How can we mobilise the trust as a protective structure to:

- Mitigate the impact of adverse, high stakes accountability by freeing our teachers and leaders from the fear and many of the adversative practices associated with the regime of accountability in England.
- Construct evidence-informed horizontal cultures of professional development.
- Build relational trust across the whole.
- Actively reduce or remove burdens from schools and teachers by utilising the trust structure (improving working conditions) – what Sam Sims calls ‘fluffload.’



How should we live?

“How should we live? This most basic of questions was asked by Aristotle, the philosopher to whom many of us return when our existing rules and systems no longer work. People need *meaning*, Aristotle argued, and they need *support* to grow and develop. Aristotle spoke of eudaimonia, which is often translated as happiness, but he was not in pursuit of an individual’s elusive happiness. In fact, he argued that a rich, well-lived life would certainly contain periods of unhappiness, but to grow we need to aim for something big and we must risk disappointment. *Eudaimonia* is better translated as flourishing. And flourishing is a collective and political concept that embraces participation in the structures of society.” [Italics in original]

Hilary Cottam (2018). *Radical Help: How We Can Remake the Relationships Between Us and Revolutionise the Welfare State*. Virago. P. 198-199.



Flourishing together

In CST's joint paper with the Church of England and Catholic Education Service, we see human flourishing as a collective vision for our education system.

We propose that this is a core purpose that is enacted in the dignity with which everyone is treated, the hope with which each are instilled, the relational community in which each are located, and the practical wisdom with which each are taught.

Our vision for flourishing is deeply resonant, grounded in mutuality, collaboration, collective voice and shared action, seeking an education system that is coherently shaped and collectively led to prioritise the flourishing of all.



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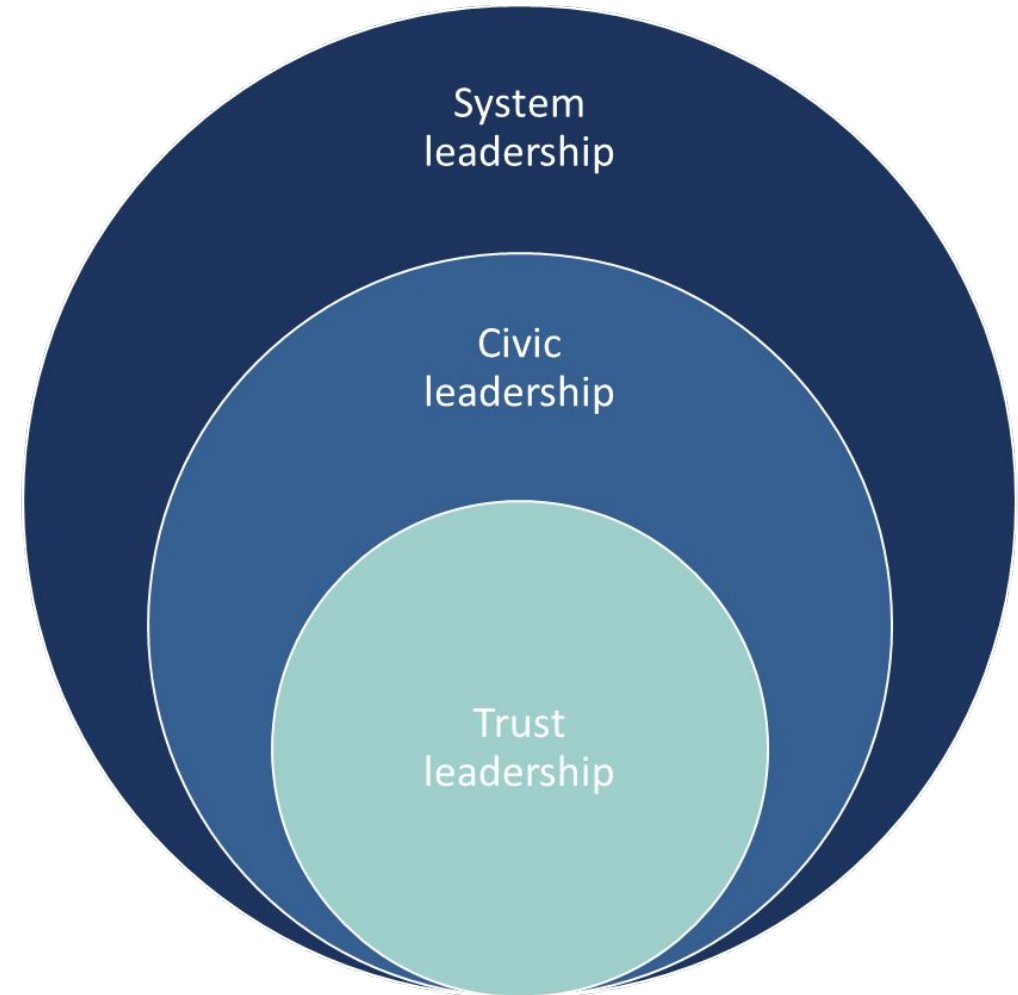
"It is our solidarity and our interconnectedness – our shared sense of purpose and our execution of a shared mission – that will make a difference to the children and communities we serve. It is through this that we mobilise education as a force for social justice and wider common good."



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The challenges we face require a
new mental model of leadership...
Once that looks to us for solutions
and not just to government

The New Domains of Educational Leadership



“There is no trust more sacred than the one
the world holds with children. ”

Kofi Annan, *The State of the World's Children*, 2000



Thank you for listening

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