Supporting Inclusive School Leadership

Policy Review

SISL
SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

EUROPEAN AGENCY
for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

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European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education

The European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (the Agency) is an independent and self-governing organisation. The Agency is co-funded by the ministries of education in its member countries and by the European Commission via an operating grant within the European Union (EU) Erasmus+ education programme (2014–2020).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Full version
Agency:	European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education
CPD:	Continuing professional development
EPNoSL:	European Policy Network on School Leadership
ET 2020:	Education and Training 2020
ETUCE:	European Trade Union Committee for Education
EU:	European Union
ICTs:	Information and communication technologies
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
TALIS:	Teaching and Learning International Survey
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund

INTRODUCTION

Attention to the topic of school leadership has grown in recent years as research has shown the key role played by school leaders and their influence on learner outcomes. In the context of increasing school autonomy in many countries, this role's profile and complexity have increased, as has recognition of the need for support.

This document summarises recent international and European-level policy documents that are relevant to school leadership. This work has, along with the literature review, informed the development of a conceptual framework for the Supporting Inclusive School Leadership project. Importantly, it supported the design of a survey to collect relevant information from Agency member countries to examine policies that impact on school leaders.

In particular, this review focuses on policy that is relevant to the development of inclusive practice and on-going support for inclusive leadership at school level. Where such policy references are lacking, gaps are noted as possible indicators for future work.

Material is organised according to the three key project questions:

1. What policy frameworks are required to develop and support inclusive school leadership across the whole education system?

2. What are the essential competences needed for effective inclusive leadership practice at school level?

3. What support and professional development opportunities are required to develop and sustain effective inclusive school leaders?

Question 1 considers policies that promote an enabling environment and support inclusive school leadership within the education system. These may include policies connected to:

- levels of decentralisation and school autonomy;

- responsibilities of different ministries and co-ordination of work areas;

- accountability frameworks;

- school organisation, etc.

Question 2 considers recommendations for competences required by effective leaders.

Question 3 examines recommendations on forms of support for school leaders, professional development and available qualifications that might support inclusive leadership.

METHODOLOGY

To provide information at both international and European level, a search was made of materials from:

- EU institutions – European Commission, Council of the EU, European Parliament;

- key international organisations with a focus on education – OECD, UNESCO, UNICEF;

- other organisations working at European level that analyse policy and produce guidance – Council of Europe, ETUCE, EPNoSL.

This review focuses on documents published in or after 2013. However, the [following section](#) summarises relevant information from before that date to provide background information. Throughout the document, key text taken directly from documents appears in boxes for ease of reference.

Overall, the review provides key information and a summary of potential gaps and inconsistencies that arise in both policy development and implementation.

BACKGROUND – INTERNATIONAL AND EUROPEAN POLICY DEVELOPMENT PRIOR TO 2013

In terms of the broader policy context, the Council of Europe's *Recommendation on ensuring quality education* recognised that, among other factors, quality education promotes democracy, respect for human rights and social justice in a learning environment which recognises everyone's learning and social needs. It also emphasised the basic principle of equal opportunities:

> Quality education should be ensured without discrimination on any ground and should be understood as encompassing access to the education system as well as the enjoyment of conditions of teaching and learning which reasonably enable pupils and students to successfully complete the education programme(s) in which they are enrolled (Council of Europe, 2012, p. 4).

Prior to this, in 2008/2009, the OECD carried out a significant work programme on 'Improving School Leadership' (Pont et al., 2008; Hopkins et al., 2009). This noted that effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling, particularly in the context of increasing school autonomy. The OECD also highlighted the growing complexity of the school leader role due to increasing learner diversity, added responsibilities arising from financial and human resource management and the growing importance of leadership for learning. It suggested that countries should make school leadership a more attractive profession and provide training and development. It further stated that distributed leadership could help with increased responsibilities.

The document *Improving Teacher Quality* (European Commission, 2010a) re-affirmed the need to improve leader recruitment, as well as training and development in leadership skills. It also emphasised the need to lighten school leaders' administrative load so that they could focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. More specifically, the *Council conclusions on the social dimension of education and training* (Council of the EU, 2010) noted the need for strong leadership for inclusion. Other documents (e.g. Barber, Whelan and Clark, 2010) began to focus on collaborative approaches.

At this time, the European Commission, in its report *School Leadership for learning: Report of a Peer Learning Activity in Limassol, Cyprus* (2010b), emphasised the need to prioritise leader development as part of a system-wide process and to focus on:

- *the legal competences and understanding necessary to work within the relevant legislative framework;*
- *strategic leadership;*
- *creating an effective learning environment;*
- *developing the leader as a person;*
- *motivating others;*

- *assessing and improving teaching and learning* (2010b, paragraph 32).

The OECD noted that school leaders can make a difference in school/learner performance if they have autonomy to make decisions (Schleicher, 2012). They need discretion in setting strategic direction, developing plans and using data to improve practice.

From this time, the focus on school leadership and its role in providing quality education increased. For example, the *Commission Staff Working Document: Supporting the Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes* noted:

> The impact of educational leadership on student attainment is clear; some research shows that leadership accounts for 27% of the variation in student achievement across schools. It has been demonstrated that the quality of leadership helps determine both the motivation of teaching staff and the quality of their teaching …
>
> The quality of leadership matters also in determining the ethos of the school, the motivation of teachers, the depth of their continuing professional learning, and the quality of teaching and learning …
>
> Recent peer learning work concluded that leadership should be conceived as a role, and not as a post or a place in a structure. A commonly agreed policy framework for school leadership should be part of each education system (European Commission*,* 2012, p. 43).

This document also provided a definition of leadership:

> The concept of leadership generally implies ownership and authority as well as responsibility. Leadership may be formal or informal: it is possible to be a school principal, without exercising leadership. It is also possible for other school staff to exercise leadership. Indeed, leadership is one of the key competences for all educators. In some systems, one person may exercise leadership in a group of schools. Other actors are also called upon to exercise educational leadership and to play their part in the development of the education system, e.g. school boards, inspectors and advisors, ministries and professional organisations. There is greatest potential for successful system reform when the various actors involved work and develop together (ibid.).

A further significant development was in 2013, when the Council of the EU produced *Council conclusions* specifically focused on effective leadership in education. Importantly, this document also raised the need for leaders to ensure equity and adopt an inclusive approach.

Educational leadership can be effective when:

- educational leaders are in a position to focus primarily on improving the quality of teaching and learning within their institutions **while ensuring equity**;

- leadership is based on clearly defined roles;

- it adopts a collaborative and inclusive approach;

- it is able to recognise the strengths and competences of staff members and assign leadership roles to them;

- it is in a position to allocate resources and to explore innovative teaching approaches; and

- it remains fully accountable to, and has the support of not only national, but also local and regional authorities and the community at large, particularly when endeavouring to introduce changes (Council of the EU, 2013, p. 3).

The following sections review policy documents produced in or after 2013, organised according to the three key project questions.

1. WHAT POLICY FRAMEWORKS ARE REQUIRED TO DEVELOP AND SUPPORT INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ACROSS THE WHOLE EDUCATION SYSTEM?

This section summarises relevant international and European policy developments that are considered to support inclusive leadership. The section summary highlights any policy and/or implementation gaps identified as a potential focus for future work.

1.1 International and European policy developments

Setting the overarching context, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities *General comment No. 4 (2016) on the right to inclusive education* states that:

> … the committed leadership of educational institutions is essential for introducing and embedding the culture, policies and practices needed to achieve inclusive education at all levels and in all areas, including in classroom teaching and relationships, board meetings, teacher supervision, counselling services and medical care, school trips, budgetary allocations, any interaction with the parents of learners with and without disabilities and, when applicable, the local community or wider public (Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016, p. 4).

At international level, work by the OECD (2013) states that transformative learning leadership is multi-level. Although the initial impetus for action might come from any level of the system or from other partners, corresponding decision-making and action is then needed at all other levels.

The need for consistency across system levels is further stressed:

> A key policy role lies in creating conditions for facilitating networked professional learning. Governance and accountability systems should align with the ambition of creating powerful, innovative learning environments, or at least should not be pulling in the opposite direction (OECD, 2013, p. 11).

In later work, the OECD (2016) notes that the most favourable approaches for establishing learning communities appear to be integrated leadership (i.e. a combination of instructional and distributed leadership) and using learner outcomes to develop the school's goals, programme and professional development plan. Furthermore, it recognises that school leaders, boards and government organisations, as well as teacher education providers, have a role in shaping and sustaining teachers' professional development. The

OCD also stresses the benefits of reflective practice and teacher collaboration, particularly when dealing with learners from disadvantaged families and those with special educational needs.

Finally, in *Leading Better Learning*, UNESCO (2016) makes the following recommendations:

- Make school leadership a priority in the education development agenda.

- Establish appropriate institutional and policy frameworks for effective school leadership development.

- Professionalise the school leadership career and make it more attractive.

- Set up viable systems of information networking and research on school leadership.

Supporting the increased focus on inclusive education and emphasising diversity, the *Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education*, adopted at an informal meeting of EU Education Ministers in 2015, noted the importance of:

- strengthening the key contribution which education makes to personal development, social inclusion and participation, by imparting the fundamental values and principles which constitute the foundation of our societies;

- ensuring inclusive education for all children and young people which combats racism and discrimination on any grounds, promotes citizenship and teaches them to understand and to accept differences of opinion, of conviction, of belief and of lifestyle, while respecting the rule of law, diversity and gender equality (European Union Education Ministers, 2015).

The Council of the EU and the European Commission re-affirmed these actions. The *2015 Joint Report of the Council and the Commission* set out new priority areas:

- *Inclusive education, equality, equity, non-discrimination and the promotion of civic competences …*

- *Strong support for teachers, trainers, school leaders and other educational staff* (Council of the EU and European Commission, 2015, pp. 2–3).

Increasing the focus on leadership, the European Commission's *Comparative Study on Quality Assurance in EU School Education Systems* (2015) notes that school-level leadership needs to be inspiring and facilitating. It needs to promote a positive climate and attitude towards quality assurance activities among school staff and support their capacity to use evaluation data and participate in defining and developing such activities.

This requires support and investment in the teaching profession and in school leaders. This is suggested in the *Communication on Improving and Modernising Education* (European Commission, 2016) and further supported by the *Council Conclusions on school development and excellent teaching* (Council of the EU, 2017). The latter focuses on high-quality inclusive and equitable school education. It stresses the need for:

- a balance between autonomy and accountability;

- the development of quality assurance systems;
- evidence-informed policies;
- optimum use of resources.

The accompanying *Commission Staff Working Document* states:

> Policies that support the teaching professions cannot be separated from systematic efforts to improve curricula, strengthen quality assurance and school evaluation, make schools more inclusive and optimise the use of resources (European Commission, 2017a, p. 31).

The *Communication on school development and excellent teaching for a great start in life* notes the complexity of the leadership role and the impact of increasing autonomy:

> Research shows that leadership based on a vision shared by staff, parents and local community is crucial in school development and innovation. However, in some Member States, school leadership positions are considered unattractive. Leading a school typically comes with a demanding mix of tasks linked to both management and instruction …
>
> Increased school autonomy has led to more responsibility for school leaders in many countries. This allows school leaders to re-organise classroom time and approaches, stimulate school development and share responsibilities among a wider group of staff. However, these changes require appropriate resources and support (European Commission, 2017b, p. 9).

A study by the European Commission focusing specifically on governance and management in school education systems (2017c) similarly suggests that greater autonomy is associated with better quality. It highlights the importance of leadership in the implementation of initiatives, along with the need for political leadership and leadership by policy implementation managers at all levels of government. The study finds that school leadership skills are critical for achieving improvements in schools' quality and inclusiveness.

This is expressed in the quote below from the European Commission's *Teachers and School Leaders in Schools as Learning Organisations*:

> … the critical importance of school leaders in introducing and implementing change is acknowledged, as is the part that school leaders play as role models. In particular there has been endorsement of the practice of distributed leadership and the value of networks to enable the exchange of experience and cooperation … The school head's role under this arrangement becomes one of delegation, encouraging and entrusting individuals and groups in their multi-discipline teamwork and professional collaboration. Policies that aim to

build these emphases on teacher leadership capacity consequently have an important role (European Commission, 2017d, p. 13).

This document also sets out key aspects of governance of school education systems that influence policy relating to teachers, school leaders and schools as learning organisations and that should be considered in system development. These include:

- *the balance of autonomy and accountability;*

- *the relationship of schools with their external educational environment and community;*

- *ethos and vision (is it shared, based on trust and self-confidence?);*

- *cooperation and collaboration within school;*

- *leadership (is there distributed leadership and teacher leadership?);*

- *professional development of staff (are there considerations for its quality across a continuum?); and*

- *the locus of ownership of policy and its implementation* (ibid., pp. 15–16).

The *Proposal for a Council Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching* offers further support for inclusive education. It suggests enabling teachers, school leaders and academic staff to promote common values and deliver inclusive education through:

- measures to empower teachers, school leaders and academic staff helping them convey common values, and promote active citizenship while transmitting a sense of belonging and responding to the diverse needs of learners; and

- promoting exchanges and peer learning programmes as well as guidance and mentoring for teachers and academic staff (European Commission, 2018, p. 17).

1.2 Other relevant contributions

A significant development has been the work of the European Policy Network on School Leadership (EPNoSL). This network started in 2011 in response to the increasing European focus on school leaders' professional development, including preparation and selection of school leaders. Although initial funding was only until 2014, the network has continued and now includes stakeholders from 42 European institutions.

The EPNoSL work (no date) identified three critical policy goals:

1. Promoting an enabling school leadership environment:

   - Room for flexibility and autonomy for school leaders to make decisions and identify and respond to needs relating to equity and learning challenges

- Distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities to empower stakeholders to engage in initiatives that combat inequalities and improve learning performance

- Enhanced accountability mechanisms to promote trust between stakeholders and legitimacy and transparency of school decisions.

2. Promoting professional standards, evaluation and research on school leadership for equity and learning:

- Establish and implement school leader professional standards for equity and learning

- Establish and implement school leader evaluation for equity and learning

- Promote research to identify leadership policies and practices that promote equity and learning.

3. School leadership capacity-building for equity and learning:

- Develop flagship initiatives that can build momentum

- Establish/upgrade initial education/training

- Develop curricula and continuing professional development (CPD) on leadership for equity and learning

- Provide incentives for school leaders' participation in professional development activities

- Establish systems for selection, career development and succession of school leaders.

Overall, EPNoSL stresses the need for co-ordinated action, stakeholder engagement and an understanding of national education strategies and their relationship to school leadership; financial aspects and policy implementation; and the relationship between governments and agencies such as universities, inspectorates, etc. (2015).

> … policy makers … need support to achieve comprehensiveness and coherence in policy planning and implementation. Policy actions affecting school leadership in one area … can have multiple implications in others, including the level of financing required, the institutions and programmes to prepare school leaders, or the degree and character of flexibility (over curricula, budget allocation etc.) that schools should have in order for a new generation of school leaders to be able to actually shape and implement school-level policies and practices aiming to foster equity and learning (ibid., p. 43).

1.3 Summary

Key policy recommendations that affect the area of school leadership include the need to:

- provide greater autonomy at school level – with support for school leaders;

- adopt instructional and distributed leadership (through CPD);

- develop leadership for learning at all levels with interaction/networking between system levels;

- clarify school leaders' role in quality assurance and ensure alignment between governance and accountability.

Potential gaps include further information/examples relating to implementation, such as:

- improving co-ordination between governments and agencies such as universities, inspectorates, etc.

- increasing stakeholders' engagement in policy-making;

- school leadership's role in implementing national education initiatives;

- evidence-based policy-making and developing schools as learning organisations.

2. WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL COMPETENCES NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICE AT SCHOOL LEVEL?

2.1 International and European policy developments

In 2012, the OECD suggested that, to meet the demands of increasing autonomy, school leaders need to be able to:

- adapt teaching programmes to local needs;

- promote teamwork among teachers;

- engage in teacher monitoring, evaluation and professional development (Schleicher, 2012).

School leaders 'need discretion in setting strategic direction and must be able to develop school plans and goals and monitor progress' and use 'data to improve practice' (ibid., p. 29).

In 2013, focusing on learning leadership as the core work to ensure 21st-century learning, the OECD stated the need for such leadership to show creativity and often courage. Leadership must model and nurture 21st-century professionalism and be social and connected. The OECD also recognises that innovation makes leadership more complex, with the involvement of diverse partners (OECD, 2013).

The OECD's 'What Makes a School a Learning Organisation?' includes more detail about the skills and competences required by school leaders. These are as follows:

- *School leaders model learning leadership, distribute leadership and help grow other leaders, including students*

- *School leaders are proactive and creative change agents*

- *School leaders develop the culture, structures and conditions to facilitate professional dialogue, collaboration and knowledge exchange*

- *School leaders ensure that the organisation's actions are consistent with its vision, goals and values*

- *School leaders ensure the school is characterised by a 'rhythm' of learning, change and innovation*

- *School leaders promote and participate in strong collaboration with other schools, parents, the community, higher education institutions and other partners*

- *School leaders ensure an integrated approach to responding to students' learning and other needs* (Kools and Stoll, 2016, p. 63).

In *TALIS 2013 Results*, the OECD states that:

> *While principals report spending the most time (41%), on average, managing human and material resources, planning, and reporting, they increasingly distribute leadership and decision-making tasks … principals with heavy workloads who distribute tasks and decision making less also report lower levels of job satisfaction* (2014, p. 20).

It notes that principals who report more instructional leadership tend to spend more time on curriculum and teaching-related tasks and are more likely to observe classroom teaching as part of the formal appraisal of teachers' work. In some countries, these principals more often report using the results of learner performance and evaluations to develop the school's educational goals and programmes.

In *A guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*, UNESCO (2017) notes that leaders have to be prepared to analyse their own situations, identify barriers and facilitators and plan an appropriate development process. Furthermore, they should create opportunities for teachers to build a common language about their practices and how to make them more inclusive and equitable. Finally, it notes the need for leaders to challenge discriminatory and inequitable practice and promote school equality, equity and social justice with a focus on teaching, learning and community.

A significant report by the European Commission (published in 2010, but included here due to its high relevance) reported on a peer learning activity, *School Leadership for learning: Report of a Peer Learning Activity in Limassol, Cyprus* (European Commission, 2010b).

The conclusions from this activity set out the need for shared understanding of the school leader role, plus the personal attributes, professional values and competences required. The professional values and competences are as follows:

- *Vision; the ability to inspire staff and pupils*
- *Strategic thinking, the ability to take a holistic view*
- *The capacity to improve the quality of students' learning and their learning outcomes*
- *The ability to enhance learning environments and learning cultures*
- *The capacity to manage resources effectively*
- *A sound knowledge of the education system*
- *Strong communication skills, openness, and*
- *Problem solving skills* (2010b, paragraph 27).

The European Commission re-iterated these competences in the *Commission Staff Working Document: Supporting the Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes* (2012). This document also noted:

> Effective educational leadership requires a team approach and the different members of any leadership team may have different, complementary expertise and competence profiles; this does not affect the core competences required by school leaders, it rather underlines the need for clarity of roles (European Commission, 2012, p. 46).

More recent work by the European Commission recognises the increasing complexity of the school leader (and teacher) roles:

> … teachers and school leaders need to develop a broader, different set of competences and carry out a wider range of tasks than before. They are expected to continually review, adapt and innovate their teaching and focus more on the needs [of] individual learners. They are asked to use new technologies to enhance learning and to contribute to leadership and strategic development at school (European Commission, 2017a, p. 32).

The European Commission's ET 2020 Working Group Schools 2016–2018 report (2017d) suggests that competences and standards for school leaders can create transparency and a common understanding of leadership competences of teachers at different stages of their careers.

2.2 Other relevant contributions

The *ETUCE Policy Paper on School Leadership* notes the critical role for principals as pedagogical leaders to ensure quality, equity and equality of educational opportunities. This document suggests that 'professional development and support programmes for school leaders are essential' to enable them to 'respond to new challenges, such as disability, migration, academic, social and economic issues' (ETUCE, 2012a, p. 4). It recommends high-quality initial and continuous school leadership training, induction and mentoring to 'strengthen the capacities and competences of school leaders' (ibid., p. 8).

In a further publication, *School Leadership in Europe*, ETUCE (2012b) surveyed teacher unions to establish their views on the essential personal and professional competences required by school leaders. The responses are listed below:

- Administrative skills
- Leadership skills
- Communication skills
- Ambition and risk-taking

- Time management

- Innovation

- Self-analysis and reflection

- Self-improvement

- Visionary and strategic thinking

- Team-building and collaborative skills

- Being honest, sympathetic, sensitive and understanding.

To conclude this section, it is worth mentioning points raised by Earley (2012) in a paper for EPNoSL. He notes the development of competency frameworks and standards for school leaders in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (England), as well as Australia, Canada (Ontario) and the United States. The paper sets out a number of potential uses for such frameworks:

> … to underpin individuals' professional development and reflection, for accreditation purposes, for recruitment and selection, to help write job descriptions, assist performance management or annual reviews or to inform the content of leadership development programmes (ibid., p. 5).

Earley stresses the importance of ensuring that statements offered in standards or competences are clear, concrete and meaningful, to help an individual leader to show that they meet the standard (or not). Everyone needs to clearly understand learning outcomes or success criteria so that evidence can be collected to demonstrate successful completion. However, Earley notes the danger of a checklist approach and recommends 'signposts to guide an integrated professional learning agenda, rather than a series of discrete accomplishments' (ibid., p. 6).

While leaders impact on learner outcomes by motivating staff and developing teachers' practice and leadership capacity, other factors – such as honesty and trust – play an important role. Earley asks if competency frameworks sufficiently consider this and other key factors to ensure that school leaders focus on the 'things that matter the most' (ibid., p. 7).

Such factors also play a key role in inclusive practice and require a more explicit focus than they have had in the past.

2.3 Summary

Recent policy documents recognise the increasing complexity of the school leadership role and the need for wider and more diverse competences, including, for example:

- Vision

- Strategic thinking

- Focus on learning

- Managing resources

- Communication and problem-solving

- Pedagogical leadership

- Self-analysis and certain personal characteristics.

The need for a team approach to cope with increasing complexity and successfully fulfil the role of change agent is also noted.

Regarding competences, gaps include the lack of a significant/explicit focus on inclusive leadership and on digital skills and related competences.

3. WHAT SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARE REQUIRED TO DEVELOP AND SUSTAIN EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE SCHOOL LEADERS?

3.1 International and European policy developments

As the 'Background' section notes, the OECD's 'Improving School Leadership' work was significant in setting out 'policy pointers'. These included the need to develop skills for effective leadership – such as initial leadership training, induction programmes and in-service training as a continuum of formal and informal processes (Pont et al., 2008; Hopkins et al., 2009).

In 2012, the OECD noted:

> … leadership preparation and training are central and building networks of schools to stimulate and spread innovation and to develop diverse curricula, extended services and professional support can bring substantial benefits (Schleicher, 2012, p. 29).

Building on earlier work, including the outcomes of a peer learning activity in Cyprus in 2010 (*School Leadership for learning* – refer to the 'Background' section above; European Commission, 2010b), the *Commission Staff Working Document: Supporting the Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes* sets out three key actions to strengthen school leadership:

- *Allow school leaders to focus on improving learning, not on administration.*

- *Reinforce recruitment and retention of school leaders.*

- *Develop efficient professional development paths for school leadership* (European Commission, 2012, p. 63).

It also recognises:

- the need for 'more detailed policy advice, based on a strengthened knowledge base';

- the value of exchange between policy-makers, practitioners, researchers and other stakeholders, through 'peer learning and expert collaboration' with 'differentiation to address country-specific requirements' (such as that developed by EPNoSL) (ibid., p. 64).

It is acknowledged that school systems can be high-performing and equitable. However, there are few – if any – specific references to inclusion/inclusive leadership practice, despite wider policy's increasing emphasis on this.

As noted earlier, a significant development occurred in 2013, when more detailed recommendations were made about leadership – with a focus on equity.

The *Council conclusions on effective leadership in education* invited member states to:

> Support, in accordance with national circumstances and with due respect for the principle of equity, new ways of enhancing the effective and accountable autonomy of education institutions and educational leaders, particularly by:
>
> 1. promoting the autonomy of education institutions and educational leaders with regard to pedagogical matters and the internal allocation of resources, while ensuring that they have the necessary means and support to adapt and respond effectively to specific and changing local conditions;
>
> 2. clearly defining roles and responsibilities, and making provision for the competences required by educational leaders to be supported and strengthened through different modes of professional development, including networking between such leaders;
>
> 3. facilitating informed decision-making and increased accountability, for instance through the use of smart data, making provision for quality assurance mechanisms and developing specific measures for education institutions in disadvantaged areas;
>
> 4. gathering evidence on effective and successful educational leadership approaches in different national contexts, particularly in order to seek an optimal balance between flexibility, autonomy, and accountability, as well as to gauge the impact of innovative approaches on the quality of teaching and learning outcomes (Council of the European Union, 2013, p. 4).

These conclusions also promote 'innovative approaches to effective educational leadership', particularly by:

1. *taking account of the specific needs of education institutions and applying appropriate quality assurance criteria when selecting future leaders;*

2. *recognising and promoting the leadership potential of staff within institutions, particularly through 'distributed leadership', by providing them with opportunities to work with colleagues in other institutions and with encouragement and opportunities to develop their potential in this respect;*

3. *stimulating the creation of innovative teaching and learning environments, including by making appropriate use of ICTs and Open Educational Resources both as pedagogical aids and as management tools;*

4. *establishing and maintaining networks aimed at initiating and developing effective approaches to leadership in education and stimulating and promoting peer learning between educational leaders* (ibid., p. 5).

The document further suggests using the Open Method of Coordination to 'promote best practice and support the development of professional leadership' through co-operation and partnerships (e.g. Erasmus+, European Social Fund, eTwinning) (ibid.). It also

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recommends promoting research and supporting national and regional networks and EPNoSL's work.

From 2015 to 2017, key messages were reinforced by a series of publications from the European Commission. However, these lacked detail and did not really move the agenda forward in terms of implementing school leader development and support. In particular, they did not consistently address issues of inclusion and equity.

However, between 2015 and 2017, official documents from EU institutions (e.g. Council of the EU and European Commission, 2015; European Commission, 2016; Council of the EU, 2017) stressed the need to empower school leaders (and teachers) through strategic investment based on excellent initial education, teamwork (peer learning) and career-long professional development to:

- enable 'learners to experience inclusion, equality, equity, non-discrimination and democratic citizenship in their learning environments' (Council of the EU and European Commission, 2015, p. 4);

- impart knowledge and common values and support learners who come from a vulnerable socio-economic background.

3.2 Other relevant contributions

In *School Leadership as a driving force for equity and learning*, EPNoSL notes the marginalisation of equity considerations and the relative absence of hands-on practical school leadership training. It advises policy-makers to encourage the development of school leadership education/training and CPD through activities that:

- Aim to develop school leaders' capacity for critical reflection, substantiated by evidence, on the conditions and factors influencing teaching, learning, and equity in their local, school context.

- Promote a holistic approach of school leadership, incorporating the attainment of both equity and learning achievement goals in a balanced way.

- Acknowledge the existing variety of perspectives, experiences, knowledge, values, ways of learning; in short, stimulate the recognition of difference (El Haj, 2007).

- Target whole school leadership capacity building, focusing on democratic, collaborative and innovative school management and pedagogic leadership methods (EPNoSL, 2013, p. 236).

It also sets out the following research-based criteria to be fulfilled by school leadership educational and training programmes and CPD activities:

- *Close relevance to the concrete challenges of leading schools in local contexts (Hess and Kelly, 2007; Levine, 2005).*

- *Promotion of a practice-oriented curricular sequence and of instructional coherence (Gaetane et al., 2008).*

- *Adoption of an international perspective on school leadership education and training that emphasizes the practical benefits of international networking and that challenges ethnocentric and cultural biases (Lumby et al., 2009)* (EPNoSL, 2013, p. 236).

EPNoSL further advises policy-makers to incorporate methods and techniques in the curricula of school leaders' education and training programmes, as well as in CPD activities such as:

- 'activities that stimulate the development of self-reflection and respect for difference', e.g. cross-cultural interviews, diversity panels, etc.;

- 'activities that enhance … data-wise, localized, practice-orientated approaches for dealing with equity challenges', e.g. equity audits (ibid., p. 236).

3.3 Summary

Recommendations for leadership support and professional development include:

- a continuum for CPD including formal and informal learning – achieved through greater networking/collaboration;

- less focus on administration and a greater focus on learning and achievement;

- support for evidence-informed decision-making and use of data.

Potential gaps include: lack of examples/information on implementation – what are the most effective ways to develop the competences outlined in Question 2 and what forms of on-going support should be provided for school leaders to promote a focus on inclusion and equity.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

This paper has considered recent policy developments at international and European levels. It is clear that, as local-level and school autonomy increase, so does the complexity of the school leader role. This, in turn, demands that policy provide appropriate status for school leaders and enable them to:

- access support – both from formal development opportunities and from greater collaboration with colleagues and other stakeholders at all system levels;

- access resources – to develop the workforce's capacity through training, teamwork and knowledge exchange;

- have autonomy and discretion to make evidence-informed decisions on the school's strategic direction and organisation, to enhance the learning environment and ensure equity across the whole school including pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, organisation of support and resource allocation;

- be held accountable through mechanisms that are aligned with other policy areas to support inclusive practice and focus on what really matters to stakeholders in the school and community.

School leaders must be enabled to develop the wider range of competences required in today's diverse schools. They can no longer work alone and should involve others by sharing/distributing leadership tasks and working with a range of partners in the community and beyond. Their potential role as change managers in wider system reform should be clearly acknowledged.

While some international and European-level documents highlight these issues, there are few concrete recommendations likely to help countries to move forward in this important area. Of particular relevance is the lack of an explicit focus on inclusive school leadership and how best to ensure that all school leaders are enabled to attend to equity and meet the needs of **all** learners in their community.

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ANNEX: RECENT EUROPEAN PROJECTS ON LEADERSHIP

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European Projects: Developing Educational Leadership of Primary Heads and Institutions (DELPHI) – Comenius Project on CPD for head teachers – management and leadership competences (2008–2010)

Leadership Improvement for Student Achievement (LISA)

Network of Experts working on the Social Dimension of Education and Training (NESET), 2017. *Structural Indicators for Inclusive Systems in and around Schools* (includes teacher and leadership quality)

SIRIUS – Policy Network on Migrant Education. *School Leaders – Advocates for Refugee and Migrant Students*

Supporting Inclusive School Leadership