

**Primary Headteachers: Perceptions on Standards, Accountability  
and School Context**

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
in the Institute of Education

2016

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## Abstract

The University of Manchester

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Doctor of Education

Primary Headteachers: Perceptions on Standards, Accountability and School Context

August 2016

The continuing improvement in standards and the associated direct school accountability has been at the forefront of school policy since the introduction of the Education Reform Act of 1988. Its introduction brought both top down curriculum control and the opening up of primary schools in England to neo-liberal market reforms. To facilitate direct market competition and raise standards, measures of performance were introduced, in the form of annually published national assessments (SATs) and from 1992 inspection by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education). These measures took on board the status of High Stakes Testing (HST), since their outcomes directly impacted upon the professional lives of all those working within primary schools. Prior to 1988, central government had started to address underachievement, for example, *Better Schools* (DfES 1985), but now, for the first time, individual schools and their leaders were to be directly responsible for the achievement, or otherwise, of their pupils through the publication of attainment data and regular inspection reports. The notion of performativity (Ball 2003) was introduced into English primary schools, where performance measures and judgements (HST) were used as a means of top-down regulation and policy enforcement.

This study investigates current primary school headteachers' perceptions of their own professional accountability. It further explores the continuing focus on standards and the constant pressures and conflicts heads currently face in terms of maximising pupil attainment outcomes. The fieldwork was carried out within thirty four state funded primary schools across the North of England.

A questionnaire was used to survey headteachers' current perceptions; this data located heads on to a conceptual framework (Figure 5.5). Heads are located into one of four positions regarding their perceptions of the Standards Driven Agenda (SDA) and HST. Heads from each of the positions were then interviewed, which formed the prime data collection tool.

The research further examines the inter-relationship between socio-economic context and HST outcomes, addressing the question of the equality of the application of identical floor targets for all primary schools, regardless of circumstance. Schools falling within areas of high and low deprivation were identified, using the income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI); each area's headteachers' perceptions were then compared and contrasted, in order to identify any effects of context.

Ranson's (2003) typology and Ball's (2003) conceptualisation of accountabilities were developed in order to explore the identified trend of heads resisting what they view as a 'data dictatorship', and seeking to reinstate a previous age of professionalism. A clear plea for a change was evident with a call for a shift away from the current focus on standards in English and maths to the adoption of a more balanced and creative curriculum, where both the academic and social needs of the children are being met. The desire to return to Grace's (1995) notion of the cult of the 'headmaster tradition', with the reinstatement of higher levels of professional autonomy and trust, was evident within many of the participating heads, along with a strong sense of moral guardian and leadership.

All heads are aware of the need to be accountable for the tax payers' money used to fund their schools, accepting the need for accountability measures. However, both sets of heads acknowledge that when a school's effectiveness is solely measured by means of HST, it fails to be a level playing field. Factors such as parental support and education, housing and income were all identified as significant contributing factors in pupil attainment, resulting in heads reporting that these factors were not taken into account when the performance of their school was judged.

The study contributes to the knowledge of how serving heads balance the needs of their children, parents and staff, whilst ensuring that they continue to improve standards, as defined by successive governmental policy and thus meet the requirements of HST.

**Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

**Copyright Statement**

The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the "Copyright") and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

## **Dedication**

My thanks and appreciation goes to:

Professor Helen Gunter for her insight, belief and uncompromising dedication in supporting me through these years of study. Also, to Dr. Charlotte Woods for her supportive insight throughout the drafting of this research.

The researchers, whose work I have used as the bedrock of my own study, for their insight into the complex role of accountability and socio-economic deprivation.

The headteachers who gave up their time within their busy schedules to both complete the questionnaires and be interviewed in depth, providing a candid insight into the challenges in their professional lives.

My Ed.D colleagues (Aleks and Rachel) for their ideas, support and endless anecdotes connected to the world of education policy and its many varied personalities.

Finally, my family and friends, without whom this would surely not have been possible, especially to Catherine for her academic support and belief in me during the many hours of study; her worth is beyond measure. Thank you.

I dedicate this work to those who are here to see its completion and to those who have left along the way.

## **The Author**

I have a first class honours degree in primary education, a Masters' degree in Educational Management, awarded by the University of Manchester, and the NPQH (*National Professional Qualification for Headship*) from the National College for Teaching and Leadership.

Having worked within primary schools since qualifying in 1992, I have experienced a range of socio-economic contexts, driving my interest in the effects of deprivation on children's educational achievement and life chances. As a class teacher and deputy head, I had the opportunity to experience the impact of both the Standards Driven Agenda and associated High Stakes Testing on children, staff and senior leaders, particularly headteachers. The combination of the effects of deprivation and the focus on standards and testing can be seen to underpin this study. My previous research focussed on the role of parents and how this is linked to socio-economic context. I have also published a paper, in conjunction with Professor Helen Gunter, focussing on Primary School Councils: Organisation, Composition and Head Teacher Perceptions and Values, in the journal *Management in Education*.

Since September 2014, I have held the position of Lecturer in Primary Education within the Teach First Programme at the University of Manchester. From September 2016 I will be taking up the position of Primary Lead within the North West. This role has allowed me to work with schools within some of the most deprived areas of the North West, further fuelling my interest and desire to explore and begin to counter the socio-economic factors, which impact on children's enjoyment, engagement and attainment within primary education. It has further allowed me to gain an insight into the professional pressures headteachers consistently face as they endeavour to meet the pupil attainment targets set by central government, under the banner of educational reform and school improvement.

## **Chapter 1 - Introduction to the Thesis**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This thesis reports on research about primary school headteacher perceptions of their own professional accountability and how this directly links to their espoused management processes and views about school performance. The research produced two types of data: first, from a survey completed by headteachers, and second, from in depth interviews with 12 headteachers, placed within differing social-economic contexts, across local authorities within the north of England. Using public domain data, questionnaires and interviews, the analysis allows for an investigation into how headteachers not only view the performance agenda for the modernisation of education, but also how they understand the direct impact of socio-economic context upon their experiences and perceptions with respect to their accountability. The thesis will also provide insight into how educational policies from the past three decades, starting with the Education Reform Act (DES 1988), has directly shaped the way in which schools and their leaders are held accountable. It will also explore the neoliberal beliefs underpinning these policies.

The research first focuses upon serving heads' perceptions of the Standards Driven Agenda (SDA). This is the complex mix of policies and strategies which have been introduced over the past 30 years to increase children's skills and knowledge and thus, to create a more able and competitive workforce in terms of operating within a global marketplace. The research concentrates particularly upon the introduction of the two National Strategies under the New Labour governments (1997-2010). These were aimed directly at improving primary aged children's attainment in numeracy and literacy and are significant since this was the first example of central government top-down control of classroom practice. Prior to this, the introduction of

the National Curriculum in 1988 had, for the first time, defined not only curriculum content but learning progression, thus creating a national level of expected attainment by the end of primary education.

The introduction of education policies underpinned by neoliberal thinking called for the direct competition between service providers within the public sector and thus, schools for the first time were in competition for pupils. This notion of competition requires the introduction of direct performance monitoring, resulting in data taking on the role of high stakes, which is the second area of focus. Heads' perceptions of High Stakes Testing (HST) is investigated since it is through the results of annual tests, at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2, and Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) inspections, that the performance of a head and their school are held accountable. The neoliberal notion of the open market and its effects on standards, in terms of competition improving outcomes (pupil attainment) and direct accountability improving service provision are investigated and the challenges this doctrine presents for heads are explored.

The thesis aims to conceptualise the link between heads' perceptions of the SDA and HST, positioning heads in relation to the various 'accountabilities' they work within, using Ranson's typology (2003) which 'conceptualises the practices, structures and codes of accountability within two regimes of governance: the age of professionalism and the neo-liberal age' (p.462). The use of this typology is central to this study since it provides an insight into the complexities of the two 'ages' heads are either working within and/or striving to return to.



The study further explores the role that socio-economic context plays in heads' perceptions of the Standards Driven Agenda and High Stakes Testing and accordingly, the impact of the location, catchment and type of school on testing and national standards.

The thesis is structured around three Research Questions:

**Research Question 1**

How and why has the role and work of the headteacher changed in regard to national standards and testing?

**Research Question 2**

What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of national standards and testing on their understanding and practice of accountability?

**Research Question 3**

What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of the location, catchment and type of school on national standards and testing?

The first question focuses on how the professional role of headteachers has changed as a result of the constant drive to improve standards, particularly within literacy and numeracy. Examining this will draw from a range of literatures which illustrates how successive governments have sought to directly influence the role of teachers via the direct control of not only what is taught, but also how it is delivered within state controlled classrooms. The second focus will gain an insight into the perceptions of headteachers operating within a culture of HST and hyper-accountability. The fieldwork, framed within Research Question Three, will investigate the relationship between differing socio-economic contexts, in terms of both pupil attainment and headteacher perceptions of accountability. The research findings will present a picture of how primary headteachers position themselves in

terms of operating within a culture driven by both educational standards and direct accountability.

A study which seeks to address these questions is timely, since research has started to seriously question the continued focus on pupil attainment, testing and Ofsted inspection (McDonald 2001; Connor 2003; Mansell 2007; Connors et al. 2009). New Ofsted frameworks, (Ofsted 2011; 2013; 2014), continue to place increased emphasis on schools being judged primarily on pupil attainment, measured via HST. The discourse regarding the use of high stakes measures to gauge a school's success and, to some extent, its future, whilst appropriately addressing the needs of children, is one worthy of investigation (Burnitt 2011b). Consequently, the contribution this study seeks to make is the construction of a framework based upon a data set which is unique in its focus, the perceptions of current primary heads. Its contribution is empirical in that the data is taken from heads identified from clearly defined criteria. The methodology positions heads by using in-depth interviews within a wider empirical framework, creating a conceptualisation of their perceptions of working within a SDA with HST as a dominant part of their work through deploying and developing Ranson's (2003) framework on accountability and Ball's (2003) policy technologies.

### **1.1 Rationale for the study**

This is an important study to undertake, since it examines the impact that successive education policies have had upon the professional lives of current headteachers. It investigates the political drivers for continuous reform policies, providing an insight into their impact upon primary heads' practice and agency.

For the past 40 years, UK Government led educational reform and school improvement in England has been constructed upon the emergence of the neoliberal principle of the market, initially pioneered by the Thatcher governments from 1979 and further established by subsequent right and left wing governments. Central to this is the operation of a performative accountability culture, in which schools are directly accountable for standards, what I call the SDA. This means that individual schools have complete responsibility for the effective delivery of the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. Each government has set a series of performance indicators which sets the minimum acceptable standards of achievement. The meeting, or otherwise, of these standards is judged by each school's performance against a set of HST tools, namely Standard Assessment Tests/Tasks and periodic Ofsted inspections. The outcomes of these evaluations are made public within league tables and published inspection reports, which are then used to inform parental choice, as part of the school selection process. This underpins one of the central elements of neoliberal informed policy, that of competition reinforced by standardised measures of performance. A further element, the need to be globally competitive within ever more challenging markets, dictates the need for a world class education and the introduction of the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) from 2000 and TIMMS (The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) from 1995 have allowed the UK to be directly compared with the rest of the developed world.

Therefore, the quality of school provision, as determined by the SDA with HST outcomes, has become central to the future economic success of the nation and is therefore central to governmental policy, irrespective of politics.

The understanding of both the nature and the processes of headteacher accountability and their resultant outcomes or consequences is now, in 2016, a key requirement for any primary headteacher. If their school is to continue to attract new pupils and thus, to stay open, headteachers must position themselves in such a way as to both obtain and then promote consistently 'outstanding' results within all core curriculum areas.

As a former primary teacher, with ten years' experience as a senior leader and now working within the University, I have first-hand experience of the pressures that the focus on standards and the associated HST have placed upon heads and I, therefore, have very strong professional reasons for undertaking the research. It is important to acknowledge my previous experiences with respect to both the underlying ontology and epistemology. Prior to moving into education, in 1988, I worked within the fuel industry for a decade undertaking advanced chemical analysis based upon established theory and practice. Thus, I was positioned very much within an epistemology of positivism based upon quantitative data and a quest for objective knowledge. Therefore, having subsequently being involved in the administration of Year 6 SATs and having to deal with the impact of negative HST data and inspections, as a member of the SLT, I began to have significant concerns, over both the validity of the data and that fact context was no-longer being taken into account, which I view as a failure to acknowledge contributing variables. My previous experience within a controlled scientific environment, where repeatability underpinned the validity of both my work and the company's professional reputation, made me uneasy with the claims made by successive governments regarding improvements in pupil attainment and the success of their

reform educational policies. My reading and empirical work for the Ed.D research papers (Burnitt 2010, 2011a, 2011b) gave me access to a wider range of ontological and epistemological knowledge claims, and these enabled me to connect my professional concerns with research methodologies and design that enabled me to explore questions according to different but equally robust tests of validity.

As a researcher, these concerns progressed from a focus on the data and policy claims to a wider perspective on the appropriateness and validity of what now appears to be an overt focus on performative accountability (Ranson 2003) and its reliance on data (Ozga 2009). This has resulted in the significant shifting of what could be viewed as the major educational success criteria from the development of the whole child to a very narrow set of attainment measures. In terms of accountabilities, this is a move away from the professional towards neoliberal consumer and performative led cultures. This research builds upon previous work (Burnitt 2010), which identified the continuing growth of the parental power base and the impact this was having on school life and professional culture.

A driver for the shift towards evidence-based education has been the replacement of trust with mistrust (Bormann and René 2014), where uncertainty about outcomes, in this case educational standards, has resulted in greater top-down control and monitoring. The notion of trust can be viewed as located in every-day decision-making and conduct where legal and professional direction cannot be directly applied to every case and so is open to discretionary judgement. This is reliant on the assumption that those involved will honour their commitment and expectations, as such; it can be seen as being risky and somewhat transient. Therefore,

successive governments have sought to reduce this risk by the setting out of clear and strongly enforced success criteria.

Luhmann (1979) presents the idea that trust can be viewed as a means of coping with the uncertainty generated by any complex system of interaction or communication. He introduces the idea of double contingency, which results when an interaction between alter and ego occurs, Luhmann (1979) views these as black boxes, each unsure of the other's intentions and motives, therefore, interactions are based on a series of assumptions, as each attempts to understand any resultant stance and actions. The subsequent assumptions generate a complexity, which inhibits progress, thus, creating distrust. Luhmann (1979) argues that the introduction of highly defined and measurable expectations, in the case of education High Stakes Testing outcomes, reduces this complexity and uncertainty and, consequently, risk.

The introduction of these performative measures in itself generate distrust, resulting in an environment in which heads and teachers are reluctant to take risks, for the fear of appearing incompetent or ineffectual (Giddens 1990; Reina and Reina 2006). Power (1994) and O'Neill (2005) further claim that the increased audit culture has led to the auditees, in this case headteachers, developing strategies to respond to the audit process and, thus paradoxically, become less trustworthy. Therefore, it could be argued that as modern society has become more complex and the need to compete globally more acute the trust between people, in this case the head and the stakeholders, is no longer sufficient and has been replaced by belief in systems (HST) and organisations (DfE and Ofsted). Nevertheless, there is a strong

argument against overt belief in systems constructed around low trust, as highlighted by Møller (2009) who draws on the international academic success of various Scandinavian countries, as confirmed by their PISA (Programme for International *Student* Assessment) ranking, to validate the need 'to find a balance between professional, public and political power over education' (p.40) and, thus, the return of professional trust.

Whilst the thesis will focus on headteacher perceptions of their current accountabilities within a SDA as evidenced through a HST regime, the effects of socio-economic context upon these perceptions will also be investigated. This will involve the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from heads working within the most affluent and deprived areas of the north of England, and from subsequent engagement with their responses to identify commonalities and differences.

Within this study, the term deprivation is defined using the work of Townsend (1979). His use of a relative deprivation approach to the understanding of disadvantage identifies the factors which categorise an individual, household or community as being within deprivation. Townsend centres the notion of deprivation on both the access to resources and the ability to effectively use them. He identifies appropriate diet, the ability to participate in activities and having suitable living conditions and amenities as key, however, it is important to view these as relative to the societies in which they belong. Therefore, the term deprivation, or indeed poverty, is not a constant and is dependent on the expectations and average life style of each community. However, for the purpose of this study, high and low

deprivation are defined as those communities which have either open or very limited access to resources and, as such, can be seen to be included or excluded from 'ordinary patterns, customs and activities' (Townsend 1979, 31).

Townsend (1979), in his approach to relative deprivation, developed a list of sixty indicators of the population's 'style of living', covering such items as clothing, fuel and light, social relations and education, and, as such, are not the same as measures of income. It is, therefore, important to view deprivation as a consequence of low household income (Mack 2016), however, the Townsend model only identifies a series of deprivation indicators and can be criticised for being arbitrary and failing to allow for any differences and choices in the way people choose to live their lives. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, Townsend's model is adopted, since, it provides an appropriate overview of the environments in which children are living as they undertake their primary education, whilst tying in closely with the indicators used with the IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index) described in detail in Chapter 4.

Although it is accepted that the term deprivation is open to interpretation and problematising, particularly with reference to the public perception that deprivation is a repeating cycle in certain communities, resulting in successive generations of disadvantage (Morris 2002b). I argue that there is strong evidence that even where this continuity is strongest many still succeed and, thus, whilst deprivation can be viewed as access to resources and, thus, opportunities, it does not have to be the outcome. Therefore, the use of the IDACI data and term deprivation is used within



this study to provide a data set, rather than a definitive definition of the two different 'types' of communities in which the study schools are located.

Harris and Ranson (2005) and Lupton (2005) examine in detail the negative effects of socio-economic disadvantage/deprivation and how educational policy has been used to address some of these issues. Limited work, however, has been carried out which focuses on how headteachers, operating within differing socio-economic environments, actually view the measures of attainment of their pupils, that is, their school's performance in relation to their own accountability and how this is related to context.

A further gap centres around pupil motivation. Whilst Doddington et al. (1999) and Harlen and Deakin-Crick (2003) have carried out studies focussing on exploring dips in pupil motivation connected to testing, limited data is available linking motivation levels with socio-economic context. The growth in evidence about headteacher stress (level of concern) associated with accountability and HST also requires further investigation. Whilst the work of Chaplain (1995, 2001), Troman (2000) and McDonald (2001) have investigated in depth the anxiety generated within the educational workplace, no links have been drawn between the stress generated by HST and how this may vary within differing socio-economic contexts.

There is a further research gap in the exploration of the relationship between headteacher perceptions and their engagement with the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Whilst the work of Brown et al. (2003), Galton (2007) and Bragg and Boyle (2009) have all questioned their effectiveness and long term

benefit, little work has been carried out which directly investigates headteacher perceptions of their overall value and whether this varies depending upon socio-economic context.

My conceptualisation of the role of headship will draw together the political, professional and practical issues connected to the ever changing responsibility and stresses of running a primary school, under the umbrella of performative accountability within a period of neoliberal centred school improvement.

## **1.2 Structure and content of the study**

Following the introduction to the research, I begin the thesis in Chapter 2 by locating and reviewing the current literature which charts the introduction of successive neoliberal informed educational reforms, beginning with the call by Prime Minister James Callaghan, in 1976, to address poor standards within schools in England, this was the point at which standards in schools started to become a significant focus for governmental involvement and scrutiny. I develop an understanding of the application of a HST regime to monitor standards against national targets and thus, promote both competition between schools and the notion of parental choice (Walford 2001). I reference the literature which explores the effects of the SDA upon headteachers and their pupils and, in addition, the claims made by successive governments with respect to the effectiveness of their reform policies and strategies (Earl et al. 2003; Webb and Vulliamy 2006a).

Chapter 3 explores the literature which illustrates how neoliberal policies aim to improve standards through the enforcement of high stakes practices. I track the

introduction of national testing in primary schools and the publishing of the results within annual league tables, along with periodic inspections conducted by Ofsted. I examine research which questions the validity and use of this data (Ozga 2012; Baxter and Clarke 2013) and provide evidence as to its current popularity with policymakers and stakeholders (Nichols and Berliner 2007). I further examine the differing political ideologies behind the use of such data in terms of the creation of a well-educated workforce equipped to compete within the global market (Tomlinson 2001).

Chapter 4 focuses upon the contextual factors which directly impact upon a school's HST performance. These are examined in terms of developing an understanding of the various components which contribute to creating a school's socio-economic context, as measured through classification using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), which includes household incomes, crime rate and the quality of housing provision. I explore the question of the potential disadvantages schools within areas of high deprivation may face, with respect to the achievement of positive HST outcomes and promotion of the Standards Agenda (Lupton 2004; Calveley 2005).

Chapter 5 examines the current role of primary headteachers, as a series of reforms have shifted their responsibilities towards ensuring ever increasing standards, with a resultant loss of professionalism (Grace 1995). I further examine the complex relationships heads currently have with a range of stakeholders, as they implement standards-driven governmental strategies and policy. The conflict between contradictory beliefs is also examined, as I explore the ever changing model of

headship. Finally, I construct two conceptualisations of headship, the first (Figure 5.4) is built around the typology of accountability regimes, put forward by Ranson (2003) and Ball's (2003) notion of four interrelated policy technologies, this outlines the various mechanisms currently in place to control and monitor the work and effectiveness of heads and their schools. The second (Figure 5.5) is based upon the relationship of the SDA to HST with respect to headteachers' accountability.

The research methodology is explained within Chapter 6. The mixed methods approach is described in detail and follows the guidance of recent research texts (Cohen et al. 2000; Opie 2004; Briggs and Coleman 2007; Denscombe 2007; Creswell 2009). A data collection overview is developed, which charts the headteacher selection, questionnaire composition and distribution, and the undertaking of the semi-structured interviews. Data is then used to position headteachers using their perceptions of the SDA and HST onto a conceptual framework which identifies each head within one of four scenarios or 'types'. Within Chapter 7 I aim to develop a detailed understanding of serving headteachers' perceptions of the focus on standards and how this affects their job. I explore their functioning within their roles and their understanding of the effectiveness of governmental curriculum and pedagogical policies and strategies. I further explore the various stresses that HST generates and the discourse which exists between the provision of a creative curriculum and the meeting of HST measures (SATs floor targets).

The focus of Chapter 8 is the exploration of how headteachers work within two differing socio-economic contexts, whilst managing the requirements of the SDA. I

explore the diverse issues these opposing contexts generate and address the discourse created through Ofsted's 'no excuses' policy (Wilshaw 2012).

Drawing together the conceptualisations generated within the previous chapters, in Chapter 9 I generate an overall positioning of serving heads in terms of their position on the SDA and HST. Using Ranson's typology (2003, 463) and the work of Ball (2003), I explore each head's position in terms of their associated accountability and investigate the strategies they employ to function within a culture of performativity.

The final chapter presents an overview of the contribution made by my research findings to knowledge, framed within my three research questions, outlined previously. An insight into the heads' perceptions of the National Strategies is given and this is explored in relation to professional conflicts generated by the SDA. Question 2 generates an insight into the changing role of headship, as school leaders adapt to the demands of performative accountability. The final question addresses the issue of context and school performance, asking if the current use of HST is both fair and accurate, as it seeks to judge schools on the quality of their teaching and learning provision. Finally, the chapter reflects upon further areas for future research.

## **Chapter 2 – The Drive for Standards**

### **2.0 Introduction**

The focus of this chapter is to analyse the literatures covering the changes in education policy and their resultant effects on the professional lives of primary headteachers

The literature is used to provide an understanding of the concept of the Standards Driven Agenda (SDA) and give a structure as to how successive governments have devised and implemented education policy within primary schools in England. In order to fully appreciate both the positioning and practice of current headteachers at a time of High Stakes Testing (HST) and what Barker (2008, 669) terms ‘the relentless pursuit of the unattainable’, I explore successive left and right wing UK governments’ focus on educational attainment and standards, set within the differing political doctrines of the Conservatives (1979-1997), New Labour (1997-2010), and the Coalition of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats (2010-2015).

### **2.1 Understanding the Standards Agenda**

The adoption of the Standards Driven Agenda, Ainscow et al. (2006, 295) propose, is now the ‘major force shaping the directions taken by schools’. This Agenda is centred on the continuous drive for improvements in very clearly defined but narrow areas of knowledge and skills, reflecting a highly directive and interventionist stance from successive governments. Therefore, the continuing focus of the SDA can be viewed as an agenda of what needs to be done, and will be measured, but not a clear blueprint for action.

This drive for improvement has resulted in significant issues, for example the limiting of the curriculum (Ofsted 2003), the raising of children's stress and anxiety levels (Connors et al. 2009), the raising of concerns over its effectiveness at actually raising standards and indeed, the accuracy with which this is measured (Crick and Harlen 2002; Tymms 2004). Nevertheless, these doubts appear to have done little to reduce successive governments' desire to place the drive for improving standards at the forefront of policy. A drive which is seen as sufficient justification for the implementation of many far reaching educational reforms.

This drive has been placed very much in the public domain, with the publishing of pupil performance data in league tables and Ofsted reports. It has further developed an associated vocabulary which is both dramatic and unforgiving. Successive Secretaries of State for Education have called for the closure or conversion into academies of 'failing' schools and the removal of heads, based solely on performative data (Gove 2014). Thus, the collection of data showing positive pupil progress has become the preoccupation of many primary schools. The power of this data is now evident on the website of every primary school and in the banners placed on their fences, proclaiming an 'outstanding' Ofsted inspection or '100% level fours and fives' in SATs, and indicates the high stakes nature of these outcomes in terms of the professional lives of those working within. This chapter continues by providing an outline charting the framing of the Standards Driven Agenda within the differing policies and emphases of both left and rightwing governments.

Wolf (2002) and Lupton (2004) cite the main rationale behind the relentless focus on standards as being the promotion of workforce skills, so that the UK can continue to compete in an ever more aggressive, technology based global market. Michael Barber, New Labour's Chief Advisor to the Secretary of State for Education on School Standards, placed the promotion of standards and testing at the forefront of educational reform (Hargreaves 2009). The drive towards higher standards led directly to greater top down control, resulting, for example, in the implementation of the National Strategies in the late 1990s. The rationale and justification behind their implementation, regardless of the negative effects resulting from the loss of teachers' professionalism, was placed firmly on the resultant rise in pupil attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Stannard and Huxford 2007).

The journey, initially started by Labour in the 1970s and continued by successive governments, has been a pathway of policies directly linked to the gaining of a narrow band of education at an acceptable level, as defined by testing. Here an agenda has been created and sustained, as illustrated in Table 2.1, with the purpose of raising standards, primarily in English, maths and science, via policies which ensure teacher compliance (DfE 2011a) and rigorous enforcement through testing and inspection.



Date	Key Policy Change	Contribution to Standards
1976	James Callaghan's Ruskin College speech	Beginning of the 'Great Debate' and the identification of the need to improve standards to equip a future work force. Notion of a 'core curriculum of basic knowledge' introduced.
1977	Education in Schools: A Consultative Document	Outlines a series of aims for schools, including the provision of the basics of mathematical, scientific and technical knowledge to make the UK work force globally competitive.
1981	The School Curriculum DES publication	Outlines the needs for a standardised 5-16 National Curriculum in state funded schools. Starts to highlight the need to improve standards of achievement.
1983	Circular 8/83	Highlights the need to improve the curriculum to raise standards of school education and directly identifies the role of Secretary of State within this.
1985	Better Schools DfES publication	Identified serious weaknesses in planning and effective practice in a high proportion of primary schools. Significant under-achievement found in ethnic minority pupils. Identifies the need for a curriculum with clear aims and objectives to be introduced across all school and this is necessary for the improvement in standards. Government set out expected levels of attainment for pupils taking GCSE examinations.
1988	Education Reform Act	Standardised National Curriculum introduced to drive up standards by setting out explicit expectations for learning and attainment, within an age related framework. Central government gained control/responsibility for what was being taught. Standards of pupil attainment directly monitored by national standardised testing at 7 and 11. Heads given greater control over budget, through the introduction of Local Management of Schools, but funding dependent on pupil numbers, which becomes directly linked to positive testing outcomes. Also, schools could opt out gaining Grant Maintained Status, free from LA control.
1991	Parents' Charter	Parents have the right to information regarding their children's and school's performance. School performance data becomes central to perceptions of performance.
1992	Curriculum Organisation and Classroom Practice in Primary Schools: A discussion paper	Outlines that falling standards, in some important aspects of literacy and numeracy, was evident.
1992	Education (Schools) Act	Introduction of Ofsted. Schools to be rigorously inspected and reports released into the public domain. Key focus on the standards of attainment within core subjects.
1998 1999	National Literacy Strategy National Numeracy Strategy	Central government takes control of pedagogical approaches to be used in the delivery of literacy and numeracy...
2003	Every Child Matters	Achievement against standards central to the notion of all children developing into adults able to make a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being.
2005	Higher Standards, Better Schools for All	Parents given powers to drive school improvement along with personalised learning to raise standards of attainment for all.
2008	Amendment of the School Information (England)	Publishing of Key Stage 1 and 2 results on website.
2012	The Education (School Teachers' Appraisal) (England) Regulations	Heads and teachers given annual class progress attainment targets.
2013	National Curriculum	The new National Curriculum developed, in order to promote the principles of freedom, responsibility and fairness and to also ensure the raising of standards for all children.

**Table 2.1: Standards timeline.**

Much of recent policy parallels Barber et al. (2010) notion of deliverology with high aspirations being met via the use of reforming strategies, the setting of challenging performance targets and the rigorous monitoring of outcomes. The delivery of these targets is placed firmly in the hands of the schools, with teachers' effectiveness being constantly monitored through performance management (DfE 2012) and SATs (Standard Assessment Tests) data. The criticality of achieving predetermined standards was reinforced by the Coalition's policy of making it easier to remove failing teachers, as outlined by Michael Gove (2012a): 'Heads said to me that they needed new powers in order to move on teachers who weren't performing' (p.1). Thus, the concept of workforce accountability and the link to standards are clear.

The notion of schools being in complete control of their own performance, Thrupp (2005) suggests, is a manifestation of 'official school improvement' (OSI), where no account is taken of context and thus, the most disadvantaged are consistently labelled as underperforming. This, Hargreaves (Harris et al. 2013, 180) suggests, results in a 'school improvement apartheid', where schools reaching high standards are given greater freedom and those falling below the benchmark targets are subjected to constant scrutiny and punitive measures. Barber's (2000, 9) 'high challenge, high support' policy boosts this notion of pupil performance being the only gauge of a school's success and thus, socio-economic factors are ignored.

Thrupp (2005) views this as a balancing act, initially created by New Labour, which supports the promotion of the market creating choice, championing an interventionist stance aimed at the delivery of standards, thus allowing the UK to remain globally competitive. He further suggests that high levels of accountability,

enforced via constant testing, have become perceived as the solution to educational under-performance. Thus, OSI has resulted in the state no longer being the provider of education, but adopting the role of financier, target setter and auditor.

To fully understand how OSI and associated policies have impacted upon the professional lives of headteachers, I give a brief history, identifying key policies and the political drivers behind them.

## **2.2 A brief history of political intervention and the drive for standards**

### **2.2.1 Labour government (1974-1979)**

Phillips and Harper-Jones (2002) state that Callaghan's Ruskin speech, of October 1976, can be viewed as the start of what, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is now seen as the 'direct intervention by senior politicians and by the media in educational issues' (p. 298). Reflecting on the literature which analyses the professional practice of teachers at that time (White 1979; Lawton 1980), it becomes apparent that education professionals enjoyed high levels of both status and autonomy, which was highlighted, perhaps as a warning, by Callaghan's use of the term 'secret garden' when referring to both the curriculum and teaching methods.

Callaghan (1976) justified increasing political involvement within education by reference to its high cost to the public, of £7.8bn or 13% of GDP (source: [www.ukpublicspending.co.uk](http://www.ukpublicspending.co.uk)). Further areas worthy of interest were identified.

Firstly, he openly questioned current teaching methods and standards:

...there is the unease felt by parents and others about the new informal methods of teaching which seem to produce excellent results when they are in well-qualified hands but are much more dubious when they are not. (p.3).

Secondly, he called for the implementation of a standardised curriculum, with what he termed the 'basic tools' and 'core curriculum' (p.5) needed to prepare children for the future world of work. Finally, he indicated the need to both improve and directly monitor standards, which would ultimately lead to the present system of testing and monitoring.

As Phillips (2001, 14) states, 'Callaghan laid out the framework that would dominate much of the education discourse for the next twenty-five years'. Phillips (2001, 14) goes on to suggest five key reasons for Callaghan's Ruskin speech being viewed as 'the jolt which initiated education reform':

- (1) It raised fundamental doubts about progressive education
- (2) 'Accountability for standards' would be the dominant metaphor for the governance of education after 1976
- (3) A close connection had been made in the public mind between educational failure and economic/industrial crisis
- (4) A particular style of educational politics emerged after 1976: Callaghan's occasional use of praise in the speech could not hide the veiled criticism of teachers
- (5) The call for parents to be involved more directly in educational decisions marked a change in the post-war control and governance of education.

Ultimately, the 1970s saw the start of what has been termed a 'general disenchantment with education as a palliative of society's ills' and the recession 'provided a rationale for economic cutbacks in education not only in England but in most advanced western industrial countries' (Galton et al. 1980, 41). These factors resulted in a cross-political party call for all teachers and education systems to become more accountable. To address this, in 1974 the DES established the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU), whose primary function was to seek to identify the incidences of pupil under-achievement.

As Ball (2008, 73) indicates, whatever James Callaghan's intended outcomes, it strongly fuelled the 'discourse of derision' being aimed directly at teachers and schools. This resulted in the media, particularly the *Daily Mail*, raising questions of whether current education practices offered value for money and generated pupils of sufficiently high standard to have, or be able to develop, the skills needed by potential new employers. The end of educational autonomy, in terms of school organisation/management and curriculum control, was swiftly coming, resulting in what Ball (2008, 74) terms 'the 'breaking' of the existing paradigm of educational politics and policy'. Lowe (2004) supports this view, stating that the Labour government's policies under Callaghan basically set the tone for subsequent education policies of governments throughout the Conservative and New Labour eras.

### **2.2.2 Thatcherite education reforms and the growth of neoliberalism**

The Conservatives took office in 1979, where Margaret Thatcher's policies from the early 1980s would directly affect all areas of both industry and the public sector. Jones (2003, 107) provides an outline of the fundamentals of what would come to be termed Thatcherism:

Conservative legislation sought to drive neoliberal principles into the heart of public policy. An emphasis on cost reduction, privatisation and deregulation was accompanied by vigorous measures against the institutional bases of Conservatism's opponents, and the promotion of new forms of public management. The outcome of these processes was a form of governance in which market principles were advanced at the same time as central authority was strengthened.

Thatcher's educational 'free market' directly called for the use of performance indicators by which all state schools could be graded and compared. Keith Joseph, the Conservative Secretary of State for Education and Science, continued the

strategic reorganisation of the education establishment with the systematic introduction of neoliberal / neoconservative reforming policies in areas which Gillard (2011) classified as:

- the curriculum - traditionally seen as the 'secret garden' which government ministers were not supposed to enter
- the teachers - controlling their training and development and restricting their role in curriculum development
- the restructuring or disbanding of local education authorities (LEAs) - many of which (especially the Labour-controlled ones) Thatcher saw as her enemy

Each of these three areas was finally brought under direct central government control with the introduction of the Education Reform Act (DfES 1988). The Act promoted neoliberal ideology via the introduction of numerous far-reaching and long-lasting reforms.

The ERA heralded the introduction of the National Curriculum, with the DfES (1988) producing lengthy documents, providing in detail the legal curriculum requirements for three core subjects, namely maths, English and science, and seven foundation subjects. As well as allowing political control over what was being taught within English primary classrooms, the National Curriculum for the first time enabled its standardisation. This facility made it possible to directly compare the performances of schools, not only across LEAs, but nationally, with the compilation of and, ultimately, publication of end of Key Stage 2 SATs data-based league tables. This school performance data underpinned the provision of customer choice, enabling parents to select a school based on its results and thus, the quality of its teaching, creating a 'free market', a fundamental principle of neoliberal, New Conservative philosophy.

The ERA (DfES1988) further introduced the site-based management of all state schools (Local Management of Schools). LMS allowed for schools to operate as independent 'organisations' with complete control over their allocated budget, resulting in a significant reduction in both the role and control of local authorities. Budgets were calculated primarily via the number of pupils on each school's roll. Thus, from this point schools became suppliers within an open market, in which parents were free to choose. Consequently, the spotlight focused on assessment and attainment, which needed to present 'competing' schools in the best possible light if they were to survive within the, now open, market place.

The role of Ofsted, created in 1992, was not viewed as supportive, but solely a mechanism by which to grade schools, thus providing information for parents to make choices within a free market (Walford 2001). Its role has caused, and has continued to cause, both high degrees of stress to whole school communities whilst being antagonistic in nature, publishing reports in the public domain naming and shaming failing schools, resulting in their being placed into 'Special Measures', with possible drastic implications for staff and the headteacher (Chapman 2002; Jeffrey and Woods 2003; Mansell 2007).

### **2.2.3 New Labour and the 'Third Way'**

New Labour took office with a large majority in 1997, and this enabled the successful introduction of a continuous flow of standards driven policies. In his 'Education, Education, Education' speech (Blair 1997), Prime Minister, Tony Blair, highlighted the educational challenges ahead. These educational priorities can be summarised as:

- There will be a greater awareness across society of the importance of education and increased expectations of what can be achieved
- Standards of performance will be higher.

These major changes were outlined within the white paper, *Excellence in Schools* (DfEE 1997, 5). New Labour placed education at the heart of government, ensuring high standards for all, not just the privileged, and there would be zero tolerance of underperformance.

Gunter and Chapman (2009, 3) highlight some of the resultant policies:

For example, National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, performance management, and training headteachers as leaders (DfEE 1998a). The approach was to directly intervene in strategically determining the purposes of schooling, the tactical day-to-day operation of schools, and the work of teachers and headteachers in curriculum design, teaching, learning outcomes and assessment.

New Labour's 'Third Way', in terms of education reform and the restructuring of the teaching profession, is based on Blair's vision, and is outlined by Barber as being the provision of:

[A] world class education service: one which matches the best anywhere on the planet. This involves 'rewarding success and challenging failure', encouraging 'a collective responsibility for educational performance' and investing steadily in education in such a way that 'all money is for modernisation'. As Barber makes clear, central to the process of modernisation is the promotion of effective management and leadership in schools, as well as a fundamental overhaul of teachers' pay and conditions. (Docking 2000, 127)

According to Jones (2003, 5), however, it soon became apparent that New Labour's education policies differed little from those endorsed by Thatcher and Major, continuing to draw on many of the policies and practices outlined within the *Education Reform Act*. This meant a continued focus on the raising of standards via neoliberal 'free market' competition principles, enforced and validated by the use of



annual standardised testing. This resulted in testing becoming even more high stakes than previously.

This stance and the belief in 'raising standards' and offering parental choice was further supported by the publication of the white paper, *Excellence and Enjoyment*, when the then Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clark, stated:

Our system must not fail any child. High standards – especially in literacy and numeracy are the backbone of success in learning and in life. Our primary education system must not write off any child through low expectations. (DfES 2003, Foreword).

Hill (2001, 10) provides further examples of a number of what he terms New Labour's continuation / acceptance of the ideologically neoliberal policies, including the strengthening of the quasi-market. In summary, in reviewing New Labour's education policies, Brehony (2005, 41) draws on the work of Edelman (1971) who makes a distinction between two types of policy. The first, 'symbolic', is designed principally to gain or sustain electoral votes, for example, the reduction of Key Stage 1 class size to a maximum of 30 children (DfEE 1998b). The second, 'genuine', is actually aimed directly at the effective improving or solving of a given problem. Brehony (2005) claims that the majority of New Labour's policies fell somewhere between these. However, what is apparent is New Labour's strong belief in the 'what works' mantra. This was drawn from the firm conviction that 'what works' can be accurately measured, ultimately leading to an 'impatience towards complexity and a demand for unambiguous evidence' Brehony (2005, 41). This demand further supported the widespread use of HST in primary schools in England.

Throughout New Labour's terms in office, it appears that they adopted a stream of ideologically contradictory elements, which formulated their education philosophies.

Brehony (2005, 41) and Gunter and Chapman (2009, 3) highlight these as:

- The strong focus on standards and testing within schools is generating significant difficulties in terms of the promotion of children's creativity, seen as vital for competing in the global economy
- The policies and resources aimed directly at countering the social injustices of poverty and social disadvantage are at variance with New Labour's embrace of neoliberal market forces, legitimised by the wide use of HST.

In terms of the workload and positioning of headteachers, to a certain extent it was business as usual, inasmuch as it continued to be critical for survival to 'play the game'. The introduction of what Thomson (2009, 117) terms 'Accountability System Mark 2' saw the Blair government adopt a 'light touch' system of inspections which, whilst initially being viewed as a backing off, in reality actually placed a significant burden on headteachers to maintain a bureaucratic and time consuming process of self-evaluation. The SEF (Self Evaluation Framework) relied heavily on attainment data, whilst taking into account school context via the use of a value added calculation. The net result was headteachers continued to focus primarily upon the strategies which would positively impact upon pupil data, spending many hours on analysing trends and on the performance management of staff, in order to ensure maximum pupil progress and thus, avoid the ever present threat of 'Special Measures' or going into a Category of Concern. Ending in 2010, New Labour's control of educational policy had continued to focus on the raising of standards, under the umbrella of direct local accountability.

#### **2.2.4 The Coalition and the continuation of the Free Market and promotion of privatisation**

In May 2010, the Conservatives formed a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats. The Coalition inherited an education system dominated by 'a market state approach accompanied by new and more intensive accountability practices, in respect of schools' (Lingard and Sellar 2012, 43). These authors go on to agree with Kerr et al. (2011, 45), and 'see 'Cameronism' as an evolution of new forms of governmentality, within a broader neoliberal hegemonic project that has developed from Thatcher and Blair'. Barker (2010, 11) claims, despite the global economic crisis starting in earnest in September 2008, 'the neoliberal narrative seems not to have eased its grip on the transatlantic imagination'.

The Coalition and post 2015 Conservative Governments have continued to emphasise the importance of reducing public spending. Avis (2011) suggests that this is a useful lever for 'the re-ordering of the relationship between the state and the welfare / public sector. He goes on to focus on the Coalition's concerted campaigns aimed at directly undermining the public sector by freezing employees' pay and conditions (NASUWT 2011).

Michael Gove, as Secretary of State for Education (2010-2014), introduced policies which have continued to significantly alter public education. One of Gove's first tasks was to write to all publicly funded schools in England with an invitation to become an academy. After stating he had 'no ideological objection' to the concept of 'for profit' schools (Guardian 2010), Gove rushed the Academies Bill (DfE 2010a) through parliament, paving the way for the opening of a significant number of academies from September 2010.

By September 2012, a total of 2,309 schools had opted to become academies, a ten-fold increase from May 2010 (Source: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)). This 'success' can be seen to be built upon a 'discourse of derision' (Smith 2011, 101), where the public are constantly told by politicians and the media that the system is 'failing or broken', resulting from a perception of poor discipline, poor teaching and standards, where 'our' children' are being let down or failed by their schools, as supported by the publication of damning test data. The Coalition's answer was their continued belief in free market principles and the premise that competition between schools (providers) would automatically drive up standards. Smith (2011, 102) strongly disputes this claim, stating that there is no evidence to support this assertion.

In 2015, the privatisation of education (Guardian 2012) and health care (Lister 2011) continued to be high on the agenda of the Coalition. Gunter and Fitzgerald (2011, 287) maintain that the post-New Labour world of the Coalition is but a continuation of the neoliberal Thatcherite policies of the past 40 years. The fundamental difference, however, is that New Labour's policy 'drivers' were placed within the doctrine of social reform and civic welfare, contrary to the positioning of the Coalition government's focus on 'disinvestment in and dismantling of public education'.

### **2.3 Raising Standards - The introduction of the National Strategies**

It is clear that 'Standards' have been the common rallying cry for all parties, starting with Callaghan in 1976 and progressing through to 1988, when Baker set out the National Curriculum, claiming that it was the 'key to raising standards' (Abbott et al.

2013, 182), and continuing through the 1990s with New Labour stating within their election manifesto:

There are excellent schools in Britain's state education system. But far too many children are denied the opportunity to succeed. Our task is to raise the standards of every school. (Dale 2000, 350)

Progressing on through to the Conservatives in coalition from 2010, the theme has remained constant, but with much greater focus on the development of the 'free market' via privatisation. This stance is highlighted by the Coalition and Conservative Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, who continued to draw attention to the need to improve standards through the introduction of the private sector; for example:

'Children are not receiving the education they deserve. And today, I want to invite the MPs in those communities to work with me to open up the education system in their areas to the new providers who can raise standards.' (Gove 2012b).

The continuation of the focus on standards has manifested itself in a number of ways. Firstly, a narrowing of the curriculum, as discussed by Crocco and Costigan (2007) and Darling-Hammond (2010), has resulted in a primary focus on the core curriculum subjects of English, maths and science (Wyse et al. 2008). Secondly, the literature continues to demonstrate the inseparable link between standards and HST, which is used to underpin the mechanism of the implementation of neoliberal education policy. Thus, HST becomes an instrument to enforce 'free market' values, a tool by which to directly gauge the performance of competitors, in this case individual schools, when marked against a standardised scoring system (published SATs results). The motivations behind the sustained use of HST have been questioned (Ouston et al. 1998). Jenny Ozga's (2009, 160) phrase 'governing by numbers' succinctly characterise SDA and the link with HST

Deliverology, the control over knowledge selection and transfer, and its associated testing can be viewed as imposing direct school change, primarily focusing upon curriculum and pedagogical controls, for example the implementation of the new National Curriculum and New Labour's Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Roger Beard (2000, 29) provides an in-depth analysis of the outcome of the National Literacy Strategy, stating that:

Significant improvements are reported in the quality of teaching. In the majority of schools, the *National Literacy Project* was also an important catalyst in raising standards of literacy.

Whilst improvements were documented, Webb and Vulliamy (2006a, 28) questioned some findings by stating:

...teachers were generally much more enthusiastic about the NNS than the NLS, which was why it was receiving much less individual teacher and planned whole-school modification. In part, this support was thought to be because teachers regarded their maths teaching as a weakness, prior to the introduction of the strategies, whereas, they considered themselves to be successful teachers of literacy.

The notion of pedagogical control was explored by English et al. (2002, 24), when they undertook a series of semi-structured interviews, involving 30 teachers within 15 primary schools, focusing on the interactivity between teachers and children during the literacy hour. They concluded that:

If teachers are to modify their practice, in order to encourage higher order thinking, they need unambiguous guidelines or the opportunity to identify and work through the contradictions between official advice and their own educational principles. NLS Flier 2 (DfEE 1999), for example, served merely to increase confusion about interactive teaching by warning of the dangers of using interactive teaching for 'cosmetic reasons'.

A degree of confusion over the pedagogy of the National Literacy Strategy is evident here, which might go some way to explain Webb and Vulliamy's (2006a, 17) data:

<b>Teachers' responses to the National Literacy Strategy (N =124)</b>		
Strongly like	Mixed responses	Strongly dislike
19%	68%	14%

**Table 2.2: Teachers' views of the NLS.**

<b>Teachers' responses to the National Numeracy Strategy (N=124)</b>		
Strongly like	Mixed responses	Strongly dislike
52%	45%	3%

**Table 2.3: Teachers' views of the NNS.**

Webb and Vulliamy (2006a, 7) provide an insight into the implementation of the Strategies when they state:

These required teachers to make considerable changes not only in the content of their teaching but also to pedagogy. Shifting government discourses on the theme of pedagogy provide a striking insight into the changing nature of policy-makers' definitions of "teacher professionalism". Prior to the Education Reform Act 1988, schools and teachers were not subject to any prescription concerning curricula or pedagogy and teaching methods, in particular, they were viewed as the product of professional judgement (McCulloch et al. 2000).

The above illustrates how education policy has moved beyond curriculum control into the field of directly impacting upon teaching methods and pedagogies, with its implied doubts, on behalf of successive governments, regarding teaching standards, professionalism and ultimately the quality of education being delivered and the attainment of pupils.

Having seen the introduction of strategies to control teaching methods by New Labour in the 1990s, significant improvements in children's attainment were claimed, but Burnitt (2011, 25) strongly questioned the evidence for this. Citing Galton (2007) who provides strong proof of increased levels of boredom amongst Year 6 pupils whilst revising for their SATs, Burnitt argues that a clear decline in children's enjoyment of school is evident; this is coupled with the pressure / stress of passing attainment milestones (Key Stage 2 SATs). 'I need to get Level 5 if I am to get into the top set' (Galton 2007, 167).

This direct intervention within the classroom was continued by the Coalition government, with the introduction of the New National Curriculum (DfE 2013a). The implications for headteachers are that they are now faced with the task of planning and implementing a new curriculum constructed around the notions of:

- the promotion of the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at school and within wider society
- the preparation of pupils within school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

The use of HST continues, be it with reconfigured modes of measurement, with the replacement of pupil attainment levels at the end of each key stage by a measure of age-related expectation and / or secondary school readiness.

#### **2.4 The current position within primary schools in England**

As primary schools within England continue to progress through the fourth decade of SDA and the associated HST regime, it is vital to explore how subsequent governments have impacted upon headteachers' professional lives.

The ongoing commitment to modernisation, fuelled by the ever increasing demand for a highly skilled workforce for the sake of national economic security and the call for an opening up of education, has been a fundamental element of all recent governmental policy. The modernisations of the curriculum, teaching pedagogies and leadership have taken the form of a number of strands focusing on local level restructuring / autonomy and direct accountability. Whilst I have reasoned that neoliberal reform has brought about centrally driven and regulated SDA with a focus on HST, this has happened within a market place which has offered some freedoms and decentralisation. This has resulted in a situation of simultaneous centralisation,



with the setting up of many different types of independent schools, for example academies and free schools with the aim of meeting local and diverse needs, within an autonomous environment, whilst still under centralised curriculum regulation and the benchmarking of standards imposed by HST.

The 'pull' of the market has been central to all modernisation policy over the past 40 years, with Apple (2004, 18) stating 'the market is only a metaphor not an explicit guide to action. The introduction of the Local Management of Schools (LMS) by the Conservatives (ERA 1988) directly allowed for schools to control their own budgets and thus, take direct control over their staffing. Whilst these freedoms allowed some schools to excel, others have not fared so well, with low pupil numbers resulting in budget deficits, staff redundancies and closures.

Paralleling the ever decreasing role of local authorities initiated by the introduction of ERA, has been the call for the continuous direct accountability of every school, every teacher and headteacher. Given that the free market can only fully function if the consumers are both free and informed in their choice, data must be provided on which to base their selection. Hence, the mechanisms involved within HST have taken on paramount importance to all those involved in the delivery of English education. The current situation is succinctly described by Apple, cited in Nichols and Berliner (2007, 64), as being a shifting of the emphasis from 'student needs to student performance and from what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school'. Currently, this reliance on pupil performance can place many primary schools in a very difficult position, with the end of Key Stage test results and data being the key to potential future parental 'informed' school

selection. It should also be noted that attainment data is now a critical starting point for all Ofsted inspections. This point is illustrated by Mansell (2007) and Glazzard (2014) when they discuss the consequences of falling pupil attainment in terms of negative inspection outcomes and the direct impact upon headteachers.

## **2.5 The movement towards the measurement of outcomes**

Governmental belief in the market through neoliberal reform still dominates policy making, despite many predicting its demise due to the financial crisis of 2008 Scherer (2014). Indeed, the opposite appears to be taking place with Fainstein (2014) pointing to the recent construction of giant stadiums, connected to Olympic and World Cup bids, as manifestations of enduring neoliberal policies, in so much as they actively develop the market by promoting competition. Justification of this massive public investment is given under the banner of increasing tourism, positive urban renewal and promoting national pride and wellbeing. Both Scherer (2014) and Fainstein (2014) point to the resilience of neoliberalism and strongly indicate that these policies will continue to underpin education reform for some time to come.

The drive for ever-improving standards, particularly within the core subjects of English, maths and science, has resulted in the creation of a series of policies directly linked to increasing attainment, as measured through the end of Key Stage 2 SATs. For example, the introduction in 2011 of the Teachers' Standards (DfE 2011a) made clear reference of the requirement for teachers to 'promote good progress and outcomes by pupils' and 'be accountable for pupils' attainment, progress and outcomes' (p.10). This continues to place the raising of standards at the centre of the teacher's role. This notion is further reinforced by the increase of

the SATs floor target from 60% to 65% of pupils achieving Level 4 or above in reading, writing and maths, since below this level a school and / or a teacher can be viewed as failing (DfE 2014a).

## **2.6 Summary**

The literature reviewed within this chapter locates the emergence of SDA and HST within a historical context, illustrating the political doctrines and policies which have driven forward primary school improvement and effectiveness. Whilst the drive to improve standards within English primary schools is a difficult notion to argue against, the literature highlights the incoherencies within the systems constructed around the administration of this drive.

These inconsistencies are evident within the Thatcherism of the New Right, which called for the opening up of the market under the simple notion that direct competition would drive up standards, whilst reducing central government involvement. However, far from reducing direct involvement, the need for performance indicators resulted in much greater top-down involvement with the introduction of the National Curriculum and monitoring systems. Tony Blair's New Left placed education at the forefront of their policies under the banner of social mobility. It too continued to adopt the neoliberal policies of the Right, placing even greater emphasis on performance based accountability, resulting in improving standards being the only measure of a school's effectiveness, with little regard to social equality or mobility.

Thus, the narrow band of measures by which a school performance is judged takes on a highly significant value. Test results indicating children's summative achievement at key points become the starting point of Ofsted inspections and have a substantial impact on their outcomes. This results in these indicators of standards becoming high stakes in nature, with far reaching effects upon all areas of the school community, not just in terms of teachers' professionalism, with controls over curriculum and pedagogies, but also in terms of their job and financial security.

The next chapter builds upon this brief political history to examine in detail how HST has been used and developed to underpin and justify education reform. I also explore how the notion of being competitive in the global market has further promoted full accountability, resulting in the use of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS assessments (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study).

## **Chapter 3 – High Stakes Testing in Primary Schools**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The literature on High Stakes Testing, its rationale and processes is both extensive and diverse. Within this chapter, I aim to identify HST as a key policy strategy within the SDA, and so I track the course of HST, charting its introduction through UK government education reform in England from the early 1990s and how HST has been used to support and justify the SDA over the past 20 years, under both right and left wing governments. I will consult and analyse relevant literature, plus primary sources including official policy documents, Ofsted inspection handbooks and pupil attainment data from the Department of Education, OECD and the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

### **3.1 A brief history and the key features of HST in England**

West (2010, 23) offers a succinct definition of HST when applied to state education within England:

High stakes testing to evaluate the performance of schools has been used in England since the introduction of a national curriculum and associated assessment following the 1988 Education Reform Act. It is used for multiple purposes, but a key function is as an accountability tool: the results of the tests (and inspections) are intended to provide a means of making schools accountable for the education they provide to different stakeholders.

HST may also be viewed as providing key, easily understood data charting the attainment of individual children as they progress through education. Whilst this may initially seem both useful and necessary for all stakeholders, a number of significant issues need to be investigated, with many raising concerns regarding the use of test data and its effect on schools, teachers and children (Barkdale and Thomas 2000; Mansell 2007; West 2010).

The notion of what actually turns a testing system into high stakes is a contested one. Ralph Tabberer, a former Director General of Schools in the Department for Children, Schools and Families, is on record as stating that he considered key stage testing as only being medium stakes in that it provided parents a sense of their children's level of achievement. He also stated that it was incidental that it also provided 'very useful information [...] for policy development and accountability' (DfCSF 2008, 110). Many resist this stance, including the teaching unions, for example NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers). Indeed, a Parliamentary sub-committee report for the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DfCSF 2008, 111) identified what it perceived as the true nature of HST within schools in England. The report draws a clear link between pupil outcomes and their teachers' need to unambiguously demonstrate their positive impact in order to win promotion or gain further financial reward. Failure to meet predetermined performance targets 'may lead to demoralisation, being passed over for promotion, difficulty in finding employment in other schools or leaving the profession altogether' (DfCSF 2008, 111).

The cost for heads was identified as potentially being even higher, with the public humiliation of leading a 'failing school' and interventions by Ofsted and the Local Authority potentially leading to their dismissal and closure of their school. Whilst the report acknowledged the high stakes element with respect to test outcomes for children regarding their ability to progress on to University or employment, it also found that the term high stakes most often referred to schools and teachers, rather than children (DfCSF 2008, 112). Therefore, under the current testing regime, pupil

performance in tests is inextricably linked with school accountability outcomes and will therefore remain high stakes for teaching professionals.

It should be noted that test outcomes are also potentially high stakes for the government itself. If the accountability systems they have set up in order to drive up standards show that targets are not being met, then there is the potential to lose considerable political capital. Testing tools such as PISA and TIMSS have provided strong political evidence prompting education reforms; however, governments are aware of England's perceived underperformance.

Table 3.1 briefly outlines the various policies of the last four decades, which have resulted in the current culture of HST within the primary schools of England. These policies have been instigated by both left and right wing governments, with their origins tracing back to the Education Reform Act of 1988 (DfES).

<b>Date</b>	<b>Key Policy Change</b>	<b>Contribution to HST</b>
1987	Conservative Government publishes The National Curriculum 5-16	Sets out national curriculum and assessment procedures for UK
1988	The Education Reform Act	Establishment of curriculum and assessment councils, (SEAC). Responsible for the moderation of assessments. LMS shifts budgetary control to school and allows parents to select schools. LMS changes role of headteacher to school manager rather than educationalist. GM and CTCs set up outside of LA control.
1990	Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) are brought in at state schools for all seven year olds. Parents' Charter	School data made available and parents able to select schools based upon previous performance
1992	Setting up of Ofsted	External inspection, grading of schools
1994	SATS introduced at the end of Key Stage 2	School data published in national and localised league tables. School performance comes under stakeholder and media scrutiny
1998-9	Introduction of the National Strategies	Pedagogical control within primary schools
1998	School Standards and Framework Act	LEAs and the Secretary of State given power to intervene in schools judged falling by Ofsted. SATs attainment data used as major indicator of performance. Schools given two years to improve or face closure or replacement of leadership team.

1999	Performance-related pay policy	Teachers set pupil performance targets
2002	City academies: the first 3 opened	Schools set up outside of LA control
2004	2003 Green paper Every Child Matters: led to the 2004 Children Act	Personalised learning for all children, outcomes measured by SATs data
2006	Education and Inspections Act	New requirement for local authorities to act more quickly and decisively towards schools who have received an adverse Ofsted report.
2007	GTC	Calls for all national school tests for 7, 11 and 14 year olds to be scrapped.

**Table 3.1: HST timeline.**

The origin of HST in England can be traced back to the neoliberal informed policies of the Thatcher Governments from 1979, which aimed to return to the neoconservative ideals of ‘back to basics’ teaching, with a primary focus on literacy and maths. The resultant focus on testing directly controlled the approach to instruction, since only what was to be tested and thus, reported, became of any consequence (Kohn 2000a).

The introduction of SATs into primary schools in England in the early 1990s was initially based upon the findings of the 1988 *Black Report* (DfES 1988b), produced by the National Curriculum Task Group on Assessment and Testing. It has resulted in the overwhelming majority of pupils undergoing national tests / tasks at the end of both key stages. The major component which transformed these tests / tasks from a useful tool for the measurement of an individual’s abilities and useful indicators of the next steps in learning, with the adoption of a high stakes persona, was the publication of SATs data in national school league tables. These tables are released every December after the tests / tasks are taken in the previous May. A recent survey indicates that 98% of responding parents considered academic achievement to be important or very important in the selection of a school (Good Schools Guide 2012). Therefore, SATs can be viewed as having a critical role in a school’s



continuing success, with respect to attracting new pupils, ensuring growth and, ultimately, survival.

This turns the relevance of pupil outcomes from micro-significance, i.e. of concern to localised stakeholders only, to macro, in which the performance of individual schools are scrutinised, not only at a local level but nationally too. Thus, the introduction of SATs created a blanket of localised accountability in which all schools, regardless of context, were compared against governmentally set floor targets (Barkdale and Thomas 2000; Mansell 2007). HST enabled the creation of a culture of performance and performativity in which all schools would be judged (Ball 2003; Troman et al. 2007). Ball (2003, 216) claims:

Performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic). The performances (of individual subjects or organizations) serve as measures of productivity or output, or displays of 'quality', or 'moments' of promotion or inspection. As such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organization within a field of judgement.

Research shows how this notion of performativity now dominates many aspects of primary school professional life. Ball (2003, 210) discusses the many 'struggles' staff now face as they seek to reconcile the discourse which exists between their own professional values and the absolute necessity to meet the requirements of HST. The importance of this data is highlighted by Ozga (2009, 150) when she highlights how it had grown in terms of 'strength, speed and scope'. She further suggests that the continuous production and management of data within schools is now seen as essential to their governance.

Coupled with the use of annual testing has been the introduction of inspections carried out by Ofsted. Whilst these inspections have, over the last 20 years, undergone significant change in their format, their primary focus has remained on raising standards of attainment and on accounting for school performance to parents and policymakers in England (Ozga 2012; Baxter and Clarke 2013).

Ozga (2012, 447) highlights how test data was (and remains) used to structure inspections:

Handbooks of inspection specified in exhaustive detail how evidence should be gathered and analysed, and put the emphasis on objective data analysis rather than professional judgement. New kinds of inspectors were recruited and most school inspections came to be carried out by Additional Inspectors (AIs) employed by commercial companies.

However, recent inspections under the Coalition Government (Ofsted 2013), have aimed to place more emphasis on inspectors' professional judgements, rather than inspection by tick box (Baxter and Clarke 2013). Nevertheless, pupil attainment data remains the backbone underpinning the evaluation of school performance. It is important to note that the continuous pressure to improve England's education system, by constant monitoring, is not solely a result of successive governments' altruistic wishes to serve its youth well, but is:

prompted by an increasing emphasis on international league tables, such as that produced by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development). In data tables, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), England is viewed as underperforming against comparable countries (Baxter and Clarke 2013, 702).

The notion of the creation of a world class education system, producing a world class workforce, is one which is central to all education policy put forward by the New Labour and Coalition Governments. Thus, they view competing and doing well against our European and American trade partners as critical to our continued

economic stability and growth. The importance of this was recently highlighted by Andreas Schleicher of the OECD when he stated:

Because of rapid economic and social change, schools have to prepare students for jobs that have not yet been created, technologies that have not yet been invented and problems that we don't yet know will arise (OECD 2013).

OECD data has recently been used to gauge the performance of English schools, despite the fact that other SATs and GCSE data was available. The importance placed by successive UK governments on the PISA and TIMSS data has led them to become the dominant methodology of analysis, emphasising the drive to make the education system world class and highlighting its failings against other systems (Gove 2012c).

### **3.2. New Labour and High Stakes Testing**

The driver behind the New Labour Government's commitment to HST is given by Gregory and Clarke (2003, 67):

The current [1997 – 2010] Labour Government has reaffirmed that raising educational standards continues to be a main priority and has expressed a strong desire that all children should leave school with the knowledge and skills to succeed in the world of work (Morris 2002a). The government requires all schools to have high expectations and to set high standards for all students, regardless of their background.

The key elements here are, firstly, 'all schools to have high expectations and to set high standards' and, secondly, 'for all students, regardless of their background' Gregory and Clarke (2003, 67). These two simple sentences set the fundamentals of New Labour's education policy during their 13 year tenure.

The widely held concern regarding the fall in standards and, therefore, Britain's ability to compete within a global market, were central themes early in New Labour's term in office. Tomlinson (2001, 2) states:

Those committed to equality continued to argue for a meritocracy based on equality of opportunity, which presumed an equal start, unencumbered by well documented social class inequalities.

New Labour's stance was straightforward; 'create an education system directly aimed at providing the human resources necessary to place Britain at the forefront of the developing technology based global market' (Tomlinson 2001, 4). Tomlinson also draws on the human capital theories of Vaizey (1958) and Becker to rationalise this approach:

...which suggested that improving people's skills and capabilities makes them act in new productive ways, and assumed that investment in education will improve the quality of the workforce, which will in turn improve economic growth and productivity (Becker 1964, 4).

Therefore, the emphasis within education became the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, hence the rapid introduction of the National Strategies. The necessity of having an able and ready young workforce underpinned all of New Labour's education policy. However, it is worth mentioning that Robinson (1997 and 1999), cited in Tomlinson (2001, 4), noted that 'there was little evidence on the actual relationships between school performance, credentials and national economic competitiveness'. Nevertheless, under New Labour, education was viewed as a method of creating or preparing the young as a direct means of sustaining or improving the economy and very little else. Tomlinson (2001, 7) reinforces this by arguing, 'an overall conclusion is that education has moved from being a key pillar of the welfare state to being a prop for a global market economy'. Therefore, the focus on raising and measuring standards, using HST, at local, national and international levels, became paramount, not only to the education of our children, but to the success, or indeed survival, of our nation as an effective force within the global market place (Cole 2005).

The notion of the market and social justice underpins the doctrine of the Third Way, the idea promoted by Prime Minister Blair when he declared in 1998 that:

‘The Third Way approach to the challenge of modern employment is about extending welfare to work . . . and investing in the skills people need in a more insecure and demanding labour market’ (Tomlinson 2001, 5).

Coupled with this is the belief in social inclusion, which Lister (1998, 216) views as a rejection of traditional Labour values of ‘equality of opportunity - with an emphasis on education, training and paid work rather than redistribution of income through the tax-benefit system’.

In order to create a system enabling ‘equality of opportunity’ within a neoliberal free market, standardisation of provision once again became vital. Simply, now the identification of standards within all schools was not only to underpin the provision of education to enable us to compete globally, but also to guarantee equity in terms of enabling all to become part of the ‘success’ resulting from globalisation. This refocusing was a direct consequence of the backlash resulting from the previous two decades of ‘Yuppie’ (Young Upwardly Mobile Professional) greed, which had left many disenfranchised.

As the 1990s progressed, the social exclusion of large groups and individuals had become a worrying trend within society, receiving great media scrutiny and becoming the focus for intense political attention (Blair 1998). During the period from the 1960s to 1980s, Western governments had focused on ‘the disadvantaged, later the underclass, and then the socially excluded, as victims of economic exclusion and poverty’ (Tomlinson 2001, 3). As a result of successive governments’ ideological commitment to the free market, social exclusion became an integral

element of society, with its associated concerns over crime, youth anti-social behaviour and drugs. Tomlinson (2001, 3) suggests this resulted in a situation where 'people became fearful of their children attending schools with those bearing the hallmarks of exclusion'. Therefore, schools could not be allowed to fail their children and therefore, must ensure high standards and be held to account. The net result of this, Hursh (2005) and Mansell (2007) claim was an avalanche of standardised testing and inspections aimed at combatting many of the issues initially raised by Callaghan back in 1976. Mansell (2007, 25) frames this when he states:

There was a need for safeguards to ensure that no pupil was missing out on the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. Trust in the profession could not be absolute. Parents did need information about their children's progress. And, as hardly needs stating, in these days of 'education, education, education', public debate around what goes on in our classrooms is legitimate and must be welcomed.

Mansell (2007) provides a picture of how these 'safeguards' are to be used when he discusses the language of the free market enthusiast. Here, he presents a simple, but nonetheless true, view that the bottom line within education today is data, be it test scores or inspection reports. This places a 'value' upon a school in terms of how it is perceived at a local level. If results are low or fall, schools risk losing the custom of parents, resulting in job losses or even closure.

Under New Labour, children in England have become the most tested in the world (Mansell 2007, xiv). An important element of my research will focus upon the discourse initiated by what has come to be seen as New Labour's contrariwise stance, that is, the contradiction between excellence and enjoyment, or between the focus on 'testing, testing, testing' (Mansell 2007, xiv) and the ideals put forward by Tony Blair in the run up to New Labour's election victory in 1997. 'Education is

about more than exams. Education is about opening minds not just to knowledge but to insight, beauty and inspiration' (Blair 1996). It is difficult to see how these high principles could ever flourish under New Labour policies. Smyth and Gunter (2009) draw on the work of Mansell (2007) regarding what he calls a "Stalinist" approach to testing, whereby "teachers are forced not merely to pay attention to results, but to live or die by them" (p.14).

Given the extraordinary potential 'cost' of HST under New Labour reforms, it is unsurprising to learn of headteacher and teacher stress, as graphically illustrated through the findings of Troman (2000), and Phillips et al. (2007):

A number of the teachers had become ill prior to the inspection and were absent from school when it took place. Mary explained that: In the week just before I had the breakdown, the Ofsted inspection was looming, also appraisals, SATs and parents' evenings. It was unfortunate that all those came at one point. So it was just overwhelming, I just couldn't cope with it and woke up in the middle of the night sobbing uncontrollably (Phillips et al. 2007, 347).

The Cambridge Review, released in October 2009, called for a number of significant changes to primary based assessment, including the removal of SATs and an abandonment of the discredited dogma that there is no alternative to SATs. The Review further identified the loss of a broad and balanced curriculum and highlighted the stress that testing inflicts on teachers, parents and children. Note was also made of the limited impact of the expensive literacy strategy and the limited success in closing the achievement gap (Alexander and Flutter 2009ab). The current themes of SATs testing, inspections and how headteachers position themselves and their staff are further explored within Chapter 5.

### 3.2.1 The Coalition and High Stakes Testing

With the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government came a continuation of New Labour's focus on both raising standards and accountability, resulting in all schools being held 'properly to account' (Cabinet Office 2010, 28). However, the focus had shifted, with inspections now targeted on 'areas of failure' (p.29). The collection, analysis and publishing of 'high stakes' data would underpin this process, as stated by West et al. (2011, 57):

Performance data on schools will be published and external assessment will continue; thus the indicators that are so important for hierarchical and market accountability are set to remain.

With this in mind, the high levels of accountability, 'root out all under-performance' stance adopted by the Coalition Government can be viewed as being driven from a very different position from that of New Labour's social equity stance. Rather than the promotion of social inclusion, it may be viewed as a support mechanism (be it an unobvious one) for the privatisation agenda, previously discussed. Strong evidence for this comes from the Coalition's continued expansion of the Academies Programme and also the creation of 'Free' schools; once again the political rhetoric is one of school improvement and parental choice. Wright (2012, 287) offers an insight:

The 'supply side revolution' is represented in the [Coalition] policy discourse as a means by which the state can 'catch up' with the expectations of a post-bureaucratic society by removing the bureaucratic and legislative obstacles that prevent individuals taking control of education. In the government's words this means 'taking power away from Whitehall and putting it into the hands of people and communities' (DfE 2010b, 1). The government suggests that this empowerment of people and communities will improve standards in education 'through the mechanisms of local democratic accountability, competition, choice, and social action'.

Avis (2011, 431) develops this further by directly linking the Coalition's commitment to autonomy and school performance:



Despite the emphasis that Coalition ministers place on devolving power and autonomy to the lowest level possible, the state nevertheless sets the direction of travel against which performance is judged.

This shifting of power downwards to an individual school level is aimed, in principle, at empowering at a local level, whilst enabling innovative and creative practices, which will serve to enhance service delivery (Avis 2011). The justification and success measurement of this policy is found primarily via the use of increased local accountability which, within education, means a concentrated focus upon the HST of individual schools.

### **3.3 HST and its effects on staff**

Given that HST in primary schools in England now occupies a significant proportion of the professional lives of both headteachers and their staff, it is important to fully understand the mechanism and rationale behind its use. Supovitz (2010) advises that, whilst HST can motivate change in teaching methods, these tend, however, to be superficial adjustments aimed primarily at improving test scores, rather than fully embedded knowledge and understanding. Linked to this notion are the motivators which underpin this practice, which are discussed below.

#### **3.3.1 Performance related pay**

In 1999, the New Labour Government introduced a performance related pay policy (HMSO 1998), which directly linked pay progression to pupil attainment. At the start of each academic year, attainment targets are set and agreed between the head and teacher, which outline the progress each child is required to make within the year. Thus, each year's performance data, as often measured by summative testing (end of key stage or optional SATs), becomes high stakes in nature. Currently, there is much debate over the effectiveness of performance related pay (Marsden

2009; OECD 2013), with the teaching unions strongly opposing it (NUT 2015), citing its ineffectiveness in terms of both raising standards and motivating teachers.

### **3.3.2 Outcomes for headteachers**

In the last five years, since 2010, 30 state schools-related people have been knighted or appointed dames (Mansell 2015). These honours have a tendency to be connected to pupil achievements, measured by HST outcomes. This reinforces the notion that successive governments continue to place great emphasis on outcomes and reward people accordingly.

A recent report (Guardian 2014) highlights the process to be adopted by Kent LA regarding the replacement of heads whose schools have failed an Ofsted inspection, resulting in them being placed into Special Measures. Those heads with two or more years' experience are to be placed on "gardening leave" and a replacement found. Some heads within the report used the term "disappeared" to describe what they considered summary dismissal. The resultant fear of removal, due to poor HST outcomes, the report suggests, is a major contributing factor in the current shortages of those wishing to progress to headship. The adoption by many local authorities of punitive sanctions, rather than a supportive approach, is currently well documented within the general press. This illustrates what Courtney and Gunter (2015) term a 'get off my bus' mentality. Whilst this work specifically focuses upon the manipulation of the teaching workforce, I argue that the same ethos of getting the 'right people on board' is equally applicable to headship.

West (2010) advises that HST has given rise to a number of negative effects, including institutional consequences, 'distorting and corrupting effects' (Amrein and Berliner 2002, 5) or 'highly dysfunctional consequences' (Goldstein 2004, 10). One of these negative effects, that of poor teacher retention has recently been highlighted within the media (Guardian 2015) and is currently being investigated by the University of Nottingham as part of a study funded by DfE (due for publication in 2016). Whilst it would be inaccurate to completely attribute the high attrition rate, of nearly 50,000 teachers leaving the profession annually, solely as a consequence of HST enforced accountability, it should be noted that many cite workload and 'teacher bashing' as significant factors. Both these issues are connected to maximising pupil outcomes and the public's perception of teacher underperformance, as measured by HST.

The power of HST can also be seen to have had an impact on headteacher recruitment, with significant numbers of vacancies having to be re-advertised due to lack of applicants. For example, this more than doubled to 44% for headship vacancies in London between 2012 and 2013. This situation is due, not solely to retirement, but to the lack of senior leaders willing to take what they perceive as a significant risk, given the imposition of ever rising targets (Richardson 2013).

### **3.4 Professional life under HST**

It is important to understand the difference between the HST (Ofsted) regime, introduced in the 1990s, and the previous inspections carried out under Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education. McClure (1986), in Baxter and Clarke (2013, 706), states:

HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) was largely composed of a group of full-time education professionals whose role was not ... a means of exercising control, but of affording assistance, often taking more of the role of critical friend, as 'supportive agents of change'.

Baxter and Clarke (2013) claim that the shift from HMI to Ofsted inspections came about, in part, not only because of concerns about falling standards, but also because of increasing doubts about the 'professional culture and judgement of the Inspectorate, in particular the suspicion that they were inclined towards liberal / permissive / child-centred pedagogy' (p.709). From 1992 onwards, the focus of inspections was to be very much on 'raising the bar' and making schools directly accountable for their performance, with accolades for those deemed successful and punitive measures for those falling below prescribed targets. These schools were to be named and shamed, re-inspected until their attainment data improved or, failing this, a new headteacher would be appointed or the school would even be closed. Thus, the link between HST and school improvement was made and is still sustained 20 years later. Even back in the early 1990s, many had doubts over whether HST would be an effective method of promoting school improvement (Allington and McGill-Franzen 1992; Shavelson et al. 1992; Herman and Golan 1993). The concerns these researchers raised included, teacher and pupil stress, which is explored within subsequent chapters.

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter has sought to track the introduction of HST regimes within the English education system since the early 1990s. It has provided evidence, based on wide research, of how HST has been used to promote the neoliberal and neoconservative ideals of a free market and competition within the public sector domain. The brief history provided outlines the various policies and practices

implemented within primary schools in England over the last 20 years and aims to start to highlight the seductive nature of HST in its provision of 'accurate' data on which to both judge performance and build school improvement.

Within this chapter, I have sought to examine the political and social drivers behind the continued use of HST and how it is now a fundamental element of education practice and reform. I explore the differing motivations between New Labour's social justice and the Right's call for free market forces to improve the breed. I have also examined how HST has become inextricably linked to the economic and social health of our nation, through all parties' calls for the production of a workforce which is able to meet the requirements of a technology-based global trade market. This need to be able to compete globally has brought calls for an accurate measure, through the use of PISA and TIMSS, of our academic performance against our trade rivals.

Finally, I have started to explore how school inspections have shifted their position from the pre-ERA 'critical friend' era of HMI to the HST nature of Ofsted, where schools are held directly accountable for all pupil attainment outcomes and where test data forms the starting point of any inspection. Within subsequent chapters, I will continue to explore the nature of HST in terms of its impact upon the professional lives of teachers and headteachers, with respect to their agency and practice. I will also examine literature connected to the motivation of and stress experienced by headteachers and will widen the field to include children of primary school age.

Having explored the political history of and motivations for the quest by recent governments for school improvement and its enforcement by localised accountability, the next chapter will focus upon how socio-economic context directly impacts upon HST outcomes.

## **Chapter 4 – Socio-economic context and HST**

### **4.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I examine the factors which define the extensive variance in the socio-economic contexts in which primary schools operate in England. I further outline the factors which directly affect pupil attainment within these schools. Given that standards as measured by HST is the primary indicator by which schools are judged the impact of context can be seen as critical.

### **4.1 Investigating the equality of HST in relation to socio-economic context**

Before exploring evidence regarding the defining and quantifying of the socio-economic context of schools, it is important to have a clear grasp of any 'allowances' made within the HST regime operating in England for the possible effects context might have on a child's performance at the end of their primary education. The Coalition (2010-2015) and current Conservative Government (from 2015), as previously highlighted, have placed great emphasis on the end of key stage SATs, viewing this data as an effective means of gauging and sustaining school improvement. Part of this school improvement process has been the continuous raising of the floor targets, with a current expectation of 65% of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 achieving Level 4 or above in both English and maths, with a minimum level for English of 92% and for maths 90% (DfE 2014a). It is important to note, these targets apply to all English primary schools, regardless of context. It is now timely to consider whether this is indeed fair and if it actually provides an accurate picture of the true quality of each school.

Lupton (2004) argues that both educational attainment and school quality are typically lower in disadvantaged areas. She draws her research from a sample of

case studies of four schools, all serving neighbourhoods within the top 3% of the most deprived wards in the country, using 1991 Census data. She highlighted three significant findings. Firstly, disadvantaged contexts provoke a greater number of additional management responsibilities, aimed at regulating behaviour and attendance, as well as fulfilling more complex welfare roles (Lupton 2004, 34). The meeting of these additional management responsibilities and roles were not viewed as extras aimed at significantly improving pupil outcomes, but as 'necessary responses, in order to facilitate essential teaching and learning'. Secondly, these process implications would more likely make the achievement of a high quality of education more difficult in areas of high deprivation. Finally, the research suggests that the 'different types' of deprived areas have different implications for schools and that some are more conducive to delivering a high quality education than others. This indicates that simple measures of deprivation, for example free school meals data and even the more complex methods of classification, such as the IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index), might fail to provide an accurate picture of context. Thus highlighting some of the criticisms of Townsend's (1979) model as outlined within Chapter 1.

This creates two arguments concerning the use of HST and floor targets as measures of school 'effectiveness'. Firstly, floor targets are nationally imposed and therefore fail to take into account local school context; they assume all children have the same capacity to access the curriculum on entry to school, which is obviously not the case, for example, in schools with a high EAL (English as an Additional Language) population. Secondly, it judges school performance solely on outcomes in terms of standardised tests and assumes that this provides an



accurate picture of both teacher and management effectiveness. This chapter and the next examine the various contexts headteachers operate in, and how their own professional practice and experience is used to cope with the demands of HST.

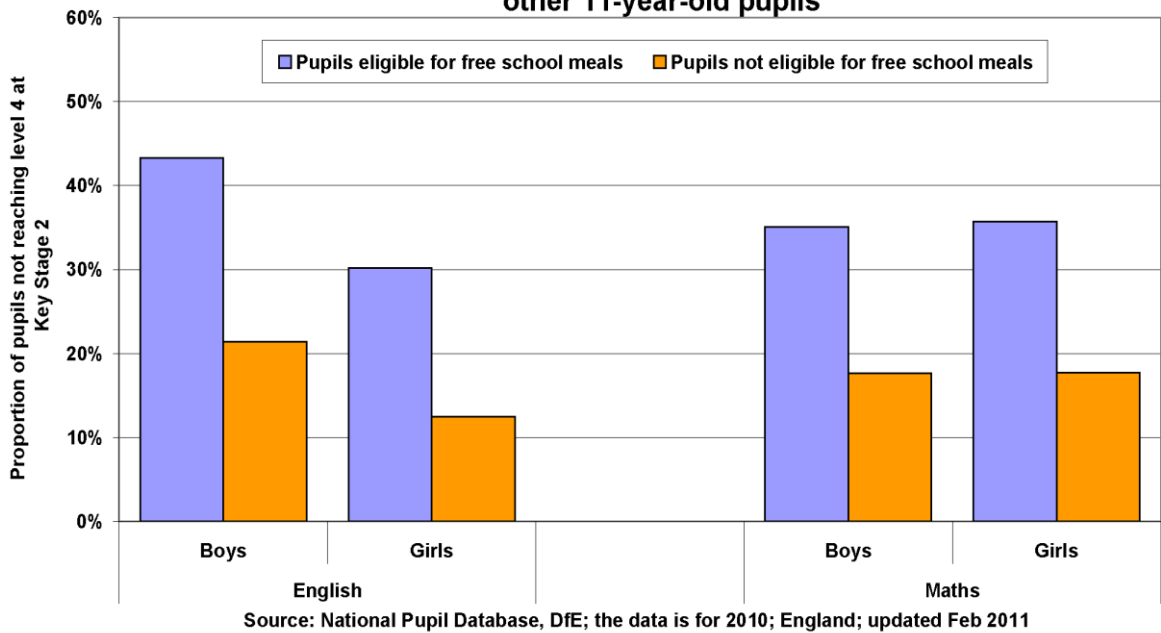
## **4.2 Standards Driven Agenda, HST and socio-economic context**

The links between context and school performance are complex. Using appropriate literature, I have divided these links into two distinct areas: firstly, those factors which impact upon HST performance, which are outside the direct control of the school, for example the quality of housing and rate of crime; secondly, those elements of school life which are under the jurisdiction of the headteacher, for example the quality of teaching and learning.

### **4.2.1 Understanding and quantifying socio-economic context**

The Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander and Flutter 2009ab), states that the gravest threat to more than 3,000,000 children is poverty. The Review highlights the advantages given to those children born into stable families, indicating that this, along with economic comfort, results in greater achievement than for those born into deprivation. The Cambridge Primary Review (CPR) offers clear evidence of higher attainment by those children not receiving free school meals during end of Key Stage 2 testing, than by those living in deprivation (Figure 4.1).

**11-year-old pupils eligible for free school meals are around twice as likely not to achieve basic standards in literacy and numeracy as other 11-year-old pupils**



**Figure 4.1 Effect of context on end of KS2 attainment**

While the CPR draws attention to what it terms, these ‘bleak statistics’ (p.14), it also highlights recent neuroscience-based research, which has provided strong evidence of the detrimental effects of growing up within environments of low stimulation to children’s pre-frontal cortices, an area of the brain associated with problem-solving, resulting in children growing up within areas of affluence being up to a year ahead, by the age of three, of those living in deprivation (Nelson and Bloom 1997; Glaser 2000; Lipina and Colombo 2009; Raizada and Kishiyama 2010; Fox et al. 2010). Therefore, it could be argued that schools working within affluent areas, where households have open access to resources and amenities, already have a significant advantage from the moment the children enter school, resulting in it being much easier to meet the accountability markers.

In order to develop a conceptualisation of how the socio-economic contexts of individual schools can be quantified and to fully understand the significance of this variation with respect to pupil attainment, I make reference to the IDACI. This is an

index, calculated by the Department for Communities and Local Government, which provides an accurate measure for local areas, termed Lower Level Super Output Areas (LSOA), of the proportion of children under the age of 16 who live in low income households. The LSOAs are similar in size to electoral wards, containing approximately 1,500 people. The IDACI is expressed as a number ranging from 1; the most deprived, to 32,482, the most affluent, with the higher number corresponding to the total number of wards within England.

The IDACI is calculated using seven distinct dimensions of deprivation, termed Domain Indices. To give an overall contextual view of the participating schools in this study, five of these Domain Indices were used within the construction of the Headteacher Questionnaire and the Interview Schedule for the Data Collection Phase; these are outlined below.

#### **4.2.2 Income**

Diamond and Giddens (2005) highlight that the poor in Britain are amongst the most deprived in the industrialised world. They highlight a widening gap, which continued to grow under New Labour (source, [www.poverty.org.uk](http://www.poverty.org.uk)). Goulden and Christoforou (2012) reason that this gap will continue to widen further under the recent Coalition. The result of this widening gap is the generation of inequalities between differing classes, particularly in terms of life chances, when linked to educational achievements, as well as health care (Callender 2004; Reay et al. 2005; Wilkinson 2005).

Whilst Ruth Kelly (2005, 3), New Labour's Secretary of State for Education, aimed for a society where 'ability flows to the top irrespective of an individual's background,' Reay (2006) claims that this has been unsuccessful, citing the failure of substantial investment to close the primary age attainment gap between children from differing socio-economic backgrounds.

Michael Gove, Coalition Secretary of State for Education, 2010-14, states:

But wherever one looks at the education system, today the denial of poor children's rights to their intellectual inheritance is everywhere apparent. Of the 75,000 children on free school meals each year (about 1 in 8 of all pupils), four out of ten fail to get even a single 'C' grade GCSE (Gove 2009).

There is still a clear governmental commitment to addressing the attainment disadvantage associated with low income. The work of Hall and Raffo (2009), which focuses upon 'micro' and 'meso' level studies, is used to further conceptualise the link between income and the perceptions of headteachers working within areas of both low and high socio-economic deprivation. The work of Sacker et al. (2002) is used to provide a historical background for the link between family income and the resultant material (resource) deprivation which, in turn, influences the effect of parental involvement on pupil achievement.

#### **4.2.3 Housing / Environment**

Garner and Raudenbush (1991), Thrupp and Lupton (2006) and Camina and Iannone (2014) offer substantial insights into the negative effects of poor housing, in terms of its quality and overcrowding, and the effects of these factors on children's attainment at school. Hence, the housing context has a direct impact upon a primary school and vice-versa. Gibbons and Machin (2002) highlight how soaring house prices and the proximity of Ofsted recognised highly achieving schools is

now commonplace, however, this is perhaps not wholly due to the 'education effect', since good schools tend to be located in 'better' neighbourhoods, which are quieter and with lower rates of crime. It is, therefore, problematic to directly link higher property values with resultant good schools; conversely, housing deprivation and attainment is an area to be explored within the data analysis phase of the thesis.

#### **4.2.4 Education experiences and attainment of parents**

The direct involvement of parents with their children's education and learning experiences was identified as highly significant in terms of future attainment via the work of Desforbes and Abouchaar (2003) and the resultant government perspectives were identified by Burnitt (2010, 2):

Over the last decade, New Labour in England and the Republicans (and more recently the Democrats under Obama) in the USA have focused on the importance of parental support in the success of children's attainment within state schools. This has led to a number of initiatives and policies, for example, Excellence in Schools (DfES 1997) and Excellence and Enjoyment (DfES 2003) in England and Project Appleseed (2010) in the USA.

Kohl et al. (2000) and Desforbes and Abouchaar (2003) have studied the family factors which potentially have a direct negative influence on parental involvement. One of these was identified as parental education level; they suggested a strong link between parent's views of school and their own experiences of education, which could result in substantial problems in terms of their support of their own children. The lack of academic success was viewed as a significant barrier, since an understanding of curriculum concepts and content was seen as a vital element in parents actively supporting their children's learning at home. Thus, any lack in their own academic success denies parents the skills and confidence necessary to operate within what could be viewed as a predominately middle class and threatening 'academic' environment. It therefore could be claimed that schools

themselves, though perhaps unwittingly, act as agents of segregation, presenting barriers to parental engagement.

The lack of experience and confidence to interact with school is predominately an issue within areas of high deprivation, the net result being the active avoidance of direct contact and little enthusiastic support of a child’s learning.

#### 4.2.5 Quality of life

At present, the notion of local accountability (that of individual headteachers and their schools) is inextricably linked to HST. I argue that the quality of a child’s life is, in itself, a significant factor in the resultant success of the school, simply because the school’s success is measured solely by that of its children’s achievement.

The detailed report, *‘Poorer children’s educational attainment: how important are attitudes and behaviour?’* commissioned by the Joseph Roundtree Foundation (Goodman et al. 2010), provides a thorough insight directly linking socio-economic position (SEP) and resultant contextual issues with future child attainment, at both key stages within primary school. Table 4.1 illustrates the significant gap of approximately 23% at both key stages between children from the poorest and the richest socio-economic contexts.

	Poorest	2	Middle	4	Richest
<b>Key Stage 1 (aged 7) % reaching expected level</b>	73.1	82.2	86.8	90.3	95.9
<b>Key Stage 2 (aged 11) % reaching expected level</b>	74.2	84.0	90.5	92.9	97.0

**Table 4.1: Educational outcomes (percentage reaching expected level) by SEP quintile. Average outcome by SEP quintile (Goodman et al. 2010, 27).**

Goodman et al. (2010) identify a number of key contextual factors which dramatically affect attainment; these include:

- Number and age of siblings
- Enforcement of routines, including bedtimes
- Birth weight, breastfeeding and smoking during pregnancy
- Home learning environment
- Family closeness
- Computer at home
- Internet access.

All of these factors will have a significant effect on a child's ability to access the curriculum and thus, attain highly within standardised tests. Limited access to a computer and out of school experiences have been shown to have very detrimental effects on pupil attainment (McPake et al. 2004, Horgan 2007).

#### **4.2.6 Crime rate**

The complex interplay between school life and the life experienced by young children on the other side of the school gates is the subject of ongoing research. Jaggia and Kelly-Hawke (1999), working in the United States, identified a significant negative effect upon pupil performance in proportion to increased crime rate. Their data indicates that an increase in the neighbourhood crime rate, from 4% to 8%, would result in the proportion of students performing poorly increasing from 37% to 44% in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade (year 5 within the UK) and from 42% to 47% in the 12th grade (year 11 within the UK). A link between 'street life' and its negative effects on child attainment is evident. Goodman et al. (2010, 11) support this view:

Overcrowding and living in a noisy environment have been associated with poor sleep patterns (Fabian Society 2005). Moreover, children living in disadvantaged communities are more likely to be exposed to environmental hazards, such as crime, violence and drug misuse; demonstrated to have an adverse impact on child development (Aber et al. 1997). Disadvantaged communities are more

likely to lack safe places for children to play outdoors, thus promoting inactivity and adding to the obesity problem, as well as reducing the opportunity to build peer relationships.

Cook and Goss (1996), cited in Ellen and Austin-Turner (1997, 839), reference studies dating back to the 19th century, which present strong evidence for how the 'values and behaviour of young people are shaped or influenced by their peers, for better or for worse. Peer pressure can lure young people into dangerous or criminal behaviour'.

Consequently, primary schools operating within areas with high crime rates face a number of especially difficult challenges, firstly to keep their children safe and engaged and secondly, to constantly strive to meet the ever more demanding floor targets for literacy and numeracy attainment at the end of each key stage. The enormity of this task, in terms of keeping the children focused and on task, is put into perspective by the work of Garbarino et al. (1992) and Martinez and Richters (1993) when they highlight the emotional trauma possibly resulting from witnessing violent crime first-hand. Ellen and Austin-Turner (1997) progress to suggest that a possible side effect of crime and violence could be children leading more sheltered and isolated lives, simply because either the children and / or their parents are too frightened to venture outside their homes and thus, to take an active part in community activities. They go on to propose the idea that this social isolation insulates the children from the effects of the neighbourhood, whilst enhancing the influence of the more immediate family. They reason that these children may be exposed to fewer learning opportunities, becoming more distrustful of others and interacting far less. Thus, 'families living in high-crime areas may be denied the potential benefits that flow from building close social networks and pooling



community resources', including schools (Ellen and Austin-Turner 1997, 842). This erosion of trust and direct contact with school by parents ultimately leads to low levels of involvement, especially in the light of government policy, which holds parents directly responsible for their children's behaviour (Guardian 2008). How these factors directly affect headteacher perceptions, positioning and practice is explored in detail within the next section.

### **4.3 Connecting socio-economic context to performativity within a culture of accountability**

To further develop a greater understanding of what I term the 'real reality' of everyday primary school life, I have selected to consult literature from within two broad areas. Firstly, I look at those works which offer an insight into how children act within, and perceive, school, linking these to the role and perceptions of teachers. These I term the 'internal community factors', since these actions take place within, and are under the direct control of, the school. The second area is the 'external community factors', which focuses on the actions and impact of parents. Both of these areas are examined in terms of how they directly affect a school's localised accountability, via the use of HST, and how they impact upon a headteacher's own direct accountability.

### **4.4 The 'Internal Community Factors'; HST within differing socio-economic contexts**

#### **4.4.1 Children's motivation**

The work of Palmer (2005) illustrates the importance of the links between motivation and the attainment of knowledge / understanding. However, when the need to motivate children, in order to promote both learning and enjoyment, is allied to a HST regime, a significant discourse is generated:

[The] belief in the power of conventional summative assessment techniques to be objective and efficient, to motivate present performance and to predict future performance is being challenged by a range of research evidence that identifies the significant flaws in these assumptions. Moreover, the assumptions highlight the worrying price that the use of assessment to measure and control extracts, including reduced motivation and significantly lower performance on the part of students (Black and Wiliam 1998). At a more macro level 'jumping through assessment hoops' and 'playing the league tables game' are not inappropriate metaphors for what is increasingly seen as a poor substitute for genuinely enhancing the quality of delivery systems (Broadfoot and Black 2004, 20).

These concerns are further voiced by Harlen and Deakin-Crick (2003) when they reference the growing international research evidence, which strongly indicates that summative assessment (SATs within the HST agenda) directly inhibits the use of effective formative assessment and has a significant demotivating effect, particularly on less successful pupils, leading to a widening of the attainment gap. They progress to underpin what is, perhaps, seen as a very simple 'truth' of summative assessment. That is:

'The association of testing with a negative impact on motivation contrasts with the view, widely held among politicians, parents and some of the education community, that testing pupils raises standards' (p.170).

Kellaghan et al. (1996) maintain that, whilst increased scores may result over time, this could be a function of growing familiarity on the part of teachers and pupils of the tests, rather than greater knowledge and understanding. Work carried out by Koretz (1988), Koretz et al. (1991), Kohn (2000ab) and Linn (2000) strongly supports this stance.

Concentrating solely on assessment outcomes has resulted in a curriculum narrowing, with schools focusing on test content and teaching to this, resulting in teachers adopting approaches which do not match the preferred learning style of many students (Johnston and McClune 2000). The net result is less or even no use

of effective formative assessment, with a subsequent loss of understanding on behalf of the teacher regarding the children's learning needs. This gives rise to ineffectual or inappropriate learning opportunities, resulting in a loss of motivation and in some cases self-confidence and esteem.

#### **4.4.2 Children's aspirations and resilience**

To position the importance and role of pupil aspirations, I draw extensively from research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, (Goodman et al. 2010). Their findings provide persuasive evidence of the significant gap in attainment between children coming from the poorest and richest backgrounds (as illustrated within Table 4.1). According to Goodman et al. (2010, 6):

Poor children who perform well in Key Stage tests at age 7 are more likely than rich children to fall behind by age 11, and poor children who perform badly at age 7 are less likely to improve their ranking compared to children from better-off backgrounds, which is an important factor behind the widening gap.

It is widely known that aspirations and attitudes to education differ significantly within varying socio-contexts (Chowdry et al. 2009; Jones and Schoon 2008; Gregg and Washbrook 2008). Again, this is effectively encapsulated by Goodman et al. (2010, 6):

Parental aspirations and attitudes to education vary strongly by socio-economic position (SEP); with 81% of the richest mothers saying they hope their 9-year-old will go to university, compared with only 37% of the poorest mothers. Such adverse attitudes to education of disadvantaged mothers are one of the single most important factors associated with lower educational attainment at age 11.

It should be noted that poorer children tend to view themselves as scholastically less able and are less likely to believe that school results are important in life and thus, are less likely to aspire within a HST environment. However, whilst this is true, their levels of school enjoyment and cooperative behaviour differ little from those of

more affluent children, a fact which perhaps is contrary to the perceptions of many parents and teachers (Goodman et al. 2010). Further data (Table 4.2) by Goodman et al. (2010, 31) provides strong evidence of the limited effect schools have on closing the socio-economic contextual gap in terms of child attainment at 11.

Parental education and family background	29%
Parental attitudes and behaviours	20%
Child attitudes and behaviours	19%
Schools	14%
Pre-school environments	3%
Missing data	1%
Unexplained	14%

**Table 4.2: Explaining the gap between the poorest and the richest: decomposition of direct effects at age 11. Goodman et al. (2010, 31).**

This data illustrates that approximately 50% of the effects directly linked to child attainment at 11 are due to parental influences and take place outside the school gates. They are therefore beyond the control of both institutional practice and policy. Within the SDA, however, schools are held wholly responsible for pupils' attainment. The data highlights both the considerable effect parents have on their children's aspirations and the limited capability schools have to either nurture or initiate future ambition and attainment. This theme of 'being out of the school's control' is further explored by Thomas (1995), who researched the effect that both positive and negative parenting had upon the end of Key Stage 1 attainment data. I argue therefore, that the ignoring of these influences creates an uneven playing field, resulting in heads working within areas of deprivation being more vulnerable to the negative effects of HST, since the raising of standards, i.e. test results, is more challenging. The effect of this is the current issue of senior leaders not wanting to take up headships in areas of significant challenge, since they have concerns over their ability to meet pupil outcome targets and therefore they feel they would be more vulnerable to dismissal through poor SATs outcomes and Ofsted reports (Richardson 2013).

Examining children's resilience in dealing with the issues arising from differing socio-economic contexts, I draw on the research of Rutter (1985) and Stein (2005). They define resilience as doing well against the odds, coping with and recovering from negative events or situations. I claim that a child's resilience is a significant issue in terms of their overall success within school, not just in terms of their attainment, but also their ability to successfully function within differing social environments. The work of Stein (2005), whilst focusing upon children within the care system, offers valuable insights into how children within the more deprived areas of England relate to school and their own attainment. Referencing the work of Rutter et al. (1998), Newman and Blackburn (2002) and Sinclair et al. (2005), Stein (2005, 13) makes the clear point that, '... having a positive experience of school, including achieving educational success, is associated with resilience among young people from disadvantaged family backgrounds'. Again, this highlights the critical role of parents, in terms of supporting their children's academic attainment and thus ensuring a positive HST outcome for the associated school.

#### **4.4.3 Children's ability to access the curriculum**

Having already identified the attainment gap linked to socio-economic context, I progress by referencing the literature which focuses upon the policies and practices aimed at both closing this gap and allowing children to access the curriculum, upon which HST will judge their attainment and consequently, the standard of their school.

With the recent removal of the Contextual Value Added measure (CVA) of a school's performance, the focus is now very much on overall summative attainment.

Since the CVA measure is no longer taken into account, the context of a school, in terms of nine separate measures including gender, special educational needs and disabilities, percentage of children eligible for free school meals and level of deprivation in the area the pupil lives (using the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index), is no longer deemed relevant in terms of judging a school's performance.

Gray (2004) and Harris and Ranson (2005) highlight a situation which has remained unchanged in the last decade, that of improving standards at all costs and, quite simply, the odds continuing to be stacked against the schools in poorer areas. Whitty (2002), Rainwater and Smeeding (2003), Gorard and Smith (2004) and Thrupp (2005) all state that, unless significant changes are made to social and economic inequalities at a substantial cost, it is extremely unlikely, using the current measures and success criteria of school inspections, that schools in areas of high deprivation are going to show significant pupil attainment improvement and hence, are going to meet ever more demanding floor targets. Thus, their findings and arguments provide strong evidence for the potential of schools within deprived areas to appear as underperforming, largely due to the factors previously identified and the lower level of attainment upon arrival in school.

To focus on the net 'cost' of the emphasis on pupil attainment and its associated testing, I reference literature which is based on teaching and learning practices, focusing, for example, on the Year 6 boosting of children, in order to reach the required SATs threshold (Harlen 2007). The requirement to meet the government set floor targets places pressure on headteachers, who ultimately retarget their

limited resources, evidence of which can be taken from the findings of the National Audit Office (NAO 2008) in West (2010, 28), when the organisation undertook an inquiry into mathematics performance within primary schools:

The schools estimated that they spent from £1,000 to £3,000 on additional teaching support staff for this year group. Of our survey respondents, 40% estimated that they spend more than 60% of their teaching time preparing for the Key Stage 2 tests. Ofsted and other commentators have suggested that too much emphasis is placed on intensive provision in Year 6, including 'booster' classes, rather than developing more lasting styles of mathematics teaching and learning embedded in earlier years (NAO 2008, 25).

Burnitt (2011, 23) claims that this leads to a period of 'force feeding', resulting in only limited long term benefits to the child, as well as limiting original creative thinking and investigation. This view is supported by the work of Davies (1999) and Collins et al. (2010).

This literature is used to support my fieldwork analysis linking headteacher perceptions of HST and accountability with their own policies and practices.

#### **4.4.4 Staff expectations and aspirations of children**

The research of Hymel et al. (1990) and Parker and Asher (1993) are used to give an insight into how teacher expectations and high aspirations for their class can significantly impact upon HST outcomes. The work of Davies and Brember (1998) and Leonard and Davey (2001), cited in Harlen and Crick Deakin (2003), indicate the potential problems a HST focus might generate, including an increase in the pressure on students to do well, resulting from the aspirations of parents and teachers, and the potential failure to meet these aspirations, resulting in demotivation and the lowering of self-esteem.

A number of studies investigating teachers focusing on the maximising of test results in order to obtain positive HST outcomes have been conducted within the last two decades (Reay and Wiliam 1999; Leonard and Davey 2001). The data is revealing, indicating that before and during tests there were high levels of anxiety and a class climate appeared in which the requirements of the test became the key elements of the teaching and learning taking place. Whilst the majority of teachers would not wish to place their class under stress, owing to the focus on HST, many feel there is little option (Connor 2003; Hall et al. 2004; Mansell 2007). This literature provides a conceptual background illuminating the rationale behind headteachers' policies and practices, in terms of dealing with staff and pupils, within a HST environment.

#### **4.4.5 Staff morale and stress**

Chaplain (1995, 2001), Troman (2000) and McDonald (2001) have investigated in depth the anxiety generated within the educational workplace, stating that stress is a 'pervasive feature of contemporary life'. Troman (2000, 1) charts the continued growth of workplace stress using Ameghino's (1998) data, which indicated that an estimated 270,000 people, in both the private and public sectors, were absent from work each day within the UK, owing to stress. This results in an enormous cost (Brown and Ralph 1998).

A study of 267 teachers by Chaplain (1995) looked at primary schools in the north and east of England. Teachers with different ages and length of teaching experience were asked to score the frequency and intensity of 18 items on a stress scale. These included professional concerns, pupil behaviour and attitudes, and



workload. His findings indicated high levels of stress associated with professional concerns, of which HST could be viewed as an example. Just over one-third of teachers were satisfied with their job, with high levels of occupational stress being directly linked to low levels of job satisfaction.

With the increased focus on local accountability and its associated HST regimes, the levels of teacher stress can be seen to have significantly increased. (Brimblecombe et al. 1995; Connor 2003; Klassen and Chiu 2010). Whilst there is significant work relating to the effects of HST on teachers' roles and wellbeing, there is, at present, little drawing links between the stress generated by the attainment focus and how this may vary within schools of differing socio-economic environments. One of the purposes of this study is to reduce this knowledge gap.

#### **4.5 The 'External community factors', HST within differing socio-economic contexts**

##### **4.5.1 Parental involvement, control and expectations**

Burnitt (2010, 30) investigated the factors which directly influence parental support for their children's education. These were identified as:

- the effects of extreme poverty and of social chaos and threat in some neighbourhoods
- the effects of substance abuse and of domestic violence
- the effects of psychosocial illness, notably depression
- the impact of a difficult child
- the effect of barriers set up by schools
- the impact of inappropriate values and beliefs underlying a fatalistic view of education
- the lack of parental confidence in, or knowledge about, how to be appropriately involved.

Clearly, this identified issues that impact upon a parent's ability and willingness to have direct involvement in school life. The work of West (2010) identified that the

views and actions of parents have direct and significant consequences for teachers and schools and therefore their 'success' in terms of HST. Burnitt (2011, 21) presents the case that, through its own research, Ofsted has validated, and continues to validate, its own inspection findings, dismissing the challenges from academic quarters (Coffield 2009; Stuart 2011) and therefore Ofsted's current position is set to judge only attainment, not taking school context or mitigating circumstances into account. Bearing this in mind, HST's 'power and influence' is summarised by West (2010) when he cites a MORI poll taken during 2005, which indicated that 52% of parents would be directly influenced in the selection of a school by its performance within a league table. Of these parents, 27% indicated this as being a more important factor than curriculum coverage, location and resourcing. Noden (2001) also highlighted the significance of league tables to teachers, stating:

A survey of teachers in schools in disadvantaged local authorities found that 69% of respondents reported that good league table results would make them more likely to apply for a job at that school.

This attitude could have far reaching consequences in terms of teacher recruitment, resulting in the most able teachers shying away from 'under-performing' schools, creating a 'Catch 22' situation, where those schools at the bottom of the tables only attract teachers who are, perhaps, less likely to facilitate radical improvements in pupil attainment (Burnitt 2011b).

This literature will give an insight into the pressures headteachers now face in terms of meeting parental expectations, managing staff and obtaining the government floor targets for pupil attainment in order to meet HST requirements.

## **4.6 Summary**

Lupton (2004) and Calveley (2005) illustrate how HST does not take contextual differences, and therefore their effects, into account and, as such, can provide misleading information when used by parents to select a school for their child. Given the importance placed on this data by central government, LAs and the stakeholders, it is critical to fully understand the effect differing socio-economic contexts have on a school's HST performance. This chapter has sought to explore the socio-economic variables which impact on children's lives, both in and out of school and, as such, directly affect their attainment, as measured by SATs at the end of their primary school lives.

I have located the variables which the school has at least some element of control over, for example staff performance and morale and, conversely, those which are 'home' based, parental income and parental education, and which are, therefore, outside the school's remit and control. However, HST currently continues to hold schools solely accountable for children's progress (Shakeshaft 2014) and therefore some schools will continue to struggle to meet the requirements imposed under the SDA, not because of their quality, but as a consequence of their context.

The next chapter focuses on how the role of headteacher has changed as a result of the various reforms over the past 20 years. I examine the nature of their changing professional relationships with staff, parents and children and formulate a conceptual framework which seeks to locate headteachers within various scenarios relating to how they perceive SDA and the HST. The conceptual framework will further aim to identify how a school's context impacts upon the head's perception of the SDA and the impact of HST.

## **Chapter 5 - Primary headship: Developing a theoretical understanding of agency and practice**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter investigates the theoretical frameworks which seek to explain the role of primary headteachers working within the public sector in England during a period of HST.

Firstly, I examine three key themes which identify how research informs the current understanding regarding the problematising of the transformation of headteachers in terms of their personal and professional values and practices. This can be viewed as the shift from 'moral guardian' and 'general manager' to 'small business leader' within a competitive market.

Secondly, I examine the current nature of primary headteacher accountability, focusing upon how recent research has reported on the practical and ethical challenges currently faced by headteachers due to the adoption of HST since the Education Reform Act (DfES 1988). I further examine how the ongoing political agenda and resultant policies have directly impacted upon the repositioning of primary headteachers, in terms of their professional lives.

Next, to develop the core conceptualisation for this study, I present Figure 5.4, which aims to illustrate the various 'controlling mechanisms' headteachers currently operate within, specifically, I engage with Ranson's (2003, 463) typology of accountability regimes and Ball's (2003) notion of four interrelated policy technologies: the market, performativity, managerialism and professionalism.

The chapter concludes with the construction of a further conceptual framework (Figure 5.5) which seeks to link headteachers' perceptions of accountability with their perceptions of the SDA. The framework is used to position headteachers into one of four positions, providing an insight into their management of standards and their professional accountability, as measured by HST.

### **5.1 The shifting sands of headship**

Webb et al. (2012) highlight the exciting and dynamic nature of primary headship, indicating its many rewards. However, a wide range of literature also documents its complex and demanding nature (Thomson 2007; Kelly and Saunders 2010; Earley and Bubb 2013). Currently, however, little of this literature examines headteachers' own perceptions of how they professionally position themselves with respect to ensuring the best possible accountability outcomes for their school and the conflicts this may create.

Whilst headteacher organisational and managerial processes continue to be a key element of their work, more and more time is now directly focused on raising pupil attainment and achievement (Earley and Bubb 2013). Grace (1995) highlights many changes, which have seen headteachers lose their preoccupation with social control and responsibility and move towards the meeting of the needs of a market-driven (attainment focused) and single site-based form of educational provision. Therefore, the development and effective use of leadership skills are critical to both their success and that of their school.

From an historical perspective, it could be argued that a key difference between what could be termed traditional school management (pre-Conservative market-led policies) and the subsequent neoliberal inspired school leader will be, as Grace (1995, 31) states, ‘...grounded upon a personal and professional record of successful innovation and evidence of interpersonal skills and capacity for team working.’

Grace (1995) further expands this by drawing links between the necessity for inspirational leadership and the requirements of a market culture. This shift towards the commodification of schools has, in effect, moved the emphasis away from a moral and social control model towards one of ‘output’. The net result, Grace (1995) claims, is a significant loss of professional autonomy, evidenced by the introduction of the National Curriculum and reinforced by the subsequent introduction of HST methods.

## **5.2 Conceptualising primary headship**

The de-professionalisation of heads and teachers, removing them from roles which Bottery (2007, 90) terms ‘the trusted gatekeepers of state services’ under the reform banner, legitimised by the need to raise standards and to have direct accountability for the nation’s future economic health, has resulted in greater centralisation and a more centrally directed, and possibly less free thinking, profession (Bottery 2007). This, it could be argued, has led over the past ten years to a significant short-fall in the numbers of teachers willing to take up the role of headship (Butt and Gunter 2007).

Bottery (2007) provides a detailed description of the experiences of headteachers as they struggle with the implementation of continuous reform and the focus to drive up standards. This, he suggests, has led to the widespread use of a pragmatic, 'let's get on with it and make it work for us' approach. His evidence also demonstrates widespread commitment to the welfare of their children, despite the pressures of the never-ending barrage of new policies and high levels of personal professional accountability.

### **5.3 The current position of headteacher accountability**

The focus on school improvement within a neoliberal market has underpinned educational policy since the late 1980s. Whilst the political drivers behind these policies have differed widely between the Right and New Labour, their reliance on measurable accountability has remained constant, with the notion that standards must continue to rise if the UK is to succeed within the ever more competitive global market. HST success now underpins every element of a headteacher's professional life (Mansell 2007).

The pressure that primary headteachers currently face to achieve their Key Stage 2 floor targets and above, to avoid being labelled as 'failing or coasting', is graphically illustrated by the response of secondary headteachers taking part in government sponsored research into the introduction of Level 6 SATs at the end of Year 6, when they stated:

[There is] a perception that primaries are under pressure to inflate their outcomes.

[There is] a perception that primary pupils are 'spoon-fed' leading to wrongly judging pupils' actual ability. (DfE 2013b, 17).

This 'perception' is further supported by Graeme Paton (2013), who summarises the situation within his article *'Headteachers' lack faith in SATs sees pupils face barrage of tests'*, in which he states:

But secondary schools feel that the sheer pressure to hit Government benchmarks is forcing some primary schools to "teach to the test" to make sure pupils pass – rendering exam results almost meaningless by the time pupils start secondary school. (p.1)

The extreme stress headteachers now face to target pupil attainment is well documented (Phillips et al. 2007). This need creates a discourse between the necessity to safeguard their school under their leadership and the moral dilemma of ensuring equality of opportunity, curriculum enjoyment, and pupil and staff well-being and motivation.

McCormick (1996), cited in Thomson (2009), attributes a significant proportion of headteacher stress to external sources, which differs from teachers, who report their key stress factors as being directly connected to children and the delivery of teaching and learning. Whilst Thomson (2009) suggests that headteachers do have to develop coping and self-preservation strategies, this is not easy given the additional workload generated by ever increasing HST data demands and accountability. Thomson (2009) provides graphic descriptions of headteachers' dysfunctional home lives, where the necessity of meeting deadlines has seriously impacted on the availability of time to spend with family and friends, resulting in damaging resentment.

Briner et al. (2008, 63) discuss the discourse of caring and management. The example used illustrates how 'metaphorical mountains of paperwork' actually get in the way of supporting and nurturing the children. Given the previously identified



importance of HST outcomes to both a school and its headteacher, it would be a safe assumption that the paperwork associated with it (SEF, School Development Plans and data analysis) would generate significantly more stress, removing headteachers even further from the children.

#### **5.4 Development of the key themes of headship**

In order to understand the diverse strands of headship I make further reference to Thomson (2009). Her work identified the wide number of practices and expectations currently being imposed on headteachers working within the United Kingdom. I developed three themes based on what Thomson's (2009) terms 'headteachers and their everyday lives (p.1). These themes not only identify the actions of heads, their way of doing things, but also equally importantly the notions of managing internal and external requirements, as measured by HST whilst remaining true to professional and personal values. Ultimately these themes will be used to structure the core conceptualisation of headteachers' accountability (Figure 5.4) later within this chapter.

##### **5.4.1 Theme 1 - Perceptions of meeting the requirements of HST**

The pursuit of excellence, as measured by HST, has been established as the driving force within primary schools. The prominence and power of successive neoliberal policies has shifted the focus of schools towards working within a culture of controlled autonomy. Within this, in order to ensure complete compliance by schools and the promotion of standards, continuous regimes of testing and inspections were introduced from 1992 (instigating both market and performative accountabilities). These systems are linked to the notion of data as the provider of an accurate and standardised insight into the actions of a school, whilst offering a

mechanism of control in terms of the delivery of accolades or sanctions (Kohn 2000; Mansell 2007; Thomson 2009). This approach, Ranson (2003) states, was seen as a direct public services management policy, which adopted a contract culture similar to that used within business, the premise being that this would directly lead to improved services. This, Ranson (2003, 466) suggests, results in what he terms technical accountability, giving rise to the notion of trust being secured through 'increased specification of purpose, task and condition of service delivery'. This, in terms of a primary school, manifests itself in the success of predetermined pupil attainment floor targets and positive inspection outcomes. Thus, HST outcomes, once placed into the public domain, have become extremely powerful.

The focus on standards and their measurement has replaced the professional accountability of the 1970s and, as such, now underpin the role of primary headship. Thus, pupil performance has become paramount (Berliner 2007; Mansell 2007; Glazzard 2014) and the discourse of reality versus rhetoric has become a truth for many headteachers.

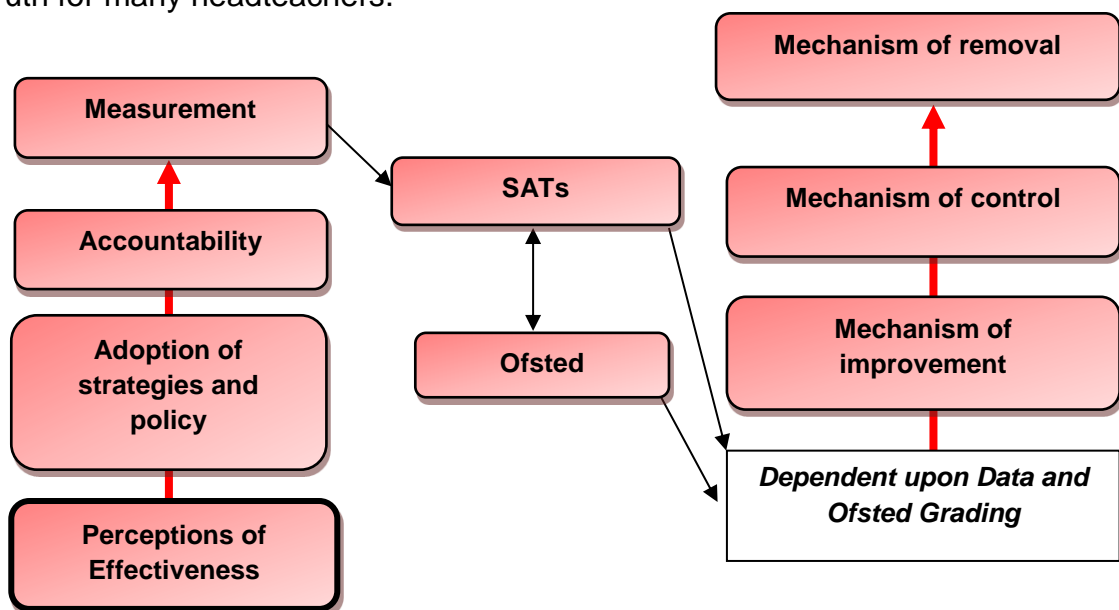


Figure 5.1: Theme 1 - Perceptions of meeting the requirements of HST.

Figure 5.1 is based on research evidence (Mansell 2007; Thomson 2009; William 2010; West, Mattel and Roberts 2011; Lefstein 2013) which outline the factors connected to the perceptions of headteachers' effectiveness within a HST regime. The first is the drive to improve standards through the use of government policy and strategy; the second is the continuing implementation of high stakes monitoring. This I term the 'reality of headship', the constant balancing of the pressure generated by localised monitoring and accountability, and the direct need to meet the performance indicators generated by successive governments' strategies and ever more challenging targets. In order to understand how specific policies and strategies have impacted upon the reality of headship, the research has focused upon the impact of the introduction of the National Numeracy and Literacy Strategies.

#### **5.4.2 Theme 2 - Practicalities of headship**

Figure 5.2 illustrates the research evidence (Crozier 1998; Day 2002; Webb 2010; Robinson 2010; Berliner 2011) that generates interconnected complex issues which headteachers face when balancing the need to achieve prescribed high standards, whilst meeting the diverse needs of all stakeholders. It illustrates the conflicting policy technologies and accountabilities heads currently work within. As educational leaders, heads may seek to work within an accountability of professionalism, where they self-regulate, placing the client's needs as paramount, whilst adhering to a professional code of conduct; however, current policy dictates that standards dominate.

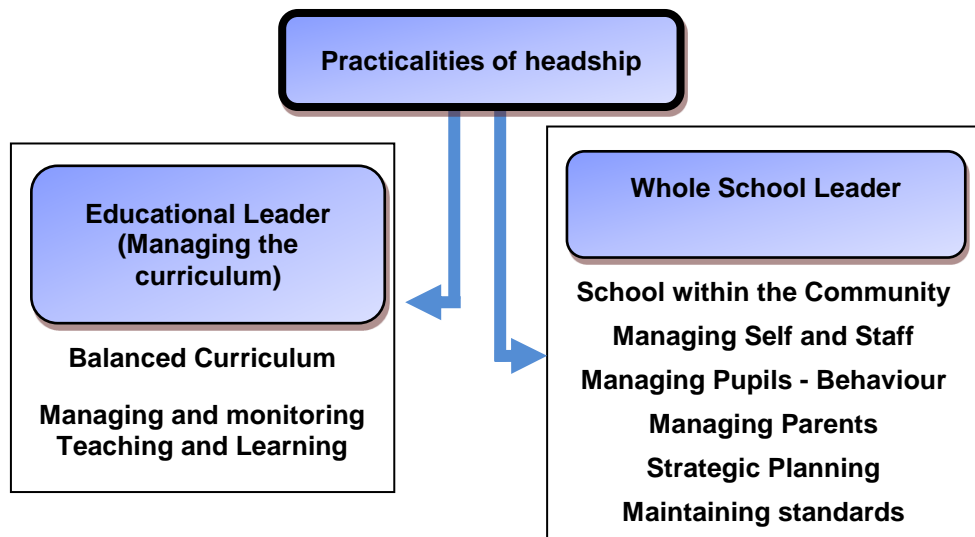


Figure 5.2: Theme 2 - Practicalities of headship

This model provides an illustration of the challenging balancing act heads currently face, that of the need to drive forward standards of teaching and learning, whilst coping with the everyday issues all primary schools generate.

### 5.4.3 Theme 3 - Conflicting values within the current role of headship

#### 5.4.3.1 Remaining true to values discourse

Within Chapter 3, I examine the work of Grace (1995) who discussed the changing role of headship in terms of a preoccupation with the loss of social control and responsibility and a move towards meeting the needs of the market. This requirement to move away from social guardian to ‘small business operator’ creates a discourse of conflict, outlined within Figure 5.3.

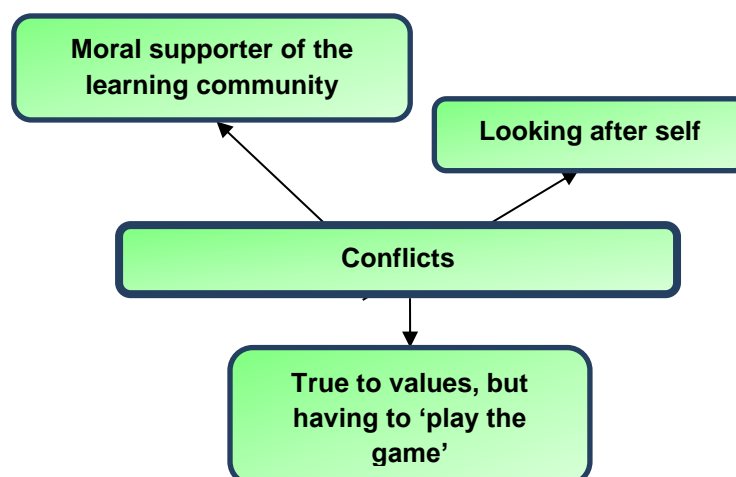


Figure 5.3: Theme 3 - Conflicting values within the current role of headship

Market accountability requires heads to focus predominately on meeting the needs of the consumer; however, the discourse occurs when these needs are governed by performativity. Therefore, heads need to ensure positive HST outcomes by 'playing the game' and thus, ensuring professional survival.

Therefore, headteachers' values are focused on localised tactical control of pedagogy, where they direct and monitor staff in order to ensure maximum pupil outcomes. Here values can be economised in regard to 'value-added' or what measured difference an individual teacher or headteacher makes to pupil outcomes at an individual and whole school level. Again this can challenge espoused and deeply felt values, whereby values are understood as a set of principles that underpin practice. Notably primary headteachers have written about this, for example, Winkley (2002) provides detail of how he worked with staff and students in the community to provide a challenging educational experience but at a time when 'school improvement' policies often elided the relationship between outcomes and the socio-economic location of the school catchment.

Thus, schools are measured in terms of how successfully they prepare children to be efficient and effective members of society and very importantly the national workforce. This agenda has been set by successive governments, within a neoliberal arena, and has led to what Wright (2001) terms 'bastard leadership'. While educational professionals may talk about values based leadership in terms of setting up organisational arrangements and cultural conditions in order to enable participation through teams, he argues that these are actually 'second order' values. In contrast, 'first order' values are about the purposes of education, and here he

claims that these *educational values*, which used to be the 'property' of school professionals, particularly heads, have now been relocated to the political level and, as such, are now beyond 'contestation, modification or adjustment to local variations (Wright 2001, 280). Thus, he argues the power of heads to outline the views and direction of their schools is being removed and a set of governmental data informed values enforced.

There is, Wright (2001) suggests, a need for heads to take risks, foster innovation and move away from the current 'managerialist, quantitative conceptions of accountability' (p.288), the success of this is reliant upon the ability of the head to both crystallise and implement their core educational values. These values were identified by Mcewen and Salters (1997) as being centred on the notions of professional relationships and the effective delivery of a wide curriculum, along with the successful resolution of pastoral issues. Headteacher professionalism in this sense, Mcewen and Salters (1997) suggest, would involve a commitment to community values rather than a focus on self-interest and as such calls for the reinstatement of a moral guardian role, outlined below.

#### **5.4.3.2 Moral authority and the cult of headship**

Grace (1995) details the changing dynamic of headship in terms of their role as moral guardians and leaders. He provides insight, referring back to the days of headteachers as being the 'autocrat of autocrats' (p.11), when the mystique of headship was constituted by personal charisma, moral authority and a strong controlling influence over others, which was frequently unquestioned.

The cult of the 'headmaster tradition' (Grace 1995, 11) remained largely unchanged and helped to sustain a prolonged period of state school autonomy, even during times of fundamental change in terms of public sector power relations. Grace refers back to the period from the 1940s to the 1970s, a time of great influence and control by headteachers, when their advice was invariably taken and their directives followed without question. However, the continuing change in society, resulting from a more democratic and participative political culture, Grace (1995) suggests, gave rise to a significant change in the class status between headteachers and their governing bodies. He reasons the case that headteachers working within affluent areas were perceived by their middle and professional class governors as being of 'their' class, and therefore to be trusted. Those heads working in areas of high deprivation were seen as 'having superior cultural and occupational status'. The net result was, simply, that headteachers during this period were given high levels of status and autonomy, with their schools free from curriculum and pedagogic control from local and state agencies. This gave rise to the concept of 'their' school, in which they had almost complete control. Grace (1995, 13) uses Bernstein's (1977) terms to describe the three possible models of headship during the early 1970s. Firstly, as agents of cultural reproduction, simply continuing to promote traditional academic standards; secondly, as an agent of cultural innovation, with the headteacher actively seeking to foster innovation and progressive methods; finally, as an agent of cultural transformation, with the primary goal being radical cultural and social reorganisation.

These models of headship are in direct contrast to those of a hundred years ago when, Grace (1995, 14) states, 'headteachers [were] little more than the cultural

monitor for a pedagogic code prescribed by others'. This freedom was constructed around the notion of 'professionalism', in which headteachers were seen as experts dedicated to the common good of their pupils and the wider society, not only in terms of education, but also as moral guardians, and, as such, not to be questioned. Headteachers could advance and propagate their own moral values in terms of dictating their school's ethos, curriculum and pedagogies. Thus, in the late 1970s, the adoption of transformational rather than modification policies resulted in some 'testing the strength of 'the headteacher as school leader literally to breaking point' (Grace 1995, 14). This was, perhaps, the 'golden age of English headship'; however, it was not without its drawbacks. As Musgrove (1971) and Kogan et al. (1984) indicate, headteachers lacked any real managerial autonomy in terms of power over finance, material resources and staff allocation. Indeed, Musgrove (1971, 72) further claimed that 'financial control is [was] at the heart of managerial power'. Thus, this period could be viewed as a time of constrained managerial autonomy, with headteachers gaining or suffering from the culture of social democracy, dependent upon the nature and beliefs of their local authority.

Grace (1995) cites a HMI report of 1977 which accurately summarises what was viewed at the time as effective leadership. There is no mention of the elements which would later be flagged as the essentials of transformational leadership, only the ability to secure specific aims and communicate to (not with) staff, pupils and parents. Grace (1995) suggests that change in the role of headteacher at this time was a complex phenomenon involving headteachers adopting various forms of leadership, including those who held onto the 'Headmaster tradition', those who



recontextualised this tradition within new consultative procedures and finally, those committed to making a radical break from the historical notions of leadership.

The introduction of the Education Reform Act (DfES 1988) and the resultant quasi-market marked the end of the policies and practices of the previous forty years. Along with the introduction of the Local Management of Schools (LMS), it sought, as an imperative, to reinstate traditional academic values and standards.

The reduction of educational autonomy, Grace (1995) suggests, was used as a mechanism to ensure that all state schools conform more tightly to the needs of the market, thus ensuring that the young people entering the job market would be sufficiently skilled and prepared to meet potential employers' requirements. Local level accountability, policed by HST, was the way this was ensured, with parents adopting the role of critical 'consumer', able to select schools on merit via the use of high status data or inspection reports.

Ribbins (1989) notes that whilst LMS re-empowered headteachers in terms of their institutional autonomy, the balance of power was somewhat swayed in favour of the governing body and, as such, LMS could be seen 'as part of a wider political strategy to reduce the sphere of autonomy possessed by professionals working in English schooling' Grace (1995, 19).

Returning to the notion of headteachers as community moral leaders, a vital element of their role a hundred years back, it is interesting to note that control of the nation's 'moral fibre' is once again being handed-back to schools. The creation of

what could be termed a socially just and democratic learning context, in which all are valued, is now a key element of Ofsted inspections (Ofsted 2014). This calls for headteachers not only to ensure that the curriculum delivers an opportunity for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, but to actively promote the children's ability to recognise the difference between right and wrong and develop their readiness to apply this understanding in their own lives. The promotion and subsequent monitoring of a school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development can now be viewed as being high stakes in nature and once again there are calls for headteachers to be moral guardians.

#### **5.4.3.3 High Stakes Testing and the effects on teaching staff and children**

It is clear that the focus on HST generates sustained pressure on headteachers; this, through policy and practice, directly impacts upon all teaching staff and the children. Whilst teacher stress is not a new phenomenon (Kyriacou 1980; Johnstone 1989; Borg 1990; Dunham 1992; Troman 2000), research draws clear links between stress levels and working within a low trust environment. Troman (2000) cites the experiences of 'Marion', a 51 year old Key Stage 1 teacher, about to take early retirement:

Before experiencing stress, and later burnout, Marion seems to have had a moral commitment to her pupils, parents and colleagues. With the impending Ofsted inspection, legal accountability took over and the opposing values of Ofsted looked certain to provide a 'head-on-collision' with Marion's values (p. 346).

This example is supported widely by further cases of the high levels of teachers' personal stress, as well as professional stress occurring as a direct consequence of HST monitoring and accountability systems (Troman 2000; Chapman 2002), resulting in relationship break-ups, self-doubt and low self-esteem. This indicates

that HST comes at a cost, resulting not only in pressure and stress on the headteacher, but also on all members of staff. This pressure to achieve is one which all teachers are now experiencing and one which those in Year 6, charged with the responsibility of SATs revision and pupil preparation, have been acutely aware of for many years (Galton and MacBeath 2002).

Harris (2007), cited in Thomson (2009, 135), contends that school leaders need to become more emotionally aware, developing habits of caring for and keeping safe, not only themselves, but those around them. Given the nature of HST and its direct impact on school leadership, it is easy to imagine how stressed headteachers could 'push' teachers to the limit, in order to maximise pupil outcomes and reach ever more demanding floor targets. Ouston et al, (1996); Earley (1998) and Ferguson et al. (2000) illustrate the trend of increased teacher and headteacher stress associated with the inspection of schools working in challenging circumstances, resulting in lower morale and job satisfaction. It is in the remit of this research to ascertain whether this is still the case.

Chaplain (2001) discusses the effort it takes for headteachers to 'manage' teachers in order to ensure school improvement and thus, meet the requirements of HST. He states that: 'Headteachers generally recognized the importance of teamwork, high morale and enjoyment of work. This was seen to lead to increased confidence and creativity' (p.204).

The audit culture, now imposed upon all levels of compulsory education in England, has developed into a major cause for concern (Ball 2003; Torrance 2004; Frankham and Howes 2006) and is highlighted by Connors et al. (2009, 2):

More recently, there has been particular concern over their effects at primary school level where various reports have highlighted the deleterious consequences of evaluation for teaching and learning and for the well-being and motivation of both teachers and pupils. Such outcomes are claimed to result from the stress associated with the external pressure on schools and individual teachers to conform and perform.

Burnitt (2011) reasons that whilst pupil preparation could have benefits in terms of developing familiarity and confidence building, there are significant issues, for example, the distortion of pupils' data and the creation of a 'Groundhog Day' situation. This never ending cycle of English and maths revision has led to substantial levels of pupil demotivation (Harlen and Deakin-Crick 2003; Webb and Vulliamy 2006b). The overall impact of national testing within England since the Education Reform Act (DfES 1988), in terms of pupil motivation and stress, is an area covered by a number of studies, for example, Reay and Wiliam (1999) and Leonard and Davey (2001). Their findings provide strong evidence for the case argued by Burnitt (2011, 25):

[The creation of] a situation within primary schools where children and their parents are acutely aware of scores, without perhaps fully understanding their meaning, other than perhaps as a mechanism to position themselves within the academic hierarchy of their classroom / school / nationally. This situation has been further exacerbated within the last few years with the introduction of the annual reporting of sublevels, where each National Curriculum level is split into three. Children and their parents now have possession of the 'official' raw data, which they can either parade or hide.

The question of the stress now being placed upon primary children, particularly in Year 6, is an important one. Many headteachers find themselves in a difficult position, having to balance the needs of meeting the requirements of external accountability processes with those of their duty of care to their children. Connors et

al. (2009) present a case for the latter coming to the forefront. The need to redress the balance is illustrated by Nic Marks, author of a study carried out in Nottingham and commissioned by the New Economics Foundation, when he states:

Narrow targets, competitive league tables and increasing pressure in the classroom are robbing kids of the best days of their lives. It's time to concentrate on our children's long-term wellbeing, and give them back the natural curiosity for learning that will equip them for real life. (Marks 2004, 17)

The result of the continued focus on maximising SATs results and therefore, the perceived 'success' of the school, has led, as Galton et al. (2003) contend, to a gradual removal of the enjoyment of school life. Their data illustrates the notion of children becoming bored and de-motivated because of current school practices, such as the excessive use of booster classes and teaching to the tests using very structured lessons.

It has been claimed that the key academic event during Year 6 is the taking of SATs during May, with practically all elements of school life geared up to the preparation for this (McDonald 2001; Connors et al. 2009; Burnitt 2011b). This process and the associated importance of the outcomes for staff and children generate high levels of stress and these appear to be having a marked negative effect. Galton (2007, 169) uses two quotes from Year 6 children to graphically illustrate the pressure they now feel under regarding their end of Key Stage 2 performance:

'I need to get Level 5 if I am to get into the top set.'

'Because we need our education. We need to get good grades to get a good job and to get GCSEs.'

Connors et al. (2009) suggest that their in-depth qualitative research with teachers indicates that primary heads and teachers express a real concern for pupils and a frustration regarding the costs of a SATs led curriculum.

A further element of concern regarding the possible effects of HST on pupils is the reduction of both teacher and pupil creativity. Research carried out by Woods and Jeffrey (1996) cited in Troman et al. (2007, 556), suggests that creative learning involves three areas: innovation, ownership of knowledge and control of the learning process. They conclude that, in considering the relationship between these criteria:

...the higher the relevance of teaching to children's lives, worlds, cultures and interests, the more likelihood there was that pupils would have control of their own learning processes.

Given the paramount importance to both a school's success and that of its headteacher of positive HST outcomes, it is possible to imagine the pressure to control and limit the curriculum to those elements under test, thus reducing the opportunity for creativity, originality and relevance. Mansell (2007, 30) provides examples of the negative effects that test preparation can have on Year 6 pupils, gathering responses such as:

'It's been the same since Christmas, just about every day, mornings and sometimes in the afternoons. I don't enjoy it.'

'We do it [test preparation] all morning, then some after dinner. It just gets boring after a while, because you are doing it nearly every day.'

Berliner (2011, 287) concludes that 'the most pernicious response to HST is perhaps the most rational, namely, curriculum narrowing.' This 'narrowing' is a direct consequence of headteachers having to focus on what, they believe, will be in the tests. Berliner argues that this narrowing has a number of serious consequences for children, including a reduction in the opportunities to show other talents, for example, through the visual arts, dance and music, rather than those deemed important. Berliner strongly defends the need to offer a wide arts-inclusive curriculum, stating, 'a reduction in curricula for learning the arts, therefore, restricts our students' ways of thinking, limiting creativity' (Berliner 2011, 291).

Barker (2008) graphically illustrates how, in terms of teaching time, the core subjects have come to dominate, leaving little time for the remaining foundation areas. Recent research by Brundrett and Duncan (2011), however, has shown that a change has started, with Ofsted (2009b) finding that headteachers had begun to promote a curriculum supported by more creative approaches. It is in the remit of this research to investigate whether this is indeed the case.

### **5.5 Conceptualising headteachers' accountability**

The identification of key themes in 5.4 shows that there are many arguments connected to the discourses surrounding headteachers' perceptions and responses to SDA and HST. Firstly, there is the reality of accountability and the associated drive for higher standards. The move towards heads working within the market has placed a substantial strain on their value system, resulting in a significant discourse, that of nurturing children against the absolute necessity to meet HST requirements. The reality of this is a removal of long established professional autonomy, replaced by top down strategic regulation with room only for local tactics involved in delivery. The rigid enforcement of HST under the banner of school improvement has left little flexibility in terms of arguing for the provision of a wider learning experience for children or for the effect of context on pupil attainment.

Secondly, it could be suggested that the mystique of headship, with its associated personal charisma and moral authority, has been replaced by what is actually measurable, i.e. HST outcomes. The net result is the reward of accolades to those deemed to be successful, i.e. compliant to central government's expectations, and deleterious sanctions placed upon those deemed as failing. How heads locate

themselves within this culture is critical to both their success and that of their school. Therefore, to fully understand the complexities of accountability, a conceptualisation was developed to support and further structure the research.

The use of both Ranson's (2003) and Ball's (2003) work has allowed for a structuring of how heads deal with the ongoing demise of the age of professional accountability and its replacement by increased, and strongly enforced, specification and regulation. The core conceptualisation of the study (Figure 5.4) aims to directly link each of the policy accountabilities and technologies outline by Ranson (2003) and Ball (2003) to both the work of headteacher and potential possible professional outcomes. The creation of a core conceptualisation (Figure 5.4) provides a link between each of the policy technologies and accountabilities (market, performativity, managerialism and professional) and their power brokers and measurement mechanisms.

Policy Technology / Accountabilities	Accountability Type (based on Ranson Typology)	Accountability Measures	Headteacher Accountable to whom (Power holders)	Positive Headteacher Outcomes Markers	Negative Headteacher Outcomes Markers
<b>Market</b>	Consumer, Market competition	National tests, Ofsted inspections Pupil enrolment?	Parents, Governing body	Pupil progress, Grade 1 or 2 inspection report	Below floor targets, Parents exit, Falling roll
<b>Performativity</b>	Performative inspection	League tables, Ofsted inspections	State	Pay progression, Gain in status, Positive career progression	Removal from post
<b>Managerialism</b>	Consumer, Market Performative	National tests, Ofsted inspections	Parents, Governing body, State	Pay progression, Gain in status, Positive career progression	Removal from post
<b>Professional</b>	Conformity to standards and codes of conduct	Peer review, Self-regulation	LA, Professional peers	Meeting all client needs, Strong moral leadership	Possible peer sanctions

**Figure 5.4: Core conceptualisation of headteachers' accountability.**



To fully understand the above conceptualisation it is necessary to grasp Ball's (2003) notion of how educational reform is embedded within these four policy technologies. Whilst three of these can be viewed to be interrelated (Ball 2003, 215) in the promotion of a 'politically attractive alternative to the state-centred, public welfare tradition of educational provision', the fourth, professionalism, is seen as outdated and traditionalist in nature. Ball (2003) claims that the new technologies are integral to neoliberal reform and play a significant role in aligning state education with the culture, beliefs and systems of the private sector, previously discussed. Thus the policy technologies of the market, managerialism and performativity are centred on the idea of meeting customer requirements via the administration of predetermined standards, as measured by testing and monitoring (Ofsted inspection). Whilst each of these policy technologies can be viewed as subtly different (Ball 2003) their impact upon the professional lives of headteachers is constant.

The final policy technology of professionalism Ball (2003) argues is very different from the competition and performance mantra of the other three. This results in heads struggling to hold on to professional beliefs in light of the need to meet the requirements of a performativity based accountability regime, whilst addressing the requirements of all their stakeholders, particularly their pupils. Ball (2003, 217) encapsulates this by simply stating professionals have significant concerns when 'value [as measured by HST] replaces values.'

Whilst it could be debated that heads are all subjected to policy technologies and accountabilities of the market, performativity and managerialism, through top-down

control, they continue to have dominion over their own commitment and loyalty towards these, along with some element of control over their administration. This I suggest is a measure of their reinstatement of the older technology of professionalism.

## 5.6 Conceptualising headteachers' positioning

In order to gain an understanding of how headteachers locate themselves with respect to their perceptions of SDA and HST a conceptualisation was developed which places each head into one of four quadrants, with an associated position. Heads are located on to the framework using their questionnaire responses, as outlined within chapter 6.

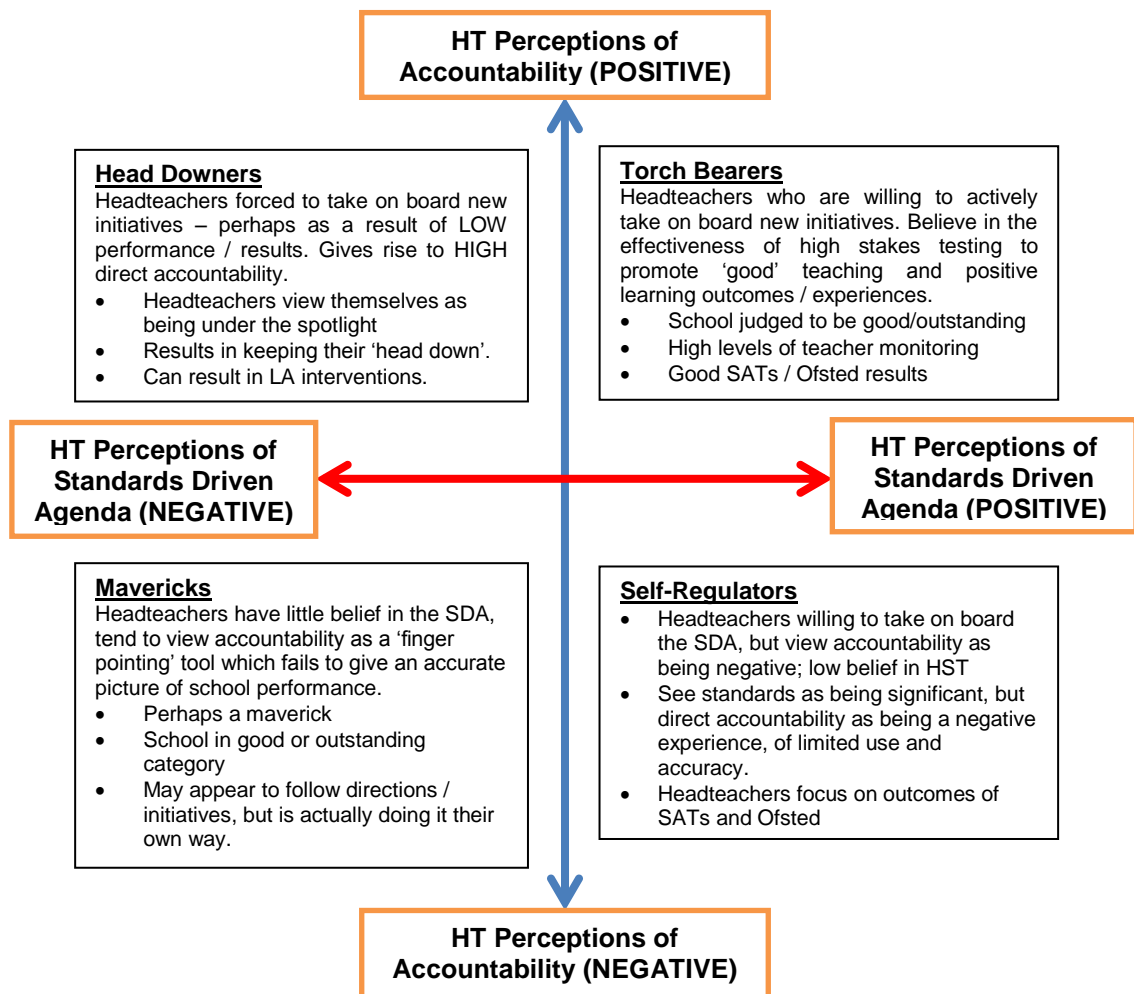


Figure 5.5: Headteachers' perceptions conceptual framework

Figure 5.6 provides a link between the resultant headteacher positioning on the Conceptual Framework 1 and the core conceptualisation of headteachers' accountability (Figure 5.4), constructed from the policy technologies and accountabilities identified by Ranson (2003) and Ball (2003). This framework is a novel and unique contribution to the field, whereby the outcome of extensive literature searches reported in this thesis have demonstrated that while there are projects that have sought to examine the realities of headship, this particular project sets out to illuminate the range of positions and the realities of positioning by and for headteachers. The thesis demonstrates how the work of Ranson (2003) and Ball (2003) have been particularly influential in underpinning the conceptualisation of this project. The development of this framework has been tested out in a range of ways, particularly through the Ed.D programme where I have given research papers and worked with tutors and fellow students on the emergence and confirmation of my ideas. In particular discussions have focussed on the clarification of meaning and validity of claims regarding each of the four positions. These positions were developed into scenarios, after discussion with a serving primary head whose experiences and insight provided a realistic outline of the real-life of a serving head (Appendix 8).

Whilst this is a basic representation of headteachers' positioning, it does provide a framework from which to start to examine the various discourses heads face in terms of meeting the requirements imposed by the strive for ever increasing standards whilst remaining true to what Ball (2003) terms the 'teachers' soul', i.e. their professional and personal identity.

Headteacher Position	Supportive of Policy Technology	Rejection of Policy Technology
<b>Torch Bearers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market</li> <li>• Performativity</li> <li>• Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalism</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Regulators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market</li> <li>• Professionalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performativity</li> <li>• Management</li> </ul>
<b>Mavericks</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market</li> <li>• Performativity</li> <li>• Management</li> </ul>
<b>Head-Downers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market (enforced)</li> <li>• Performativity (enforced)</li> <li>• Management (enforced)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalism</li> </ul>

Figure 5.6: Linking the headteacher positions to policy technologies.

### 5.6.1 Defining headteachers' positions

Figure 5.7 outlines each of the four possible positions headteachers could occupy. They are defined by reference to each head's perception of the previously identified policy technologies and accountabilities of Ranson (2003) and Ball (2003).

Headteacher position	HT perceptions of the Standards Driven Agenda	HT perceptions of Accountability
<b>Torch Bearers</b>	<p><b>POSITIVE perceptions of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the market – competition will improve standards (neoliberal reform)</li> <li>• managerialism – tight control over professionals with direct accountability</li> <li>• performativity - professional performance measured outcomes (SATs and inspection)</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<p><b>POSITIVE perceptions of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff accountability, belief in rewards and sanctions administered via defined performance indicators</li> <li>• performance accountability, for example, league tables used to inform parental choice</li> <li>• Ofsted inspections, with state holding power and output being key measure of school effectiveness</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Regulators</b>	<p><b>POSITIVE perceptions of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the market – competition will improve standards (neoliberal reform)</li> <li>• managerialism – tight control over professionals with direct accountability</li> <li>• performativity - professional performance measured by outcomes (SATs and inspection)</li> </ul>	<p><b>NEGATIVE perceptions of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff accountability, low levels of belief in rewards and sanctions administered via defined performance indicators</li> <li>• performance accountability, for example, league tables viewed as inaccurate, failing to account for context</li> <li>• Ofsted inspections inaccurate and HST used to enforce politically based policies</li> </ul>

Headteacher position	HT perceptions of the Standards Driven Agenda	HT perceptions of Accountability
<b>Mavericks</b>	<p><b>NEGATIVE perceptions of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the market – belief that competition does not always drive up standards and is subject to political and bureaucratic interference</li> <li>• managerialism – tight control over professionals leads to loss of creativity and limiting of curriculum</li> <li>• performativity - professional performance measured by outcomes is limiting and should not be the only measure of a school's effectiveness</li> </ul>	<p><b>NEGATIVE perceptions of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff accountability, low levels of belief in rewards and sanctions administered via defined performance indicators</li> <li>• performance accountability, for example, league tables viewed as inaccurate, failing to account for context</li> <li>• Ofsted inspections inaccurate and HST used to enforce politically based policies</li> </ul>
<b>Head-Downers</b>	<p><b>NEGATIVE perceptions of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the market – belief that competition does not always drive up standards and is subject to political and bureaucratic interference</li> <li>• managerialism – tight control over professionals leads to loss of creativity and limiting of curriculum</li> <li>• performativity - professional performance measured by outcomes is limiting and should not be the only measure of a school's effectiveness</li> </ul>	<p><b>POSITIVE perceptions of:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff accountability, belief in rewards and sanctions administered via defined performance indicators</li> <li>• performance accountability, for example, league tables used to inform parental choice</li> <li>• Ofsted inspections, with state holding power and output being key measure of school effectiveness</li> </ul>

Figure 5.7: Defining the headteacher positions.

### 5.6.2 Torch Bearers

These are headteachers who have readily taken on board the various elements of educational reform, embracing HST and the standards focus, viewing these as effective means of school improvement. These were identified by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL 2004, 3) as being effective leaders, since they focused upon 'continuous improvement and the raising of standards'. Headteachers fitting within this position could be viewed as rejecting the concerns raised regarding the accuracy, fairness and appropriateness of HST (Allington and McGill-Franzen 1992; Shavelson et al. 1992; Lupton 2004; Calveley 2005; Shakeshaft 2014).

These heads also have a positive perspective towards their own accountability with respect to HST, tending to view performative accountability (Ranson 2003) as critical to their school's success. These headteachers place great emphasis on the 'quality of product' (Ranson 2003, 163), which ultimately can be seen as impressive SATs data and an outstanding grading from Ofsted. They have successfully sought to reconcile the discourse which exists between their professional role of ensuring that all children have access to a broad curriculum, positive learning experiences and creativity, and the requirement of a culture of performativity (Ball 2003).

### **5.6.3 Self-Regulators**

These are headteachers who view the focus on standards as an effective means of driving up pupil attainment, thus agreeing with Barber's (2001) notion that educational standards are fundamental in the continuous development of national economic growth and stability. However, these headteachers have low belief in HST, viewing it as stressful for teachers and pupils (Goldstein 2004; Currie et al. 2004) and an inaccurate measure of school and pupil performance (Barksdale and Thomas 2000; Mansell 2007). These heads tend to reject the notion of performative accountability, whilst being aware of their accountability for standards; they reject the performativity associated with HST and its culture of rewards and punitive sanctions. They further reject the current accepted political thinking that accountability measures, when linked to performance with resultant rewards or sanctions, are effective, directly leading to school improvement (Hanushek and Raymond 2005). Self-regulating heads believe in the market culture and its focus on improvement through competition, being aware of the limitations of the notion of parental choice but believing it meets the needs of their children and school,

perhaps viewing it as a means of providing good budgetary support, since their school has good, and possibly growing, pupil numbers due to the achievement of high standards. These heads reject the 'older policy technologies of professionalism and bureaucracy' (Ball 2003, 216), seeing these as limiting, outdated and both finance and practice controlling.

#### **5.6.4 Mavericks**

These are headteachers who have little belief in either the overt focus on standards or in HST. They view the focus on testing as limiting the curriculum (Galton and MacBeath 2002; Berliner 2011). However, given the pressures exerted by HST, these headteachers are likely to be leading schools which have good overall SATs and inspection outcomes, in order to have the position, confidence and ability to justify their actions to stakeholders and the LA. These heads tend to place the needs and motivation of their children and staff at the forefront of their thinking, rejecting what they might consider to be a standards restricted curriculum (Palmer 2005; Burnitt 2011b). As with the 'self-regulators' classification, these heads also tend to reject accountability constructed from absolute measures of performance. They further find the overt focus on pupil outcomes limiting with a resultant narrowing of the curriculum (Berliner 2011). They are, however, aware of the significance and power of HST in terms of the negative consequences of a poor result, and have perhaps therefore undertaken 'gaming' behaviours such as teaching to the test or focusing upon specific borderline children for boosting (Burgess et al. 2006).

Maverick heads further reject the market culture and its focus on improvement through competition, being aware of the limitations of the notion of parental choice, perhaps viewing it as a pseudo option. They reject the notion of competition as a form of 'market exchange' where products, in this case primary schools, can only thrive through the support of their consumers, in this case parents (Ranson 2003, 465), seeing this as working against the best interests of their children. These heads view the new policy regime of neoliberal reform as creating an environment where 'value replaces values, [and] commitment and service are of dubious worth' (Ball 2003, 217).

Maverick heads have a strong commitment to the policy technology of professionalism, with firm beliefs in their ethics, professional judgement and the notion of co-operation across schools, which within the market model could be viewed as supporting the competition, and therefore disadvantageous. These heads support Ball's (2003) notion that 'the policy technologies of market, management and performativity leave no space for an autonomous or collective ethical self' (p.226). They are willing to fight against what Sennett (1998) calls the 'corrosion of character' in order to reinstate an environment in which professional judgement dictates policy and practice, and client needs are placed in front of commercial considerations.

### **5.6.5 Head Downers**

These headteachers are in a vulnerable position, perhaps working within schools deemed to be failing under HST. They will be subject to high levels of scrutiny, with pupil attainment and inspection outcomes their main focus, with constant tracking of teacher performance and pupil progress in place, and with LA support / intervention



a distinct possibility. These headteachers are positioned within what Gronn (2003, 139) terms the 'blame game'. Gronn uses the expression 'instrumental scapegoating' to describe the situation many headteachers within this position find themselves in; that is, being deemed ineffective through the imposition of strategies or targets forced upon them by power-holders, in this case central government.

This position is somewhat of a contradiction in that it is unlikely that a headteacher would have a positive perspective regarding HST, whilst holding a negative view of the focus on standards, since one is effectively the measure of the other. However, Gronn (2003, 138) places these leaders within what he terms a 'vicious circle', where the human actors, by continuously trying to avoid negative outcomes, actually create these outcomes. Therefore, headteachers who ignore the standards focus and keep their head down will actually instigate a negative HST outcome.

The vulnerability of this position makes it extremely difficult for a head to subscribe to a professionalism policy technology position, since their survival is based very much within performativity, i.e. successful HST outcomes. As a consequence there is little space for the development of an 'autonomous or collective ethical self' (Ball 2003, 226). Whilst head downers may ethically disagree with the policy technologies of the market, management and performativity, they are currently in no position to reject them.

## **5.7 Summary**

This chapter aims to conceptualise the current position of primary headteachers as they manage the pressures of HST and the drive towards improving standards. The

chapter also gives an insight into the direct effects of HST upon teachers and pupils, referencing research which draws upon their first-hand experiences. The effect of curriculum narrowing and the resultant exclusion of some subjects are investigated and links made to resultant pupil motivation.

The current position of headteacher accountability is examined. The pressure they now feel under to achieve SATs floor targets and the resultant stress is well documented (McCormick, 1996; Mansell, 2007; Thomson, 2009), and so this chapter illustrates how this manifests in headteachers' professional daily lives.

The chapter outlines the construction of a conceptual framework, which aims to position and understand the current perceptions of serving headteachers as they seek to reconcile the discourses within their professional lives. The next chapter details the design and methodology for the empirical research.

## **Chapter 6 - The Research Design**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the research design used to accumulate and organise the fieldwork data, focusing on headteachers' perceptions of the SDA and their accountability linked to HST. A mixed methods approach was adopted, following the guidance of Cohen et al. (2000), Opie (2004), Briggs and Coleman (2007), Denscombe (2007) and Creswell (2009).

Data collection involved the use of a headteacher questionnaire and was followed up with a series of semi-structured interviews. The data focused on a series of key themes, initially outlined within the three research questions: firstly, to develop an understanding of the changing role of headship within the current regime of testing and the drive to improve national standards; secondly, to gain an insight into the impact of testing and national standards on headteachers' agency; and finally, to gain an understanding of how heads perceive the impact of their context upon testing and national standards.

### **6.1 Selecting an appropriate methodology**

The methodology used for this project is a case study, where the 'case' is the espoused accounts of headteachers regarding their professional practice at a time of SDA through HST (see 6.1.1 below). The methodological dilemma of this study is to ensure that all voices of the participants are heard, therefore, underpinning this is the notion of what represents the truth. The ontological and epistemological approach taken challenges my original training and career as a chemist. The approach I brought to my doctoral studies was the normality of constructing measurable and repeatable models, through producing data under, what could be

termed, scientifically robust and legitimate conditions. Thus my positioning aligned with that of the natural sciences, with belief systems centred on quantitative data collection and interpretation and therefore, could be termed positivist (Thompson 1995).

Access to a wider range of research methodologies and methods through my doctoral studies has enabled me to challenge and relocate my own ontological and epistemological position. I have therefore approached this project by giving recognition to how people position themselves and understand the world (Mason 2006a, 2006b). Hence, an ontology, which links experiences, perceptions and actions, is needed. Therefore, the perceptions of the headteachers, at the time of either completing the questionnaire or undertaking their semi-structured interviews, can be said to be a transient truth. This presents a realist ontological view, that the participants' perceptions is an approximation of reality and subject to rapid change. Therefore, headteachers can be viewed as striving to develop a sustainable reality, in which they fully comprehend the challenges created by the SDA, and the HST within everyday practices.

The underlying epistemology is therefore based on subjective and interpretivist knowledge claims regarding how the headteachers see the world and construct meanings about and for their practices. This is captured through a mixed methods approach of gathering perceptions through a questionnaire combined with in-depth interviews with a small sample of headteachers. This enables the collection and examination of how and why headteachers talk about their practices in certain ways, by examining both their perceptions of the SDA and HST, whilst examining

the positions they take about their practices as they endeavour to meet the challenges of both. Therefore, the mixed methods used must allow for the opportunity for the complexities of situations, actions and contexts to be fully explored. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for this opportunity. Whilst, the quantitative questionnaire approach allowed for the collection of data used to locate heads on to the conceptual framework (Figure 5.5) constructing a model of headteacher ‘types’ based on four scenarios.

### 6.1.1 Case study

This is a case study using the serving headteachers working within state-funded primary schools in the North of England as the unit of analysis (McMillan and Schumacher 1984). Figure 6.1 illustrates the data collection procedure used within the research. It outlines the initial selection process, using public domain IDACI data, progressing through to the distribution of the headteacher questionnaire and finally the semi-structured interviews.

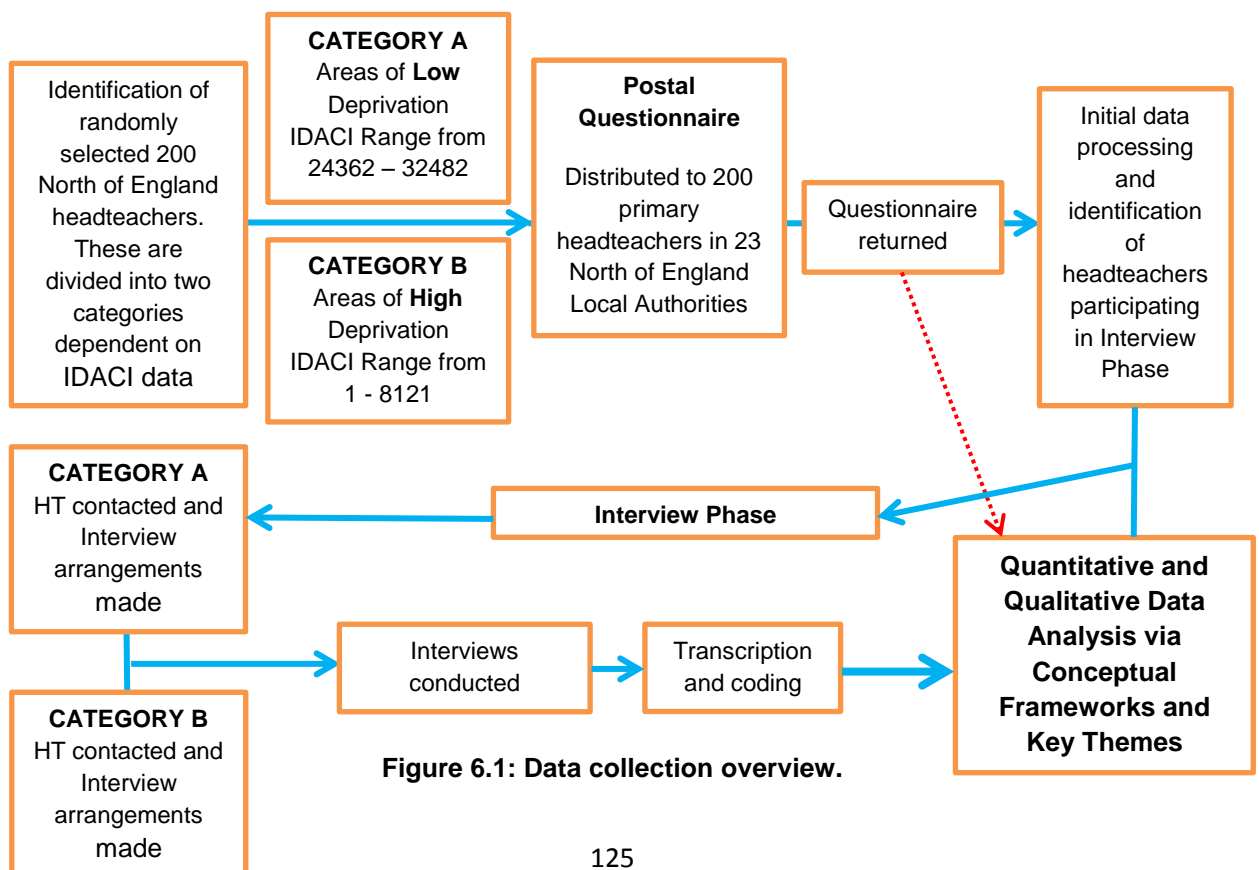


Figure 6.1: Data collection overview.

The unit of analysis was divided into two categories, defined by the IDACI measure of child deprivation. Category A are those heads identified as working within schools located within the least deprived 25% of wards in the north of England, whilst Category B are those working within the most deprived 25% of wards (Table 6.2).

The case study uses quantitative and qualitative data from serving primary headteachers' testimonies, via questionnaires and interviews, regarding their current perceptions and practices within a particular setting, operating under the scrutiny of HST accountability, within a period of sustained educational policy change by successive governments.

Nisbet and Watt (1984), Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) and Sturman (1999) all present strong arguments for the adoption of a case study approach, citing that this provides rich and vivid descriptions of events relevant to the case and opportunities for the individual actors or groups of actors (in this case, north of England primary headteachers) to articulate their perceptions of events (Cohen et al. 2000).

The function of the quantitative questionnaire phase of the fieldwork was two-fold: firstly, to gain an understanding of each head's working context; secondly, to use the data collected around the three research questions to position each head on to the conceptual framework (Figure 5.5). (Reference Appendix 6). This was followed up by the use of qualitative semi-structured interviews providing a mixed methods approach. Briggs and Coleman (2007) support the use of this type of approach, stating that it provides a 'fuller overall research picture' (p.31), whilst allowing for the incorporation of insider and outsider perspectives. They also indicate how a mixed

methods approach can go some way towards overcoming the ‘problem’ of generalisability, which is encountered via qualitative methods. Further support is offered by Denscombe (2007, 111) when he highlights the compensating nature of a mixed methods approach, stating:

[A] shrewd combination of methods allows the researcher to exploit the strengths of a particular method without leaving him / herself vulnerable to criticism in connection with that method’s weakness.

The adoption of mixed methods provides the opportunity to fully explore the perceptions of headteachers operating within their varied contexts, giving an up-to-date insight and portrait of what it is truly like to be a headteacher, providing what Geertz (1973, 109) terms ‘thick description’.

Figure 6.2 is an adaption of Creswell’s Sequential Explanatory Design (Creswell 2009), outlining mixed methods data collection.

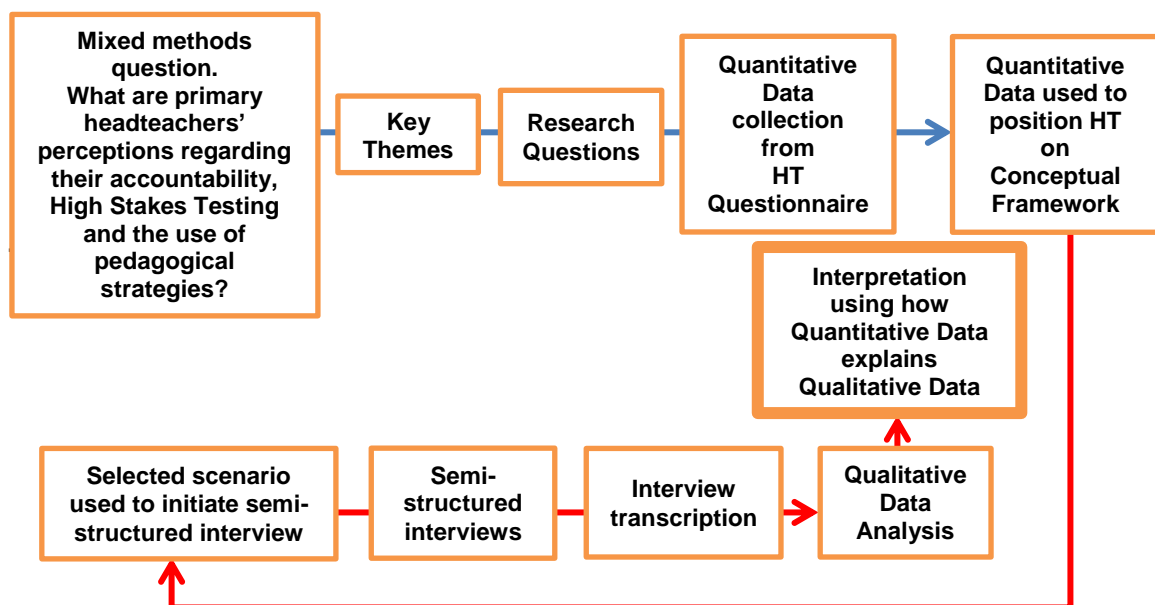


Figure 6.2: Framework of analysis.

### 6.1.2 Questionnaire population and sampling

The population comprised 200 primary schools taken from local authorities within the north of England. Table 6.1 highlights the local authorities selected to take part

in the study. These LAs were selected in order to provide a representative sample of primary schools within the north of England with respect to ethnicity, faith, culture, size, rural and urban location and socio-economic context.

Local Authority	Number of primary schools
Blackburn and Darwen	55
Bolton	94
Bradford	157
Bury	63
Calderdale	84
Cheshire East	124
Cumbria	273
Durham	227
Halton	50
Lancashire	484
Leeds	218
Liverpool	122
Manchester	128
Newcastle upon Tyne	71
North and South Tyneside	101
Salford	76
Sefton	75
Stockport	85
Trafford,	67
Warrington	69
Wigan	102
Wirral	90
York	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>3085</b>

**Table 6.1: LA sampling.**

The total population of primary schools within the 23 LAs was 3085, which equates to 772 primary schools within each of the two socio-economic categories outlined below. Thus, the total sample size is equal to:

$$\frac{100 \times 100}{722} = 13.9\%$$

Therefore, if a questionnaire return rate of 100% were secured, then this would equate to 13.9% of the population for each of the two categories. Whilst this falls slightly below the 14% return rate recommended by Cohen et al. (2000, 95) to secure 95% confidence level, the difference was deemed negligible.



Each of the schools received state funding, and a number of faith schools operating their own admissions policies were included in the study. Whilst the majority were under Local Authority control, some now had academy status and were thus independent, receiving funding directly from the Department of Education. However, all participating schools still delivered the National Curriculum and were subject to inspection by Ofsted.

The selection of the participating primary heads was made by reference to the IDACI information relating to their school's context, obtained from the Department of Education ([www.education.gov.uk/cgi-bin/inyourarea/idaci.pl](http://www.education.gov.uk/cgi-bin/inyourarea/idaci.pl)), which ranks areas in relation to a range of factors, including neighbourhood income, parental education and total deprivation, previously outlined.

The IDACI is an index of deprivation and is supplementary to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. It uses seven distinct dimensions of deprivation, called Domain Indices, in order to give an accurate measure of a given area's wealth. I have used this data to set the socio-economic context of a given school, with a focus on:

- Income
- Employment
- Health and disability
- Education, skills and training
- Barriers to housing and services
- Living environment
- Crime

The IDACI gives an accurate and up-to-date measure of the socio-economic status of a given area, and thus provides detailed data on the composition of a specific school's catchment.

Sampling was carried out in accordance with Cohen et al. (2000), that is, with the adoption of stratified sampling involving the identification of homogeneous groups, containing subjects with similar characteristics. Table 6.2 outlines the IDACI ranges for each of the two categories of schools.

Socio-economic Categories	IDACI Range
Category A ( <i>Low Deprivation</i> )	24362 - 32482
Category B ( <i>High Deprivation</i> )	1 - 8121

**Table 6.2: Deprivation categorisation.**

A non-probability sample size of 200 primary schools was selected. These schools and their headteachers were selected by use of a random number generator program (Briggs and Coleman 2002), which randomly selected a school by referencing its associated IDACI number. This process allowed for 100 schools to be located in each of the deprivation categories, using the ranges outlined in Table 6.2. A total of 34 questionnaires from a possible 200 were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 17% (see section 6.1.5). It should be noted that on some returned questionnaires not all questions had been completed. Questionnaire response were used to collect quantitative contextual data and in the construction of Conceptual Framework 1a - Headteacher positioning (Figure 6.3b)

### **6.1.3 Headteacher questionnaire design**

The headteacher questionnaire (Appendix 1) was designed following the guidance presented within Cohen et al. (2000) and Briggs and Coleman (2007). This literature provides detailed practical advice on and examples of the appropriate questionnaire format, in terms of layout and issues regarding effective distribution. The questionnaire was divided into four sections (Table 6.3), each linking to the original Research Question, whilst providing comprehensive contextual information.

<b>Section A</b>	Contextualisation of headteacher and School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headteacher age</li> <li>• Headship experience</li> <li>• Ofsted rating of school</li> <li>• Socio-economic categorisation of parents</li> <li>• Features of current school</li> </ul>
<b>Section B</b>	<b><u>Research Question 1</u></b> How and why has the role and work of the headteacher changed in regard to national standards and testing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headteacher perceptions of National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies</li> <li>• Headteacher perceptions of how the Standards Driven Agenda may or may not have impacted upon their school</li> </ul>
<b>Section C</b>	<b><u>Research Question 2</u></b> What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of national standards and testing on their understanding and practice of accountability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headteacher perceptions of High Stakes Testing and its impact upon their professional / personal lives and their context</li> <li>• Headteacher experiences of the Ofsted inspection process</li> </ul>
<b>Section D</b>	<b><u>Research Question 3</u></b> What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of the location, catchment and type of school on national standards and testing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headteacher perceptions of their professional accountability based solely upon pupil attainment performance</li> <li>• Headteacher perceptions and experiences of the effect of context upon child well-being and future attainment</li> </ul>

**Table 6.3: Headteacher questionnaire framework.**

The questionnaire was piloted with two serving primary headteachers, one from each of the socio-economic categories previously outlined. After completion of the questionnaire both pilot headteachers were interviewed, in order to ensure question and structure clarity. Positive feedback was received from both with a completion time of less than 12 minutes. This was deemed acceptable, in terms of securing a maximum response rate and to minimise disruption to the respondent headteachers.

Piloting undertaken prior to the commencement of the field study (Burnitt 2011b) identified three key issues. The first of these was the need for complete confidentiality, in order to ensure anonymity and promote willingness for the respondents to answer with honesty and in full detail. Accordingly, the use of a reference number and an associated key, to ensure that neither a school nor its

headteacher could be directly linked to a given data set, was adopted. This allowed for the returned questionnaire to be used to help link with the next semi-structured interview phase. The second point raised from the pilot was the need for the questionnaire not to appear critical of either a school's socio-economic status or its current or previous HST performance. Finally, to encourage a maximum return rate and for ease of completion, the headteacher questionnaire avoided the use of narrative-based answers, which take longer to complete and, instead, used questions requiring only the insertion of a simple tick, via the use of a Likert scale. Careful consideration, however, was given as to whether to use an even or odd number of answer statements, since, as Briggs and Coleman (2007) indicate, an odd number could result in the taking of an uninformative neutral stance position.

#### 6.1.4 Questionnaire distribution

Table 6.4 outlines the distribution procedure for the headteacher questionnaire.

Date	Action	Outcome
1 <sup>st</sup> May 2012	Posting out of 200 headteacher questionnaires	40% to be completed and returned before the end of May 2012
1 <sup>st</sup> June 2012	Reminder emails sent to non-responding headteachers	60% to be completed and returned the end of June 2012
15 <sup>th</sup> July 2012	Closing day for returning of questionnaires	A minimum of 30 (30%) responses from headteachers within each socio-economic band

**Table 6.4: Questionnaire calendar.**

The questionnaire distribution was carried out in accordance with best practice, as outlined in Cohen et al. (2000). The questionnaire was distributed by post directly to each of the 200 headteachers within the local authorities previously listed. Each questionnaire was sent with a letter of introduction (Appendix 2), research outline (Appendix 3) and an interview request form (Appendix 4).

A follow up email was used after a period of one month, which was deemed as sufficient time for the initial response. Given the current heavy workload of primary headteachers, no further reminders were sent, since this was cited as being ineffective (Cohen et al. 2000).

#### **6.1.5 Response rate and data validation**

A response rate of 17% (34 completed questionnaires) was obtained. This equates to a total population response rate of:

$$\frac{34 \times 100}{1544} = 2.2\%$$

This data broadly parallels the return rate findings of Sivo et al. (2006) when expressed as a function of the total population of primary headteachers working within the two socio-economic categories, as defined by IDACI. This response rate does raise the question of validity, which is summarised by Cohen et al. (2000, 264):

First, whether respondents who complete questionnaires do so accurately and, second, whether those who fail to return their questionnaires would have given the same distribution of answers as did the returnees.

This 'volunteer bias' (Belson 1986, 123) is a significant issue and can only be countered by a large sample, in order to produce more representative responses. To counter this, and in order to ensure appropriate representativeness, each headteacher was asked to complete a school context section of the questionnaire.

#### **6.1.6 Contextual data analysis – Gaining an understanding of each school's context.**

Completed and returned questionnaires were processed into a Microsoft Excel 2010 spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was organised into data groups, which correspond to each of the research questions and provide data on the context of each of the

participating primary schools. This element of the analysis was critical, since its use was to validate the sampling procedures, ensuring that:

- each school, in terms of Free School Meals and other Domain Indices, corresponds to its IDACI classification;
- the sample is broadly representative of primary schools in the north of England in terms of pupil and staff numbers;
- a representative sample of headteachers, in terms of age and experience, was collected;
- a representative sample of schools, in terms of their most recent Ofsted grading, was collected.

This data was used to calculate a mean figure for each of the parameters, which are then compared against the mean data provided by the Office of National Statistics (ONS 2011: 2013a: 2013b). Thus, if the mean of each of the parameters from the responding schools was broadly in line with the national data, it could be assumed that the 34 responding schools were representative of UK primary schools. Therefore, each of the responding school's parameters was directly compared against the mean. Table 6.5 illustrates that the accuracy of the deprivation selection process is validated by the significant variance in the percentage of free school meals being claimed within each contextual category. Category A schools (the top 25% most affluent) had a free school meals (FSM) claim rate 12.6% below the national average, whilst Category B schools (the 25% most deprived within the north of England) had a rate 25.9% above the national mean. This variance above and below the national mean FSM claim rate validated the use of the IDACI data with respect to categorising these schools.

	Category A Low Deprivation Mean	Category B High Deprivation Mean	National Mean	Category A Low Deprivation Mean Variance	Category B High Deprivation Mean Variance
<b>School size</b>	326	284	<b>257</b>	+69	+27
<b>Class size</b>	25.8	22.0	<b>27.0</b>	-1.2	-5.0
<b>SEN</b>	14.7%	26.2%	<b>16.0%</b>	-1.3%	+10.2%
<b>FSM</b>	6.6%	45.1%	<b>19.2%</b>	-12.6%	+25.9%

**Table 6.5: Sample schools' characteristics when compared against national data.**

In terms of both school and class size, some variation from the national mean is observed. However, with respect to school size, this could be due, in part, to the small sample size and given a higher response rate, the results would probably be nearer to the national average of 257 pupils (ONS 2013). The variance in class size could be seen to directly indicate government policy and strategy, with classes within Category B (High Deprivation) having on average 5 fewer pupils than the national average of 27 children. The funding for this reduction was supported with the introduction of the Pupil Premium by the Coalition Government (DfE 2014b), which led to the provision of £1.8 billion of funding to schools in the financial year 2013 to 2014, increasing to £2.5 billion in 2014 to 2015. This funding has a significant effect on all primary schools, particularly schools in areas of high deprivation, with each eligible pupil initially bringing an additional £953 to the school's allocated budget, rising to £1,300 in the financial year 2014-2015.

Table 6.6 illustrates the net mean annual budgetary increase that the introduction of the Pupil Premium has brought to schools within each of the categories, and provides some evidence for the observed lower class sizes within areas of high deprivation.

Context	IDACI Range	Mean School Size	Mean % FSM	Number of Children Eligible for Pupil Premium	Mean Resultant Pupil Premium Funding Per School
Category A Low Deprivation	24362 – 32482	326	6.6	22	£20,966
Category B High Deprivation	0 – 8121	284	45.1	128	£121,984

**Table 6.6: The difference between Pupil Premium Funding within Category A and B schools, based on the 2013-14 allocation.**

Whilst this is a notional calculation, it does illustrate the significant difference in funding which now exists between schools within differing socio-economic contexts. Perhaps this provides some evidence for the difference in class sizes currently observed, since the extra budget could be used to fund additional staff.

To further gauge the representativeness of the sample, each headteacher was asked to indicate the socio-economic demographic of their parents and carers. This data, given below in Table 6.7, demonstrates the polarisation of the demographics associated with each category.

Context	A Upper middle class	B Middle class	C <sub>1</sub> Lower middle class	C <sub>2</sub> Skilled working class	D Working class	E Those at lowest level of subsistence	Total n=32
Category A Low Deprivation	0%	36% (5)	14% (2)	36% (5)	14% (2)	0%	14
Category B High Deprivation	0%	0%	0%	0%	33% (6)	67% (12)	18

Number of responding heads given in brackets.

- A = High managerial, administrative or professional
- B = Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
- C<sub>1</sub> = Administrative or professional
- C<sub>2</sub> = Skilled manual workers, supervisory, clerical and junior managerial
- D = Semi and unskilled manual workers
- E = Unemployed with state benefits only

Classification based on the National Readership Survey (NRS 2014)

**Table 6.7: Demographic classification based on responding schools.**



From the 32 responding schools (two heads did not complete this section), it was significant to note the differences in the physical locations of schools within the two socio-economic categories (Table 6.8).

Context	IDACI Range	Location				Total n=32
		Inner-city	Urban	Semi-Urban	Rural	
Category A Low Deprivation	24362 – 32482	0%	57% (8)	14% (2)	29% (4)	14
Category B High Deprivation	0 – 8121	78% (14)	22% (4)	0%	0%	18

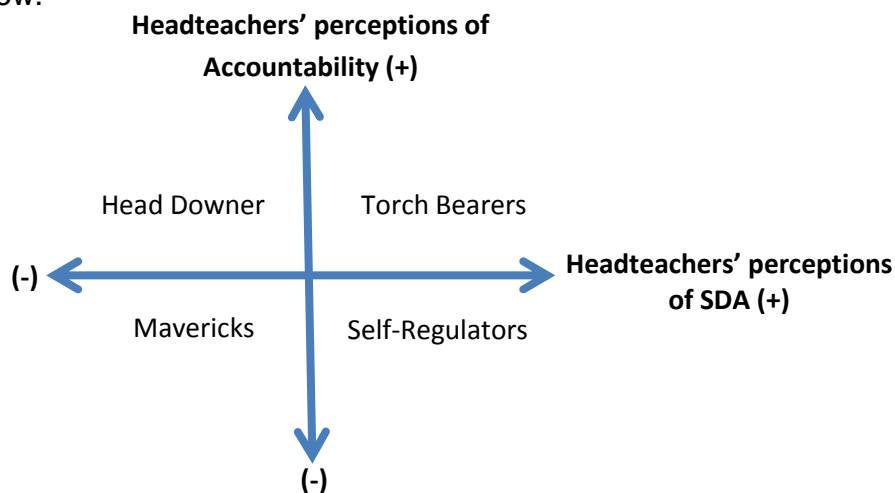
Number of responding heads given in brackets

**Table 6.8: Classification of physical location based on responding schools.**

The majority of schools within areas of high deprivation are placed within the inner-cities or close by, with areas of lower deprivation tending to be within the urban or semi-urban areas, with a notable proportion placed within rural communities.

## 6.2 The position of headteachers upon the Conceptual Framework

Using the responses given within their returned questionnaires, each headteacher was positioned onto a conceptual framework (Figure 5.5) a simplified version is given below.



**Figure 6.3a: Simplified Conceptual Framework 1a – Headteacher positioning.**

Their responses to Research Question 1 were used to plot the x axis, their perceptions of the SDA, whilst their responses to Research Question 2 were used to plot the y axis, their perceptions of accountability and the HST agenda. Each

question was assigned either a positive response (+), indicating a supportive view towards the SDA or accountability through HST, or a negative (-), demonstrating a non-supportive stance. The total number of negative responses was then subtracted from the total number of positive to give an overall stance, which was then plotted as a co-ordinate onto the conceptual framework for each responding headteacher.

### **6.2.1 Plotting the x axis – Perceptions of the SDA**

Research Question 1 focuses on headteachers' perceptions of the drive to significantly improve standards, in both literacy and maths, through governmental strategies and policy. Whilst both National Strategies came to an end in 2011, their effect, in terms of school improvement and organisation, is still significant. Therefore, it is relevant to seek current headteachers' perceptions, since this is a gauge of their willingness to accept top-down pedagogical control and the focus on standards. The headteachers' overall responses are given within Table 6.9.

What are your perceptions of the impact of the emphasis on raising pupil attainment and standards in the teaching and learning of literacy and maths?			High Deprivation	Low Deprivation	Reponses as used to generate x axis coordinates
1.1a	Has the recent focus on standards resulted in improvements in pupils' learning?	Yes	12	11	+
		No	7	3	-
1.2a	Did the introduction of NLS result in higher literacy attainment?	Yes	12	10	+
		No	7	5	-
1.3a	Did the introduction of NNS result in higher numeracy attainment?	Yes	15	11	+
		No	4	4	-
1.4a	Given a free choice would you have used the NLS?	Yes	10	9	+
		No	9	6	-
1.5a	Given a free choice would you have used the NNS?	Yes	12	13	+
		No	7	3	-
1.8a	Has the current level of focus on standards had a negative effect upon pupils' self-esteem?	Yes	2	7	-
		No	17	8	+
1.9a	Has the current level of focus on standards made children more acutely aware of their own performance and that of their peers?	Yes	16	15	-
		No	3	0	+
1.10a	Do you have a willingness to take on board new initiatives and approaches which could lead to significantly better SATs results, whether you believe in the initiative or not?	Yes	13	10	+
		No	6	5	-
1.11a	Has the introduction of a Standards Driven Agenda led to a limiting of the curriculum?	Yes	13	13	-
		No	5	2	+
1.12a	Do you believe that the introduction of a Standards Driven Agenda has led to your school becoming a less enjoyable environment in which children learn?	Yes	8	7	-
		No	11	8	+
1.13a	Do you believe that the focus on literacy and maths has resulted in a lowering of pupil motivation?	Yes	5	3	-
		No	15	13	+
1.14a	Do you believe that the focus on literacy and maths has resulted in a decrease in pupil creativity?	Yes	10	12	-
		No	9	3	+
1.15a	Do you believe that the constant use of High Stakes Testing (SATs and Ofsted inspections) has resulted in schools becoming less able to develop the creativity of children?	Yes	15	11	-
		No	4	4	+

**Table 6.9: Responses to Question 1a. Data used to plot the x axis on Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b).**

### 6.2.2 Plotting the y axis – Perceptions of accountability

The focus of Research Question 2 is headteachers' perceptions of the impact of the emphasis on standards and increased localised accountability (through HST) upon their role.

Perceptions of High Stakes Testing			High Deprivation	Low Deprivation	Reponses as used to generate y axis coordinates
2.1a	Do you think the annual SATs provide an accurate picture of pupil attainment in the core subjects?	Yes	4	6	+
		No	15	9	-
2.2a	Do you think school performance data is a useful tool in aiding parent / carer selection of suitable schools?	Yes	2	7	+
		No	17	8	-
2.3a	Do you think Ofsted inspections provide an accurate picture of the effectiveness of a school?	Yes	6	6	+
		No	13	9	-
<b>Do you think Ofsted inspections provide useful information about:</b>					
2.4a	Achievement of pupils at the school?	Yes	8	9	+
		No	11	5	-
2.5a	Quality of teaching in the school?	Yes	9	7	+
		No	10	7	-
2.7a	Quality of leadership and management of the school?	Yes	11	8	+
		No	8	6	-

Do you think it is acceptable to 'Teach to the Tests', in order to?			High Deprivation	Low Deprivation	Reponses as used to generate y axis coordinates
2.13a	Do you consider that there is a particular cohort within your school which could potentially distort a future judgement by Ofsted?	Yes	15	14	-
		No	5	0	+
2.14a	Do you think the current level of teacher accountability is having a negative effect upon teacher morale?	Yes	11	14	-
		No	8	1	+
2.15a	Do you think the current increased focus on accountability is leading to potentially quality teacher training candidates choosing alternative careers?	Yes	11	10	-
		No	6	5	+
2.16a	Do you think the current high level of teacher accountability is forcing good / outstanding teachers to consider leaving or to leave the teaching profession?	Yes	11	8	-
		No	6	7	+
2.17a	Do you think the current high levels of headteacher accountability is forcing good / outstanding members of Senior Leadership Teams to re-consider their career progression and to not apply for headteacher positions?	Yes	19	14	-
		No	0	1	+
2.18a	Do you consider that Ofsted's current measurement of a school's effectiveness (based upon the Standards Driven Agenda) fails to include the true picture of a school's impact upon the social and emotional development of its pupils?	Yes	18	15	-
		No	1	0	+

2.19a	Do you consider that some schools are unfairly deemed 'unsuccessful' when measured by High Stakes Testing (SATs results and Ofsted inspections)?	Yes	16	14	-
		No	3	1	+
2.20a	Do you consider that less external accountability would allow you the time to drive the school forward more effectively?	Yes	14	11	-
		No	5	4	+
2.21a	Have you ever considered leaving your post because of the importance placed on pupil attainment?	Yes	9	5	-
		No	10	10	+
2.22a	Have you ever considered leaving your post because of the pressure of your own direct accountability?	Yes	6	6	-
		No	14	8	+
2.23a	Have you any professional experience of what you perceive as an UNFAIR Ofsted inspection?	Yes	9	9	-
		No	9	8	+
2.24a	Have you any professional experience of what you perceive as an INACCURATE Ofsted inspection?	Yes	10	5	-
		No	9	10	+

**Table 6.10: Responses to Question 2. Data to plot the y axis on Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b).**

### 6.2.3 Position on the Conceptual Framework

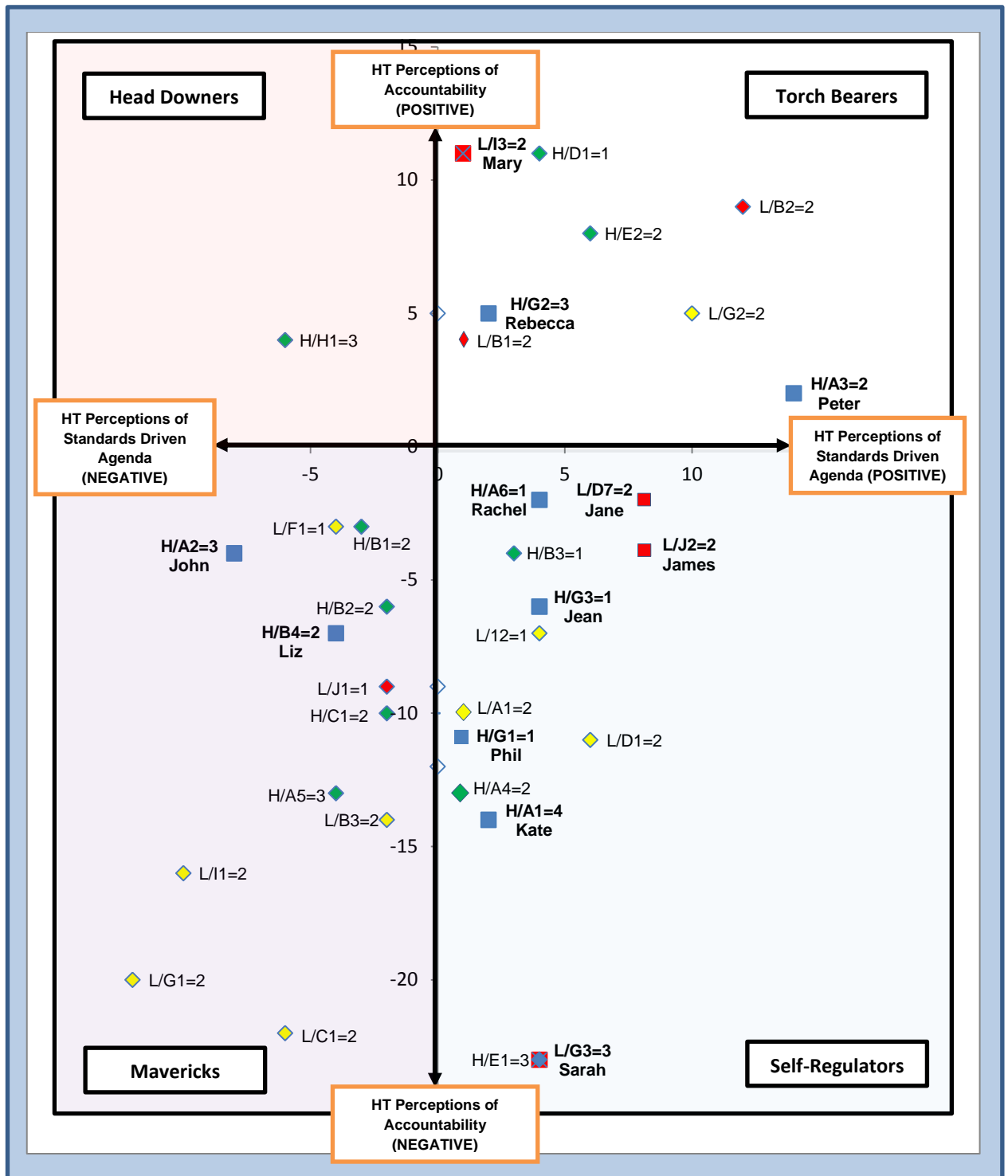
The data from Tables 6.9 (x axis) and 6.10 (y axis) were used to plot the coordinates on the Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b) and thus, to position each headteacher prior to interview. An increasingly high positive coordinate is indicative of an increasingly positive perception of the effectiveness of accountability and HST in raising standards, and vice versa. For example, +14 demonstrates a very positive perception and -14 a very negative one, with zero denoting a neutral stance.

H/T Ref	Standards Driven Agenda	Accountability	H/T Ref	Standards Driven Agenda	Accountability
<b>High Deprivation</b>	<b>x axis</b>	<b>y axis</b>	<b>Low Deprivation</b>	<b>x axis</b>	<b>y axis</b>
*H/A1	+2	-14	L/A1	+1	-9
*H/A2	-8	-4	L/B1	+1	+5
*H/A3	+14	+2	L/B2	+12	+9
H/A4	+1	-12	L/B3	-2	-14
H/A5	-4	-13	L/C1	-6	-22
*H/A6	+4	-2	L/D1	+6	-11
H/B1	-3	-3	*L/D7	+8	-1
H/B2	-2	-6	L/F1	-4	-3
H/B3	+3	-4	L/G1	-12	-20
*H/B4	-4	-7	L/G2	10	5
H/C1	-2	-10	*L/G3	4	-23
H/D1	4	11	L/I1	-10	-16
H/E1	4	-23	L/I2	4	-7
H/E2	6	8	*L/I3	1	11
*H/G1	1	-10	L/J1	-2	-9
*H/G2	2	5	*L/J2	8	-3
*H/G3	4	-6			
H/H1	-6	4			

**Table 6.11: Conceptual Framework coordinates.**

\*self-selected for interview

Conceptual Frame 1a (Figure 6.3b) was then constructed from this data.



The conceptual framework provides diagrammatical representation of each head's questionnaire responses. For example, Head H/A3 'Peter' is positioned within the Torch Bearers quadrant, because his answers indicated significant support of the SDA, as illustrated by a positive response to the question 'has the recent focus on standards resulted in improvements in pupils' learning?' (Appendix 6), but only limited endorsement of accountability through HST. A further example, L/G3 'Sarah' illustrates a head positioned within the Self-Regulators quadrant, as a result of her strong negative perceptions of accountability through HST, as shown, for example, by her negative responses to questions asking about the ability of annual testing and Ofsted inspections to provide an accurate picture of a school's performance

### **6.3 Headteacher semi-structured interviews**

Whilst the questionnaire phase of the fieldwork provides quantitative data, it does not provide the answer to what Opie (2004, 111) terms the 'why' questions. Therefore, the interview element of the research is critical in gaining an understanding of how and why headteachers cope with working within the current 'low trust society' (Troman 2000). Further support for this approach is offered by Oppenheim (1992, 81): '[Interviews] allow respondents to say what they think and to do so with greater richness and spontaneity'.

Using the guidance outlined within Cohen et al. (2000), the interview schedule was designed in order to avoid the superficialities identified by Kerlinger (1970), and to provide the respondent headteachers with the opportunity to furnish more detailed responses to the answers given within the questionnaire stage. The schedule also



allowed for the rapid development of a rapport with the heads, thus promoting mutual trust, ensuring detailed and candid responses.

### **6.3.1 Interview sampling**

The next phase, the semi-structured interviews, involved the headteachers opting to take part in the research when completing and returning their questionnaires. This involved completing the final page of the questionnaire (Appendices 1 and 4), giving their consent to be interviewed within their school at a mutually agreed time, whilst providing contact details.

It is important to note that self-selection by informants has a number of associated issues, which have been identified (Cohen et al. 2000; Drever 2003; Opie 2004). They highlight that self-selection can create questions over both the representativeness of the sample and the possibility of bias created by the interviewees. Within this context, this could result in only those headteachers who are confident with their position with respect to HST outcomes, or those with an 'axe to grind', actually nominating themselves for the interview phase.

Each headteacher who had given consent to be interviewed was initially contacted by email, with a follow-up telephone call to set a mutually convenient time for interview. The interviewing phase of the fieldwork spanned the period January 2013 to October 2014 and involved twelve headteachers, eight from areas of high deprivation and four from areas of low deprivation. In order to maintain anonymity, each headteacher was assigned a pseudonym. Table 6.12 presents the sample.

Ref	Assigned Pseudonym	Sex of HT	Time in post (Years)	Most recent Ofsted grading	Number of staff (FTE)	Number of pupils	FSM %	SEN %	SATs Data Level 4 and above
<b>Category A (Low Deprivation)</b>									
L/D7	Jane	F	8	Good	8.4	226	4	15	93%
L/G3	Sarah	F	11	Satisfactory	5.5	190	10	15	85%
L/I3	Mary	F	5	Good	13	384	2	7	97%
L/J2	James	M	8	Good	18.6	410	7	7	93%
<b>Category B (High Deprivation)</b>									
H/A1	Kate	F	7	Inadequate	11	260	35	28	78%
H/A2	John	M	10	Satisfactory	14.5	267	56	25	73%
H/A3	Peter	M	8	Good	15.8	338	62	34	88%
H/A6	Rachel	F	4	Outstanding	20	465	31	26	78%
H/B4	Liz	F	7	Good	9	207	83	27	65%
H/G1	Phil	M	16	Outstanding	25	475	21	20	67%
H/G2	Rebecca	F	4	Satisfactory	8.3	157	40	8	64%
H/G3	Jean	F	9	Outstanding	7	142	42	9	N/A

**Table 6.12: Interview location data.**

### 6.3.2 Semi-structured interview administration

Guidance on the actual administration of each interview was taken from Denscombe (2007), who highlights the importance of self-preservation in terms of adopting a passive and neutral stance with the interviewee, whilst being empathetic and attentive. He further suggests that the ‘personal identity’ of the interviewer can have a marked effect upon the chances of developing a rapport with the interviewee. To minimise any possible negative perceptions, which might limit honesty and candour, care was taken to present myself as a confident and competent researcher, who is both knowledgeable and sympathetic to the pressures faced by the headteacher. To ensure this positive perception, care was taken to dress appropriately and arrive on time, whilst presenting a professional persona.

Prior to interview, each headteacher gave their written consent for their interview to be digitally recorded (Appendix 4), following which the sound files were encrypted

for security, and for direct quotations to be used anonymously, Each interview was conducted within the privacy of the headteacher's office and lasted between 45 and 55 minutes. The structure and questions used within the interviews are given within Appendix 5. This schedule was used to ensure consistency across each of the twelve interviews.

After initial introductions, the interviews progressed to focus on each headteacher's positioning on the Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b), based on their previous questionnaire responses. Each was asked to discuss their indicated positioning on the Conceptual Framework (Figure 6.3b). In order to enable this process four scenarios were used, as outlined below and within Figure 5.5.

- An Active School Improver (Torch Bearer) – Positive perceptions of both the SDA and accountability;
- A Developing School Improver (Self-Regulators) – Positive perceptions of the SDA but negative perceptions of accountability;
- A Critical School Improver (Maverick) – Negative perceptions of both the SDA and accountability;
- A Survivalist School Improver (Head Downer) – Negative perceptions of the SDA but positive perceptions of accountability.

The heads were asked to explain their current stance regarding their perceptions of the SDA and accountability through HST, with a particular focus on any discourse which may exist between the enforcement of policy and practice. Table 6.13 illustrates each interviewee headteacher's positioning within the Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b), indicating the strength of their perception stance on standards and accountability through HST.

High Deprivation					
HT Ref		Neutral Stance 0 - 5	Medium Stance 5 - 10	Strong Stance >10	Scenario
H/A1 Kate	SDA	x			Self-Regulator
	Accountability			x	
H/A2 John	SDA		x		Maverick
	Accountability	x			
H/A3 Peter	SDA			x	Torch Bearer
	Accountability	x			
H/A6 Rachel	SDA	x			Self-Regulator
	Accountability	x			
H/B4 Liz	SDA	x			Maverick
	Accountability		x		
H/G1 Phil	SDA	x			Self-Regulator
	Accountability		x		
H/G2 Rebecca	SDA	x			Torch Bearer
	Accountability		x		
H/G3 Jean	SDA		x		Self-Regulator
	Accountability		x		
Low Deprivation					
L/D7 Jane	SDA			x	Self-Regulator
	Accountability		x		
L/G3 Sarah	SDA	x			Self-Regulator
	Accountability		x		
L/J2 James	SDA			x	Self-Regulator
	Accountability		x		
L/I3 Mary	SDA	x			Torch Bearer
	Accountability			x	

**Table 6.13: Perceptions of headteachers taking part in the interview phase.**

Following the Interview Schedule (Appendix 5), the discussion was directed to answer each of the three research questions. The first focussed on exploring heads' perceptions of the SDA, its effects on pupils and staff in terms of their motivation, enjoyment of school and creativity. Heads were also asked to express their opinions and experiences of the National Strategies in terms of their effectiveness in raising standards. Secondly, heads perceptions of the impact of national standards and testing was discussed. Initially the focus was on their experiences of Ofsted

inspections in terms of their accuracy, fairness and consequences for the professional lives of heads. The interviews progressed on to how heads managed their staff in terms of maximising performance with respect to gaining positive HST outcomes. Finally, heads were asked about their professional context and its effect on HST outcomes. They were also asked to identify the special challenges they faced given either the high levels of affluence or deprivation in which they worked.

### **6.3.3 Data handling and analysis**

After the completion of each interview, the digital file was transferred from the recorder, assigned a unique code (Table 6.12) and, using Dragon Naturally Speaking voice recognition software, transcribed before being securely stored as a Microsoft Word file.

Care was taken during the transcription process to follow the guidelines outlined by Cohen et al. (2000), who warn of the potential for massive data loss and distortion. They note that the data held within the transcription of an interview inevitably loses insight from the original encounter, since only the oral element is taken into account, with the loss of all non-verbal communication and the ability to add emphasis.

Once all transcriptions had been completed, they were transferred into Atlas *Ti* software. Atlas *Ti* is a qualitative data program (QDA) able to manage large amounts of qualitative data, allowing for the identification and organising of themes. I specifically used Atlas *Ti* to assign open and vivo codes, which act as labels locating and identifying specific elements within the interview transcriptions, effectively linking these to each of the themes identified within Chapter 5 (Figures

5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). This allows for the efficient analysis of complex phenomena hidden in unstructured text data. (Appendix 7).

The use of effective coding of data is critical in the reduction of data overload (Miles and Huberman 1994). It allows for the easy analysis of previously identified key themes originating from existing theories, professional experience or concepts within the literature review and policy technologies and accountabilities (Figure 5.4), based on the conceptualisations of Ranson (2003) and Ball (2003). Coding is defined by Kerlinger (1970) as the effective means by which question responses are translated and located into specific categories for the purpose of analysis. Table 6.14 outlines the relationship between the three key themes identified and developed through the literatures to produce the core conceptualisation of headship, (Figure 5.4).

Key Theme	Policy Technology / Accountabilities	Category	Coding
<b>Perceptions of Meeting the Requirements of HST</b>	Market	Accountability	Accountability Accountable Responsibility Control Headteacher stress
	Performativity	Standards	Ofsted SATs Teachers Staff Results Tests Data Standards Results
	Management	Strategies	NNS NLS
<b>The Practicalities</b>	Professional	External community effects Context	Deprivation Poor Unemployment Crime FSM Free School Meals Middle class Support Homework
	Management Professional Performativity	Internal community effects Parents and pupils	Staff Performance Staff Morale / Resilience Staff Expectations / Aspirations of pupils

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Headteacher Conflicts</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Management Professional Performativity</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Staff</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Stress Motivation Workload Creativity Lesson observation Marking Balanced curriculum</p>
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**Table 6.14: Coding scheme.**

### **6.4 Analysis**

The analysis of the qualitative data using Atlas *Ti* was carried out using the work of Smit (2002), which highlights the strength of this program in aiding the identification of similarities, differences, categories, themes, concepts and ideas (p.66). The identification of these elements is based upon effectively isolating smaller units of meaning, indicated within Table 6.14 as ‘codes’. The effective use of coding allowed for the direct linking of individual headteacher’ interview responses to each of the three key themes, previously outlined within Chapter 5, and to locating data used to answer each of the three research questions. A simple overview of the process is given within Appendix 7. The use of Atlas *Ti* allowed for the rapid processing of 14 hours of recorded headteacher interviews which generated over 40,000 words of transcription. Clearly, looking for specific elements directly linked to each key theme or research question would have been extremely challenging without the processing power of this program.

The analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data can be challenging, since large amounts of raw data was produced. However, effective coding allowed for the identification of generalisations and the production of explanations. There are a number of disadvantages associated with qualitative data analysis, for example, the impact of the researcher and the de-contextualisation of meaning due to coding (Denscombe 2007). However, the use of mixed methods allows for these to be

balanced and for the data to be rich and detailed, giving comprehensive interpretations of complex professional situations.

### **6.5 Access and ethical issues**

Prior to the undertaking of fieldwork, a University of Manchester risk assessment was carried out, with the project found to be medium risk, since the research follows standard procedures and established research methodologies and is considered non-contentious. Further, I completed a Manchester Institute of Education ethics form, with approval for the study being granted by the Ethics Committee. Throughout both the questionnaire and interview phases of the fieldwork, great care was taken to show respect to all participants, by seeking informed consent and providing them with detailed information outlining the study and its aims (Appendices 2-4). In order to ensure this, guidance from the British Educational Research Association (2011) was followed:

Researchers must take the steps necessary to ensure that all participants in the research understand the process in which they are to be engaged, including why their participation is necessary, how it will be used and how and to whom it will be reported (p.7).

As the initial questionnaire (Appendix 1), letter of introduction (Appendix 2) and research outline (Appendix 3) were mailed directly to the populating schools, consent was given via the completion and return of the questionnaire. If the headteacher self-selected to take part further in the study, in the interview phase, they provided their details on the final page of the questionnaire and returned this with their completed consent form. Those heads volunteering to be interviewed were initially contacted by email and, following this, phoned to finalise the arrangements for interview.



In order to maintain complete confidentiality and anonymity, all schools were assigned reference numbers and pseudonyms were given to those heads who agreed to be interviewed. It should be noted that during the course of some headteacher interviews, some items were discussed which were of a sensitive nature, involving specific members of staff; this information has not been included within the transcripts. This, however, does indicate a high level of trust on the part of the responding heads in my professionalism and skills as a researcher. It further validates the responses they have provided, since it highlights both their honesty and candidness.

### **6.6 Validity and reliability**

Given that this research is based upon a case study and, as such, is looking at one off events, in that a head's perceptions of both SDA and HST are located within that specific moment, and are open to subsequent change. As such, it could be argued that their responses are 'not open to exact replication' (Bassegy 2002, 111). This raises the question of the trustworthiness of the heads' responses, as opposed to their reliability. Bassegy (2002) outlines a series of tests to validate trustworthiness, including critical challenge from critical friends, provided here by my supervisor and Ed.D research colleagues. A further test that Bassegy (2002, 120) highlights is the notion of sufficient research detail. Whilst the research methods are quite complex, they are both systematic and sufficiently triangulated to validate the research conclusions drawn.

Nevertheless, as Cohen et al. (2000) highlight, there are potentially significant issues connected to the researcher being the interviewer. Whilst it allows for the

interviewer to be familiar with the study, it could be extremely difficult to remain fully objective, resulting in a conflict between the two roles. Given that both SDA and HST have been significant elements of my professional life, it would be unrealistic to think that, in both my verbal and non-verbal communication to the responding heads, I remained completely neutral, even with the aid of an interview script. This view is supported by Cohen et al. (2000) when they identify the potential sources of bias which could be present in the characters of both the interviewer and interviewees, and also within the questions.

### **6.7 Summary**

This chapter provides information on the research design and methodology used to collect and analyse the quantitative data from the headteacher questionnaires, and the qualitative data from the twelve semi-structured interviews. The research instruments used were developed and refined through piloting (Burnitt 2011b), and an overview of the mixed methods data collection was also developed (Figure 6.1). I now present my fieldwork findings for the three research questions and, using the conceptual framework, present a portrait of primary headship, in terms of professional perceptions of the continuing drive to improve standards, HST and the resultant issue of accountability. A further element of the research is the development of a detailed understanding of how these elements are interlinked within headteachers' professional working contexts.

## **Chapter 7 – Headteacher Positioning with Respect to the Standards Driven Agenda and High Stakes Testing**

### **7.0 Introduction**

This chapter examines the current perceptions and positioning of serving primary headteachers, in relationship to the implementation and professional consequences of HST. It draws from the three themes of HST requirements, practicalities and conflicts of headship, which aim to conceptualise the professional and personal lives of current heads within a low trust society.

### **7.1 Theme 1 - Perceptions of meeting the requirements of HST (outlined within Figure 5.1)**

The marginalising of professional accountability by both the market and its resultant culture of performativity have placed effectiveness at the forefront of all elements of school life. The notions of compliance and the promotion of standards via top down policies have underpinned educational reform for the past thirty years. Examples of this are the two National Strategies, outlined in Chapter 2, which sought not only to improve standards, but to introduce state pedagogical control within the classroom. As such, heads' perceptions of their effectiveness provide a valuable insight.

#### **7.1.1 Adoption of strategies and policy**

The mixed responses the Strategies received, and the questions raised regarding New Labour's claims of significant improvements in literacy and numeracy, were widely documented (Beard 2000; Earl et al. 2003; Webb and Vulliamy 2006; Burnitt 2011b). However, little robust research is available which focuses directly upon headteachers' perceptions of the Strategies' long term effects. Whilst the introduction of the Strategies formed only an element of the continuous drive by successive governments to place high standards at the forefront of educational

reform, they were fundamental since they introduced pedagogical control. This creates a significant discourse, in which the headteacher acts as ‘lead teacher’, thus controlling teaching methods, and as ‘implementer’ of top down policy and practice. Therefore, a headteacher’s perception of these Strategies is an important element in understanding their positioning with respect to the SDA and the HST associated with it.

As discussed previously, there now exists a culture of implied doubt on behalf of successive governments regarding teaching standards and professionalism and, as such, headteachers have been charged with the task of enforcing improvements in standards above all other considerations.

The Strategies can be viewed as a mechanism of school improvement, and therefore headteachers’ perceptions of their effectiveness with respect to improving standards is significant. Table 7.1 illustrates the headteachers’ questionnaire responses.

Has the recent focus on standards resulted in improvements in pupils’ learning?	Yes	23
	No	11
Given a free choice would you have used the NLS?	Yes	19
	No	15
Given a free choice would you have used the NNS?	Yes	24
	No	10

**Table 7.1: Headteachers’ perceptions of the Strategies taken from questionnaire responses.**

The questionnaire data indicates that two thirds of the responding headteachers perceive that the focus on raising standards has resulted in a direct improvement in pupil attainment and, since the introduction of the National Strategies was a key element of this drive, headteachers’ perceptions of these will provide an insight into one element of this process.

Given that 18 of the responding headteachers would have actually implemented the National Literacy Strategy (NLS), given the 'free' option, it is important to note the pressure HST placed upon headteachers to conform. This was illustrated during her interview by Rebecca (H/G2), the head of a school within an area of high deprivation:

'... we were told that we had to deliver numeracy and literacy in a certain way; it was very top down. Although some of it wasn't statutory, you would have to be very brave not to do it.'

Webb (2010) provides further examples of the pressure exerted on heads to use the Strategies and their concerns connected to resisting their use. So, whilst not mandatory, the majority of heads opted to adopt the Strategies, as illustrated within the Ofsted document, *'The National Literacy Strategy: the first four years 1999–2002'* (Ofsted 2002).

During their interviews, the headteachers articulated their concerns regarding the use of the Strategies, but also why, despite their concerns, they had elected to implement them:

It is a very prudent head that used them, but a cut-and-paste strategy is not appropriate for all children. Because there is one model which says teach this way and then we teach all the children in that way and schools across the whole country are doing it the same. No wonder they had a limited impact on standards. Mary (L/I3).

Mary (L/I3) is the head of a successful semi-urban school judged outstanding by Ofsted, and yet she did not feel sufficiently confident to resist the implementation of the Strategies, despite her serious reservations regarding their positive effect upon standards. Again, this illustrates the power HST has to control the professional judgements of even successful heads.

### 7.1.2 Headteachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the Strategies

Headteachers, when questioned regarding their support for the implementation of the two Strategies, indicated stronger support for the National Numeracy Strategy than the Literacy Strategy, with three quarters of headteachers supporting the introduction of the former (Table 7.2).

Did the introduction of NLS result in higher Literacy attainment?	Yes	21
	No	13
Did the introduction of NNS result in higher Numeracy attainment?	Yes	24
	No	10

**Table 7.2: Headteachers' perceptions of the Strategies' effects on standards.**

Expanding on this during interview, headteachers cited reasons connected to ensuring a uniformity of teacher expectations across year groups, as well as the provision of a toolkit, which enabled teachers, particularly those new to the profession, to both check their subject knowledge and to have access to current DfE and Ofsted supported pedagogies. The concerns raised by heads regarding the negative effects of poor or limited subject knowledge is supported by the research of Goulding et al. (2002) who identified a clear link between weaknesses in understanding, particularly within primary mathematics and resultant poor planning and teaching. Thus, heads concerns are understandable, since pupil attainment could be seen to be at risk.

The notion of pedagogical control was supported by Liz (H/B4) states, 'a great deal of the work within the classroom was behind a closed door' and 'there wasn't a prescriptive curriculum and it didn't really matter. So, as long as you are doing something 'Englishy', it seemed to be okay'. This illustrates her perception of the need to control the curriculum. The introduction of the Strategies structured the curriculum in detail, removing the 'opt-out clause' and opportunities for teachers to adopt non-conforming teaching approaches. However, English et al. (2002) argue

that the Strategies offered contradictory pedagogical advice to teachers, creating significant dilemmas around the imposition of prescribed programmes on personal educational principles (p.9).

Whilst headteachers were broadly supportive of the Strategies, citing improvements in teachers' knowledge, planning and, subsequently, standards, a common theme around appropriateness started to emerge. The idea that a single strategy and its age related expectations could address the numeracy and literacy needs of all children was questioned. Two headteachers, both working within areas of low deprivation, illustrated these issues; firstly, Mary (L/I3):

The problem I have with the Strategies, with any of the schemes, is that it is like trying to get all the children to fit through the same hoop; it's 'the one size fits all' approach.

Sarah (L/G3), a more experienced head with eleven years in post, agrees:

[The Strategies] were exhausting, so the fact that children were being pushed, pushed, pushed to get through them didn't have the positive effect on standards, which they ought to have had.

Whilst questionnaire returns indicated that 26 (for literacy) and 21 (for numeracy) out of 34 responding heads considered that the introduction of the National Strategies had resulted in an increase in standards, their use was not without its criticism, with headteachers expressing concerns over the narrowing of the curriculum, loss of teachers' professional identity and the 'one size fits all' perspective during interview. James (L/J2), the experienced head of a school rated 'good', within an affluent market town, illustrates his concerns, stating that, 'the three-part lesson and all the overhead projector stuff was all very dry and teaching by the book'.

The DfE (2011b) published a review of the effectiveness of the Strategies in raising attainment in literacy and numeracy, which provided strong evidence supporting their use, with an increase from 49% of pupils gaining Level 4 in English in 1997 to above 80% in 2010, with similar improvements in maths cited (p.10).

### **7.1.3 Headteachers' perceptions of HST and its effect on agency**

The returned data indicated reserved support for the SDA, with two thirds of heads indicating that it had focused their school's teaching and learning (Table 7.1), with some expressing concerns over curriculum balance and creativity-limiting influence. Headteachers accept that standards are now an integral element of their work and the measure by which they and their school will be judged. The next phase of this research examines how primary headteachers in the north of England actually perceive and operate within this arena of performance judgement and localised accountability.

### **7.1.4 Perceived accuracy and fairness of HST**

West (2010, 23) states that the key function of HST is to make schools directly accountable for their performance, presenting easily understood data which is available to all stakeholders. My research indicates that headteachers readily accept the notion of being accountable, in terms of being effective in maximising children's attainment, as illustrated by the following headteachers:

I think it is very important that we are accountable for attainment in numeracy and literacy, because if the children don't attain well in any of those areas, it doesn't set them up very well for... for real-life, everyday situations. Liz (H/B4).

I agree that we should be accountable for children's progress; I totally agree with that and I totally agree with our philosophy, which is, that the children should be as good as they can be. Rebecca (H/G2).



This indicates an understanding and acceptance on the part of headteachers of their need to be held to account. However, their views appear to be very child centred inasmuch that they view their accountability as a function of improving outcomes, rather than naming and shaming individuals or schools.

For the past twenty years, standardised testing has been the primary measure of school performance and, as such, provides the most significant data by which schools are held to account. Whilst headteachers viewed working within these processes as part of their job, there were concerns expressed regarding both their accuracy and consistency; these were expressed within their questionnaire and interview responses.

Table 7.3 presents headteachers' questionnaire responses, which illustrate their concerns and highlight the problematic position they find themselves in, that of having to operate within a system they consider inaccurate or, indeed not fit for purpose. It is important, however, to note the findings of Coldron et al. (2014) who identified the pressure placed on heads to maintain an Ofsted grading of at least 'good' and to avoid slipping down and thus the negative result of 'a loss of local and national prestige demoting both school and headteacher' (p.398). It is recognised that Ofsted has in the past not promoted a sense of collaboration nor a critical friend stance, previously identified with HMI inspections (Jeffrey and Woods, 1996) and this has created an atmosphere of mistrust. I explore these issues further using the headteacher interviews.

	Yes	No
Do you think annual SATs provide an accurate picture of pupil attainment in the core subjects?	10	24
Do you think school performance data is a useful tool in aiding parent / carer selection of suitable schools?	10	24
Do you think Ofsted inspections provide an accurate picture of the effectiveness of a school?	12	22

**Table 7.3: Headteachers' perceptions of HST tools.**

Peter (H/A3), working as an executive principal for two northern inner-city academies, is in a unique position to comment on the consistency of Ofsted inspections, having had two inspections within a three week time frame, both under the New Framework, introduced in September 2014, Ofsted (2014). Referring back to his questionnaire, he had previously strongly indicated that he had little confidence in the ability of inspections to accurately reflect the quality of teaching and learning, and the resultant pupil progress within his schools. Upon interview, he described in detail the inconsistencies of the two inspection teams, stating:

The team at the other academy (named) was much more supportive, the team here (school named) was much more 'beat you with a stick'... We are an outstanding school and we know what we need to do to stay outstanding, but this team was not as supportive, even though the results were better...odd?

There is a difference in the interpretation of the Framework and the focus of the lead inspector wasn't on working together...whilst the other one actually asked me to consider what I would like them to look at. That's never happened before.

This supports the need for the question put forward by Professor Dylan Wiliam of the Institute of Education in 2012, and reported in Elliott (2012, 3), when he challenged the validity of Ofsted, asking:

'If two inspectors inspect the same school, a week apart, with no communication between them, would they come to the same ratings?'

In the case of Peter (H/A3), there appears to be this type of inconsistency. He rationalises this by stating:

...of course [you get inconsistencies], it's only human nature. You might go in somewhere [as an inspector] and have a different perception of what's going on. As an academic (points towards me), you would be going in and really looking at

the data. I, on the other hand, would be going in and viewing what I could do as a quick fix, in terms of staff and pupil issues.

Jane (L/D7), the experienced head of a school operating within an area of low deprivation and rated 'good' by Ofsted, states:

Yes, indeed, you do get inconsistencies. You can have some inspectors who still want to see a three part lesson and things like that. I've spoken to headteacher colleagues and their experience is that schools' inspections can vary enormously.

Given that the Coalition (2010-2015) and the subsequent Conservative governments have sought to place more emphasis on inspector's professional judgements (Baxter and Clarke 2013), headteachers' concerns over inconsistencies in inspections is a valid one. Nevertheless, many headteachers have had positive experiences of inspections, with teams being supportive and identifying next steps for school development. Liz (H/B4) illustrates this:

Since I have been a head here, I have had two Section 5 Inspections, a recent one and one nearly four years ago now. On both occasions, I was blessed with two fantastic Ofsted teams, because we've all heard stories of the ones which are 'dragons' and are dreadful.

Headteachers, however, did express concerns regarding their ability to effectively challenge Ofsted's findings. This reflects the conclusions of Webber (2011), whose research highlighted the inconsistencies and inaccuracies in many inspection reports, and the challenge that numerous schools had in questioning these.

Headteachers expressed the view that there is a need to be transparent regarding the effective use of the public purse by their school; the majority indicated that this was an important element of their work. Liz (H/B4), working within an area of high deprivation, illustrates this:

I feel accountability is incredibly important, you have to be accountable, and we are spending the taxpayers' money.

Whilst accepting the need for localised accountability, headteachers had concerns over the dependence placed by inspection teams upon school data, particularly Year 2 and 6 SATs outcomes. Indeed, serious concerns were expressed over the importance placed upon this annual data. Many talked about their fight for survival (Barkdale and Thomas 2000; Mansell 2007) and this was illustrated by headteachers working in areas of both low and high deprivation. Firstly, Sarah (L/G3), working within an area of relative affluence:

...children are no longer seen as individuals and as every child joins a school at five or six, you think, oh my God, I hope they are a Level 4. This is a huge stress, since one realises that if the LA floor targets are not met, then the 'big boys' are coming in.

This is reinforced by Phil (H/G1), working within an area of high socio-economic deprivation:

...over the time I have been a head, I have seen the effect it has had on people. I know someone who was inspected in late autumn and they were put into a category. Within three days, they weren't in school, they have never returned to school and I was told yesterday, that they have resigned.

The power of HST appears to place headteachers in a very vulnerable position, and thus, a strong theme of maximising SATs results started to emerge. The majority of headteachers, 29 from 34 respondents, indicated that they considered that some schools were unfairly deemed 'unsuccessful' when measured by HST (SATs results and Ofsted inspections). The relationship between SATs data and resultant inspection outcomes was exemplified by Sarah (L/G3):

In my view...I find it a very unfair system, in that the decision of a school's effectiveness is made prior to an inspector landing; it's based purely upon the data. I have now experienced three inspections as a headteacher and I feel now that, instead of it being a supposedly joint...evaluation process, it is very much based on the data.

This notion of 'unfairness' was further explored and is illustrated within Table 7.4.

2.18a	Do you consider that Ofsted's current measurement of a school's effectiveness (based upon the Standards Driven Agenda) fails to include the true picture of a school's impact upon the social and emotional development of its pupils?	Yes	34
		No	0

**Table 7.4: Headteachers' perceptions of fairness.**

Examining the responses given to Question 2.18a, illustrates that all the respondent headteachers feel that the current inspection process fails to take into account schools' impact on the development of the whole child, focusing only on a very narrow gauge of success. Therefore, the schools which excel in the provision of pastoral support and the building of fully rounded and socialised children, perhaps, are not receiving the full recognition of their hard work and success. They felt that if their SATs floor targets are not reached, this could potentially result in a negative inspection outcome. The reliance on data and failure to fully understand the work schools undertake, in terms of social development, particularly within challenging contexts, by Ofsted and the resultant missing of the full picture was identified within the work of Fitz-Gibbon and Forster (1999). Their findings highlighted headteachers' lack of faith in inspectors' analytical skills to fully grasp complex social dynamics and their impact on standards. This research indicates that despite a number of new Ofsted Frameworks and the £137 million spent during 2015 -16 (Source: Parliamentary Memorandum - 2015-16 Main Estimate) on training and inspections, this doubt by heads still persists.

### 7.1.5 HST as a mechanism of control and removal

Tables 7.5 and 7.6 illustrate the pressure that HST practices place upon primary headteachers. The majority of headteachers indicated that a particular cohort was of concern, in terms of distorting an Ofsted judgement.

2.13a	Do you consider that there is a particular cohort within your school which could potentially distort a future judgement by Ofsted?	Yes	29
		No	5

**Table 7.5: Particular cohort concerns.**

2.1b	Publication of annual SATs results.	No Concern	6
		A Little Concern	5
		Moderate Concern	8
		Significant Concern	13
		Very Significant Concern	2
2.4b	Ofsted inspections.	No Concern	1
		A Little Concern	3
		Moderate Concern	5
		Significant Concern	9
		Very Significant Concern	16

**Table 7.6: HST concerns.**

Headteachers readily expect a variance in pupil performance from year to year, with this being attributed to, as Peter (H/A3) states, either family / social factors or 'just the way it is'. However, many of the respondents felt that to ignore this fluctuation produced a distorted picture, as illustrated by Sarah (L/G3):

Ofsted and Local Authority standards...are a huge pressure on the school, in that the Local Authority has their target to achieve, which is then fed down to schools. Bearing in mind that cohorts vary hugely from year to year, supposedly this is taken into account, but in reality, there is so much pressure placed on us to achieve these targets and this is unrealistic.

...but no school these days is allowed for a child not to achieve, even though, as we know, children and cohorts vary widely.

The data illustrates the discourse created by successive governments' 'no excuses' stance. Although headteachers accept the need for direct local level accountability, they have serious concerns over the accuracy of testing and inspection, whilst being acutely aware of the impact that context has upon HST outcomes. Again referencing the work of Fitz-Gibbon and Stephenson-Forster (1999), it would appear that little has changed in the last two decades with respect to heads belief in inspections '...fail[ing] to meet even the most elementary standards with regard to sampling, reliability and validity' (p.115). And thus its failure to identify and acknowledge the factors which directly impact on standards based performance.

## **7.2 Theme 2 - Practicalities of headship (outlined within Figure 5.2)**

Again, the removal of professionalism (Grace 1995), initiated by successive performativity based policies, has shifted the practicalities of headship towards the management of the maximisation of standards. The analysis of Theme 2 draws out the complex relationship between the headteachers' need to achieve highly with respect to positive HST outcomes and the emotional and practical needs of their staff and pupils.

### **7.2.1 Headteacher acting as an educational leader – Managing the curriculum**

#### **7.2.2 Balanced curriculum**

A paradox appears to have been created with the narrowing of the curriculum, identified by Webb and Vulliamy (2006a) and 'the government's drive for excellence through the standards agenda and the desire for schools to be creative and foster enjoyment' (p.6). A further paradox was identified by Ofsted in their 2008 report (Ofsted 2009a), which highlighted the negative results of over-emphasising on the core subjects in preparation for the Year 6 SATs in terms of the redistribution of curriculum time away from non-tested subjects. Thus the mechanism for inspecting schools based on standards is actually criticising schools for undertaking strategies which would maximise their perceived performance within a HST arena. This research indicates that whilst some continue to struggle with this issue today, there has been a significant shift towards a balancing of the curriculum, as evidenced within Table 7.7.

Do you believe that over the past five years the amount of curriculum time spent on the following subjects has...?	Significantly decreased	Shown some decrease	Stayed the Same	Shown some increase	Significantly increased	In your professional opinion, is this situation acceptable? *	
						Yes	No
Science	7	7	15	4	1	10	16
Art	6	14	13	0	1	10	9
History	4	19	11	0	0	9	18
Geography	4	21	9	0	0	9	18
PE	2	3	18	10	3	17	10
RE	11	5	17	1	0	15	12
PSHE	3	14	12	5	0	15	12
Music	8	10	14	2	0	12	13
ICT	2	4	9	15	4	17	10
Design &Technology	7	17	9	1	0	8	19

**Table 7.7: Headteachers' perceptions of changes in curriculum time allocations over the past 5 years (\*Some headteachers did not provide a response to this question).**

Those headteachers who considered the narrowing professionally unacceptable have started to restructure their school's curriculum to specifically meet the needs of their children, as illustrated by the interview responses of two headteachers, each working within differing socio-economic contexts. Firstly, Phil (H/G1), a headteacher working within a deprived area, states:

...I'm prepared to fight for it [balanced curriculum]...when you look at the life experiences of our children, they don't actually have experiences of the wider world.

[Doing] activities which expand their knowledge of the world and realising that there is a bigger world out there than just their local area, that's got to be important.

Jane (L/D7), working within an area of affluence, illustrates how her school counters the effect of curriculum narrowing:

...we have a much enriched curriculum. We have embedded a global dimension to the curriculum. But we also teach maths and English separately as well as thematically, because it is important that the children are literate and numerate by the time they leave us.

Whilst the pressure is still very evident in terms of focusing on the core 'measured' subjects, there appears to be a push against allowing more than 50% of directed teaching time to be allocated to literacy and maths. Discussion during interviews



indicated that schools were starting to adopt a more cross-curricular approach, aiming to fully integrate the core subjects into these learning opportunities, revisiting what Liz (H/B4) described as:

... a thematic curriculum. So, we don't box off subjects, which is another thing that Michael Gove wants us to do. We do English skills within history and geography lessons, we do maths skills within P.E. and science lessons, you know...It's the education of the whole child.

This notion of developing a curriculum which is underpinned by the core subjects, but not dominated by them, was a theme which many headteachers felt strongly about. Nevertheless, they all understood the position they and their schools are in, regarding the need to fully address the standards agenda, which was perceived as primarily focusing on English and maths attainment.

### 7.2.3 Managing and monitoring teaching and learning

Table 7.8 illustrates the headteachers' questionnaire responses regarding their perceptions of the effectiveness of Ofsted inspections and how their monitoring of teacher performance impacts upon their staff. It is interesting to note the higher degree of support expressed here for the validity of Ofsted inspections, than within Table 7.4 indicating that some heads either believe that the process is becoming more accurate or they are willing to accept the fact that whilst context does have an effect, they view the monitoring process as essentially accurate, creating somewhat of a paradox.

2.5a	Do you think Ofsted inspections provide useful information about the quality of teaching in the school?	Yes	17
		No	17
3.13a	Do you think headteachers' making teachers more directly accountable for pupil outcomes has increased pupil attainment?	Yes	25
		No	9
3.14a	Do you think headteachers' making teachers more directly accountable for pupil outcomes has increased teacher stress?	Yes	30
		No	4

**Table 7.8: Teacher monitoring - effectiveness and stress.**

The link between HST and teacher stress is well documented (Troman 2000; Chapman 2002). Graphic examples of stress related relationship breakups and collapsing self-confidence are cited. Of the 34 headteachers who responded to the questionnaire, 30 considered that there is a direct connection between increased teacher accountability and stress. Although headteachers are aware of this, the pressure exerted by constant testing and inspection makes them powerless to act, as illustrated by the following two heads:

Teachers' stress is enormous; there used to be a time in teaching, if you were a head and you had a weak teacher you would put them into Year One, because that was the safest bet and you would 'make it up or get it right' in Year Two. However, the accountability is now such...there is nowhere to hide. Liz (H/B4).

[HST] doesn't acknowledge the quality of the teaching and ... the use of the kind of pernicious media which actually implies that the teachers who are not performing are the sole cause of [attainment] problems... Or that all schools which are not performing, are a direct result of everybody who is sitting in that school not performing, is an absolute nonsense. John (H/A2).

However, there is also headteacher support for direct teacher accountability, regardless of any resultant stress, with the rights of children and the pressures placed upon other staff by ineffective teaching being placed at the forefront of the argument, as illustrated by Rebecca (H/G2):

We agree targets at the beginning of the school year. If those targets are not met by the end of the school year, [then] if a teacher's complacency was a reason why the targets were not met, I can now say, within my rights, these are the Teacher Standards and you have not met this one [or] that one. And you are not going to go onto the Upper Pay Spine because you are not earning your money. And I think that is right because I have had terrible problems in the past with teachers who were not earning their money, which left other teachers, who were working really hard, with real problems, because there were huge gaps in children's learning that somebody else then had to work on.

Also, 25 of the 34 respondents indicated that they consider explicit teacher accountability as having a positive impact, so strong evidence is starting to emerge of a perception that HST has a positive part to play in ensuring that all children fulfil

their potential via ensuring that all teachers are performing at a consistently high level. This positioning illustrates a shift away from the focus and trust associated with professionalism towards Fordism (Avis 2003), with its primary focus on production outputs and close monitoring. The continuous introduction of HST systems has strengthened this Fordism perspective, further directly controlling the workforce, via, for example, the introduction of pupil progress targets within a strong culture of performance management. Avis (2003) suggests that the adoption of such 'Fordest' policies and practices serve to reduce a willingness to undertake risks and tend to reinforce high levels of surveillance and a culture of enforced worker practice transparency. Thus performativity, with its endless chain of targets and accountability serves to position headteachers within an arena of forced production (which manifests as positive pupil attainment outcomes), which result in a zero tolerance of teacher underperformance. This results in headteacher's questioning their welfare and social responsibility to their staff, whilst trying to balance the demands of HST.

A further interesting element is the notion of accountability acting as a 'culling agent', i.e. a means of removing unwanted staff or teachers perceived as ineffectual and replacing them with more standards-focused practitioners. The perceived dogma of older members of staff is illustrated by Liz (H/B4):

One of the biggest problems [I had] were people who had been here for 20 years plus, saying this is the way that we do it [here] and I don't care what you say, I'm not changing. The younger people are much more...adaptable and they come in as NQTs particularly wanting to learn, wanting to experiment and wanting to try different things.

The current perception of headteachers, therefore, can be viewed as a balancing act, with, on the one hand, the need to support and nurture staff, whilst on the other,

having to accept no excuses for underperformance, for fear of the long term consequences for their school.

## **7.2.4 Headteacher acting as whole school leader**

### **7.2.4.1 School within the community**

As discussed within Chapter 5, the role of headship has shifted from school management, with headteachers being agents of social control, to performance-driven leadership. However, whilst headteachers accept that their primary role is standards driven, a high proportion of respondents still believe that strong community links are critical to a school's success (Table 7.9).

2.6c	Do you consider that strong community links are an important element in securing high standards?	Yes	29
		No	5

**Table 7.9: Community and high standards.**

Sarah (L/G3) talked at length about her school 'remaining a sort of bastion of the community' in the light of the closure of other community centres, for example churches or sports clubs, and the 'buzz' she got out of being known within the community. This notion of a wider responsibility, however, was not prevalent within the responses of other heads. Therefore, community interaction may perhaps be viewed as a function of engaging children within their learning only, rather than the more traditional 'pillar of the community' model.

Further support for this was presented by Jane (L/D7). As the head of a school rated 'good', within an affluent semi-urban area, she questioned parental views of the school as being part of a wider community. She stated that the focus is now very much on what the school can provide in terms of maximising attainment outcomes for their children, rather than a wider community spirit, thus again illustrating the current power of the focus on standards. This move away from the

head being at the centre of the community, to a more egocentric view of the school being solely responsible for the attainment of their children, supports the notion of Grace (1995) regarding their loss of both tradition and power. Their distancing from their community has resulted, Grace (1995) suggests, in a significant loss of moral authority, with the head no longer being an active guardian of the neighbourhood.

#### 7.2.4.2 Managing self and staff

2.2c	Do you consider your primary role as headteacher is to organise and monitor teaching and learning in order to improve or maintain pupil attainment standards?	Yes	28
		No	6
2.3c	Do you consider that the focus on standards has made it harder to manage and organise your school?	Yes	15
		No	19
2.5c	Do you consider that the focus on standards has made it more difficult for you to effectively manage staff?	Yes	7
		No	27

**Table 7.10: Management of self and staff.**

The response to question 2.2c (Table 7.10) indicates that the majority (28 out of 34) of responding headteachers consider the monitoring of teaching and learning as crucial to their role. However, what is interesting to note is that 15 out of the 34 respondents consider that this has made the organising of their school more difficult, whilst only a minority (7 out of 34) consider it has made staff management more problematic. As previously mentioned, these problems are related to teacher performance being linked to pupil attainment outcomes and the wider use of the Teachers' Standards. It is perhaps paradoxical to see headteachers being placed into a position where they are being instrumental in reducing the professionalism of their staff, via the use of performativity measures, as they themselves come under the control of what Exworthy (1998, 2) terms the 'strategic weapon' of top-down managerialism, which effectively challenges and ultimately controls the independent thinking and actions of established professionals, in this case primary heads.

Table 7.11 explores the headteacher questionnaire responses regarding their perceptions of how their role has impacted upon their ability to continue their own professional development and manage their personal lives.

2.7c	Do you consider that you have been able to maintain your own professional development in recent years?	Yes	27
		No	7
2.8c	Do you consider that you have managed to maintain a healthy work / life balance in recent years?	Yes	12
		No	22

**Table 7.11: CPD and work balance.**

Thomson (2009) provides examples of headteachers' dysfunctional home lives, resulting from consistently heavy workloads and this still appears to be the case, with 21 of the respondents indicating that they fail to maintain a healthy work life balance. John (H/A2), a headteacher working within one of the most deprived wards in the country, described the all-encompassing nature of the role, whilst linking it to a higher purpose:

I'm not saying that I'm unique, a lot of my colleagues in this area function very much like me, and I think this whole concept of a work life balance is a misnomer. You do this job because you have a sense of moral purpose and moral commitment, so what you end up with is a blended lifestyle.

However, many headteachers expressed real concerns, with a sense of regret and guilt, regarding the effect their workload was having upon their family life. Whilst a positive response was given to the question of their own Continued Professional Development, this had been aimed predominately at raising standards via a focus on teacher monitoring and mentoring or data analysis, with little aimed at creativity or innovation.

#### **7.2.4.3 Managing pupils - Behaviour**

Table 7.12 presents the headteachers' questionnaire data which explores their perceptions of how the inspection process provides an insight into pupil behaviour and how this impacts upon school effectiveness.

2.6a	Do you think Ofsted inspections provide useful information about the behaviour and safety of pupils within school?	Yes	17
		No	17
3.4b	How do you consider the effect of the following factors in relation to the effectiveness of YOUR school? Behaviour of children PRIOR to starting school.	No Effect	0
		Little Effect	1
		Some Effect	4
		Significant Effect	15
		Very Significant Effect	14

**Table 7.12: Pupil behaviour.**

A very mixed response to Question 2.6a is observed, with equal numbers of heads questioning and supporting Ofsted's ability to accurately gauge pupil behaviour fairly and consistently. Once again, the perception of some heads is that, as long as the data is good then other elements of school life are of less importance, as illustrated by Sarah (L/G3), who states that, in her opinion:

...prior to an inspection the RAISEonline will have been scrutinised by the inspector and so their pre-inspection briefing is totally based upon this data.

Although the responses given to Question 3.4b might initially appear to contradict this view, with nearly all respondents indicating the importance of positive behaviours prior to starting school, it could be claimed that, since good behaviour is fundamental to effective learning (Steer 2010), this level of concern is again directly linked to potential HST judgements and outcomes. The loss of, previously discussed, headteacher moral guardian identity within the community again comes into play here, with the head being viewed by many stakeholders as too busy to deal with anything other than driving up standards, resulting in the creation of barriers (Cullingford, and Morrison 1999), making it difficult to deal with some behaviour issues.

#### **7.2.4.4 Managing parents / carers**

Table 7.13 provides an insight into headteachers' perceptions of how appropriate the use of HST measures are in terms of aiding parents in school selection, as well as headteachers' views on parental expectations regarding pupil attainment.

2.2a	Do you think school performance data is a useful tool in aiding parent / carer selection of suitable schools?	Yes	10
		No	24
2.8a	Do you think Ofsted inspections provide useful information about: Parents' / Carers' views?	Yea	14
		No	20
3.11a	Do you agree that increased headteacher accountability to parents / carers has directly improved pupil attainment / outcomes?	Yes	21
		No	13
2.9c	Do you consider that you now spend more time discussing children's attainment with their parents / carers?	Yes	15
		No	19
2.6b	Parent / Carer expectations based on their children's expected attainment.	No Concern	4
		A Little Concern	6
		Moderate Concern	12
		Significant Concern	9
		Very Significant Concern	3
2.7b	Dealing with unrealistic parent / carer expectations of their child's progress / attainment	No Concern	7
		A Little Concern	10
		Moderate Concern	6
		Significant Concern	7
		Very Significant Concern	4

**Table 7.13: Parental perspectives.**

Within Chapter 2 I examine various governmental neoliberal policies, which placed school selection within the hands of parents and carers. This selection is built around the premise that pupil attainment data and inspection outcomes would provide a standardised measure against which all schools could be compared. The possible negative outcomes of this process for schools and headteachers have been fully researched (Jeffrey and Woods 1996; Chapman 2002, 2007). Ranson (2003) provides further valuable insight into the complexities of parental choice and its associated accountability, when he presents the notion of the rights of the possessive individual overriding the substantive conceptions of the common good. Therefore, the technical accountability of HST is centred very much on the maximising of the individual's potential with little regard to the greater good of the school community. I argue that it is therefore not surprising that headteachers have concerns regarding the power of school performance data along with its potential to generate more egocentric thinking in parents.



The questionnaire responses illustrate that headteachers have significant concerns over the appropriateness of this data with respect to school selection, with 20 of the 34 respondents believing that inspections fail to provide useful information for parents to inform their choice. However, the opposite was true regarding the link between direct accountability to parents and improving performance, with 21 of the 34 believing that accountability to parents had resulted in some measure of improvement. A significant number, however, were concerned by parents' expectations of their children's progress, with 17 of the 34 expressing concern over parents' unrealistic expectations. Sarah (L/G3) states, '...whilst parents are high achievers themselves, it does not necessarily follow that their children will be.' Rebecca (H/G2) further supported this point by stating that some parents were under the impression that their children were 'little Einsteins', resulting in them openly questioning teaching, the appropriateness of homework and, perhaps, pushing their children too hard with further home-based study.

### **7.3 Theme 3 – Conflicting values within the current role of headship (outlined within Figure 5.3): Remaining true to values discourse**

Here I examine the discourse of conflict, focusing on how heads resolve the loss of their professional, 'not to be questioned' status, afforded by the age of professionalism Grace (1995), whilst also managing the requirements of the market.

#### **7.3.1 Playing the game**

Having identified the pivotal role data now plays in the professional lives of primary headteachers, I progress to examine how they manage this accountability mechanism and actually 'play the game'. Phil (H/G1), working within an area of extreme deprivation in a northern inner-city, where the community's ability to access

resources, as defined within Townsend's model (1979), is severely limited, describes it as 'targeting the learning to jump through the hoops'. This notion of moulding learning, particularly within Year 6, to meet the requirements of HST was a common one, with many headteachers commenting on the loss of curriculum time owing to the needs of boosting the 'under target' children (below Level 4). As previously mentioned, many headteachers view SATs as inaccurate or unrepresentative of attainment (Table 7.3) and this notion added to a perception of wasting time and talent, exemplified by Phil (H/G1):

I think that there has been so much more focus on looking at standards as the way in which teachers perform, but my problem with that is, again, we have gone through a series of hoops of what is perceived as good teaching and learning. And I think the problem with that is, from my experience of being in schools, there are teachers who can operate in amazing ways, but not within the perceived models of good teaching.

[The problem is] children are not cans of baked beans; these are real children and real people, so you can't just churn them out. I do have a real problem with that. I have also been in the position where I have felt under real pressure to improve results.

The discourse resulting from the balancing act of meeting the requirements of HST whilst viewing the children as developing individuals was a theme which emanated from the majority of headteachers. All respondents felt it necessary to organise booster sessions prior to the SATs in May each year. However, many felt that this was not necessarily in the best interests of the child. It has been claimed that the excessive preparation for testing has a marked negative effect on pupil motivation and wellbeing (McDonald 2001; Galton et al. 2003; Connors et al. 2009). Sarah (L/G3) highlights this point:

Certainly, with booster groups, the children know that they are attaining in the high Level 2s or 3s and that they need to get to a Level 4, and are fully aware of this. Especially the Year 5 and 6 children, they know why they are there and they do not enjoy it.

The zero choice element of this discourse is graphically illustrated further by Liz (H/B4), an experienced headteacher, when she stated:

We have booster classes; these children stay behind three nights a week, from September until May, getting more of, 'What genre is this and how do you know?' All these sorts of questions to get them ready to sit a 45 minute test in May. I do know it's wrong, but because that's what I am judged on ultimately, then that's what we have got to do, but we are not educating the whole child!

The frustration here is self-evident, but so also is the power wielded by HST, resulting in the situation which Apple describes as, 'it's not what we as a school can do for the child, but what can the child do for our school' (Nichols and Berliner 2007, 64).

Whilst boosting was viewed as a necessary element of 'playing the game', headteachers were keen to state that under no circumstance would they consider cheating, even if this had negative consequences on both their professional career and the school. However, they were prepared to push children currently below the expected threshold very hard in order to achieve Level 4. Kate (H/A1), the headteacher of a school within an area of high deprivation and recently rated 'inadequate' by Ofsted, identified a future negative consequence of this policy:

I think this squeeze to get to Level 4 has a knock-on effect in secondary schools, because unfortunately, what they get is a lot of children who come through with a Level 4, be it a 4c (just above the threshold)...I don't think it's fair on them because they are getting children in at Level 4c, but really they're a 3a... We get our children and support them to get a 4c, but it probably isn't really sustainable.

### **7.3.2 Headteachers' perceptions of the effect on staff of the SDA and HST**

As previously discussed, the introduction of continuous educational reform has brought with it accountability systems, such as the annual review of school performance. Pivotal to this is pupil attainment and, as such, children's testing

success is intrinsically linked to both job security and future pay progression. This creates a significant dilemma for headteachers, as illustrated within Table 7.8, with 30 of the 34 respondents believing that increased accountability has significantly increased teacher stress. This increased scrutiny has one driver, the improvement of standards via increasing pupil attainment, as measured by HST. Whilst headteachers are aware of this stress, they find themselves in a difficult position, having to have a zero tolerance approach to underperformance whilst having to maintain staff morale and lower stress levels. Headteachers were keen to voice their concerns, with many feeling directly responsible, as Liz (H/B4) illustrates:

...I've got a very good team here, but I know that they're very stressed and I know that I don't help that stress, because whenever the rules change I then look at the way we are doing things. I might not want to change it... but I feel I have to. So it's accountability, accountability, accountability all the time.

It is not only teacher stress which currently concerns headteachers; as previously discussed, the narrowing of the curriculum is an issue. The majority of respondent headteachers, 27 from the 34, consider that the focus on standards has resulted in some significant redeployment of staff, namely teaching assistants, to support interventions aimed directly at boosting pupil attainment in the core subjects. This has resulted in the removal of teaching assistants from what Bach et al. (2004, 16) term their traditional roles, and this has placed further demands on teachers, who now have to manage these extra tasks within an already packed day. This shifting of the teaching assistant role is further described by Sarah (L/G3):

Teaching assistants are now used very differently. Gone are the days of brilliant displays taking days to construct; now the focus is very much on standards, interventions and boosters. Any Year 6 child identified as not a sure Level 4 has some intensive group booster work daily in the autumn and spring terms; we have to reach our floor targets, so there is no option.

I argue that this evidence strongly indicates that heads are actively altering teaching strategies and the deployment of staff, solely as a consequence of the requirements

of HST. A clear tension is evident here, when you reference back to Phil's (H/G1) perspective of fighting for children's wider life experiences and also Sarah (L/G3) clearly feels trapped into limiting these experiences by having to redirect the workforce.

### 7.3.3 Headteachers' perceptions of the effects on children

During their interviews, the heads were asked to explore their understanding of how the Standards Driven Agenda had affected their children. A number of key issues were identified. The first was the effect on time in terms of how the SDA focus directly limits other non-standards driven activities. Sarah (L/G3) exemplifies this point:

I feel that children are not getting the rounded education they should; they are missing things like music, P.E., drama and other opportunities. An element of enjoyment has diminished.

These findings mirror those of Galton and MacBeath (2002) and Berliner (2011), who acknowledged the 'squeezing out' of subjects like art, history and geography, thus reducing the opportunities for the less 'academic' children to shine and hence, removing the motivation provided by actually being good at the subject. However, a new trend of headteachers actively taking steps to address this imbalance is starting to emerge, with the introduction of the new National Curriculum being viewed as the catalyst. However, Table 7.14 indicates that the loss of curriculum breadth resulting from HST has raised issues of anxiety regarding the development of children's creativity.

1.15a	Do you believe that the constant use of High Stakes Testing (SATs and Ofsted inspections) has resulted in schools becoming less able to develop the creativity of children?	Yes	25
		No	9

**Table 7.14: Creativity and HST.**

James (L/J2), working within an area of low deprivation, an environment in which according to Townsend's model (1979) access to resources such as those supporting health and recreation is unproblematic, highlights the need to move away from a HST directed curriculum. He identifies the need to balance the curriculum, in order to stop children becoming bored and disengaged. Emphasising the need to use open-ended questions and challenges, where 'children can just run off and explore'.

Responding headteachers were also keen to articulate how they had worked hard with their staff to continue to broaden their curriculum, whilst still maintaining good results within the core subjects. Phil (H/G1) illustrates this:

[I believe] they need to have those wider experiences, those things which give them those broader experiences and opportunities, like actually getting onto a bus and taking a group of kids to the theatre in the evening; that's actually going to influence their English.

A further issue, identified from the literature, was that of the motivation and boredom of children connected to the continuous striving to improve standards (Reay and Wiliam 1999; Leonard and Davey 2001). Sarah (L/G3) illustrates this point:

I think, in the last couple of years, the introduction of the creative curriculum, as opposed to the narrow QCA route, has resulted in a much more positive outcome for children and staff. Prior to this, the QCA approach was very dull.

Here Sarah (L/G3) appears to contradict herself with respect to her earlier comments, regarding the limiting of children's creative experiences, due to the reallocation of teaching assistants, however, perhaps it is an indication of the commitment of staff to work around what they perceive as the limitation imposed by HST and previously imposed governmental strategies, for example the QCA schemes for science.

The work of Palmer (2005) and Burnitt (2011) identified the need for children to be actively engaged in their learning, to be motivated by it; therefore, the SDA and its interconnected HST must directly appeal to them at an individual level. John (H/A2), an experienced headteacher working within an area of high socio-economic deprivation, supports this:

Over the last 10 years I have seen them [the children] being demotivated; boys are a real issue. I think what we have done with the [Standards] Driven Agenda, with its outcomes [only] in terms of academic performance, is a disservice to boys. We now have a curriculum which denies the natural instincts of males. We are actually casting boys into a performance arena, which some of them genuinely don't understand.

Whilst this headteacher views the curriculum in terms of gender, which is outside the remit of this research, it does illustrate the importance of an appropriately 'motivating' curriculum. However, this is contrary to the majority of respondents, 25 out of 34 of who considered that the standards driven agenda had not had a negative effect upon children's motivation.

#### **7.3.4 Looking after self – Headteachers' pressures and concerns about HST**

Whilst the respondent headteachers readily accepted the need for their professional accountability, significant concerns were raised. Stress was a major factor, with 25 of the 34 respondents indicating that Ofsted inspections generated significant to very significant stress levels for themselves. The annual publication of SATs data, however, was deemed as less traumatic. Nevertheless, 15 of the 34 respondents indicated significant concerns regarding the SATs data outcomes; this is supported by previous research (Chaplain 1995, 2001; Troman 2000; McDonald 2001). The production and use of SATs data remain very complex and are wrapped up within a myriad of competing elements. On the one hand, there is the explicit requirement to conform to the accountability agenda, ensuring that pupil progress remains high and

sustained, whilst on the other, there is the need to nurture the whole child by looking after his / her social and emotional needs, whilst both challenging and supporting the school's most valuable resource, its staff. Headteachers currently find dealing with this complex equation both physically and emotionally draining.

Ozga (2012) and Baxter and Clarke (2013) highlight that HST drives much of the work currently being undertaken in primary schools and, as such, it is critical to understand the direct impact this actually has on the 'daily life' of a school, the rationale being that, if a school is to succeed then it must focus on standards above all else. It is therefore unsurprising that senior leaders take considered and focused steps to maximise this data, since their professional lives could well depend upon it (Mansell 2007). Table 7.15 provides the questionnaire data which illustrates the pressure this HST regime now places on heads.

2.21a	Have you ever considered leaving your post because of the importance placed on pupil attainment?	Yes	14
		No	20
2.22a	Have you ever considered leaving your post because of the pressure of your own direct accountability?	Yes	13
		No	21

**Table 7.15: Leaving the profession.**

Headteachers are acutely aware of the precarious nature of their current position and how their professional careers are dependent upon continuing positive accountability outcomes. The research data tends to indicate some link between this accountability and some desire to leave the profession. However, 20 out of the 34 heads indicated never having considered leaving their posts, which demonstrates high levels of both commitment and resilience. This high level of resilience, Day and Schmidt (2007) suggest, is due to a strong sense of moral purpose, which offers support to my argument of heads continuing to fight for the re-establishment of notion of the 'headmaster tradition' (Grace 1995, 11).



Within performativity and technical accountability, headteachers understand that they have a 'game to play', in that they must maximise pupil outcomes by the use of various revision strategies, but feel that these switch the focus from an enjoyable creative curriculum to a boring 'teach to the test' situation, which can lead to data inaccuracies, as children progress from Key Stage 2 into secondary school. Whilst some element of guilt is expressed by headteachers regarding the pressure they place on their staff in order to maximise outcomes, they view this as unavoidable. However, they do take active steps to both monitor and minimise this pressure.

Headteachers have continued to broaden their curriculum in order to expand their children's learning experiences and to start to correct the gradual erosion of the foundation subjects, particularly the humanities and the arts. However, they continue to be mindful of the need to be prudent and always place literacy and maths attainment at the forefront of everything they do, whilst always being conscious of the need to be able to justify their actions if their data were to show a dip

#### **7.4 Summary**

This chapter has sought to develop an understanding of the current perceptions of serving headteachers regarding their meeting of the requirements of the SDA, whilst operating within a localised accountability regime regulated via HST.

The first theme focused on developing an understanding of headteachers' perceptions of effectiveness, with a focus on the introduction and effectiveness of the National Strategies and the accountability instruments associated with HST. The second focused on developing an understanding of how heads function as leaders,

with respect to managing HST outcomes and the various pressures and stresses these create. The final theme, focusing on headteacher conflicts, is the discourse created between having to meet the requirements of the SDA and HST, whilst remaining true to one's own educational values. The notion of 'playing the game', in terms of maximising test outcomes, is explored and the possible negative effects of boredom and demotivation are examined.

The next chapter explores how socio-economic context affects headteachers' perceptions of their accountability, and how they currently operate within the 'no excuses' agenda, presently being enforced by Ofsted (Wilshaw 2012).

## **Chapter 8 - Headteacher Perceptions and Socio-economic Context**

### **8.0 Introduction**

Headteachers within the north of England work within a wide range of socio-economic contexts, from some of the most affluent neighbourhoods in the UK, to areas of extreme poverty and deprivation. This chapter seeks to explore how primary headteachers function within these varying contexts as they aim to ensure the best possible High Stakes Testing outcomes for their children and staff, whilst coping with the diverse issues a given socio-economic context can generate.

Courtney (2013) recently drew attention to the difficulties headteachers have in ensuring positive outcomes within HST, indicating that the recent changes to the Ofsted Framework (Ofsted 2011) had adversely affected headteachers working in disadvantaged areas. Whilst Ofsted have acknowledged the difficulties that context can generate in terms of maximising HST outcomes, a 'no excuses' for underachievement doctrine dominates (Wilshaw 2012). This demand for higher standards, whilst not fully acknowledging the barriers social context can generate, creates a significant discourse, which is yet to be fully addressed. The negative effects on pupil progress of poor housing, lack of parental involvement and crime have been analysed within Chapter 4, and I continue to question the fairness and validity of accountability policies constructed on the simple moral argument 'that background should not excuse low achievement' and 'that social background has no effect upon attainment'.

I now explore these complex themes from the perspectives of current primary headteachers working in areas of both high and low deprivation in the north of England.

## 8.1 Headteachers' perceptions of the effect of socio-economic context

Broadly, this creates a construct which separates headteachers' perceptions into two categories: firstly, the issues connected to school performance, as measured by HST, which are outside a headteacher's direct control and influence, termed the 'external community factors'; secondly, the 'internal community factors', the issues, policies and practices which are directly under the control or influence of the headteacher and as such should be the elements most appropriate to focus upon in terms of judging performance within a HST regime.

## 8.2 Perceptions of external community factors with respect to HST

Figure 8.1 illustrates an overview of the external factors which may directly influence children's HST performance within a given school and, therefore, the importance of that school's context. The randomly selected schools within the study were divided into two categories, those within areas of low deprivation (with an IDACI >24362) and those within areas of high deprivation (with an IDACI <8121).

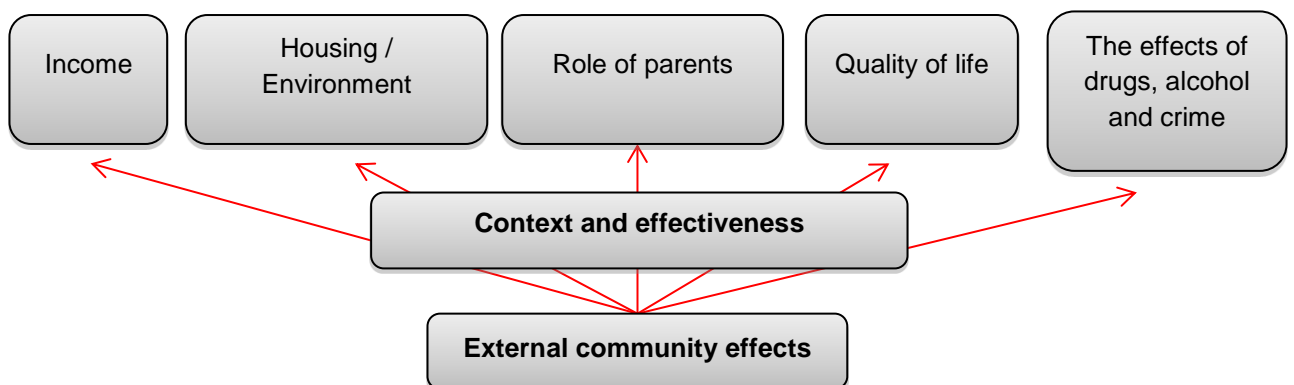


Figure 8.1: External community factors.

Given that both categories of school are expected to reach the same floor targets when their performance is judged by HST, the external factors which influence and impact upon their performance are critical in terms of understanding and managing them, in order to maximise pupil attainment to achieve positive HST outcomes.

### 8.2.1 Context and effectiveness

Within Chapter 4, the case was made for recognising the widening gap which now exists between household incomes, with the poor in Britain being substantially poorer than the worst off in more equal industrialised societies. This gap has continued to broaden, resulting in distinct inequalities in life chances, living conditions (source: [www.poverty.org.uk](http://www.poverty.org.uk)) and education (Bennett 2005; Reay 2006). However, little research exists which investigates how headteachers perceive the effect of low income and poor housing upon their own HST accountability.

Table 8.1 illustrates that all the responding headteachers working within Category B schools, within areas of high deprivation, believe that the socio-economic context of their school has an effect on the ability of their school to perform well within the HST regime.

			Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B
3.1b	What level of effect does socio-economic context have on the effectiveness of your school?	No Effect	0	0
		Little Effect	0	0
		Some Effect	6	0
		<b>Significant Effect</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
		<b>Very Significant Effect</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>
			<b>8/14</b>	<b>18/18</b>

**Table 8.1: Effect of context on school effectiveness.**

This view of the challenges that context creates, regarding the meeting of HST requirements, was further expanded upon during interviews with Sarah, working within an area of low deprivation, and John, working in an area of extreme deprivation, respectively:

...after discussion, I know colleagues who teach in areas of high deprivation who realise that in order for their school to be judged good or outstanding, based on attainment, is a very hard thing to achieve. So, from my point of view, these are the families [high deprivation] I enjoy working with the most, however, with the Standards Driven Agenda, where attainment is the key, one would be inclined to move to schools in areas which are reasonably affluent,

where the attainment would be high and I would be less stressed. Sarah (L/G3).

You are not going to remove generations of multiple deprivation in this context. We are the penultimate worst area in the city and we sit in probably one of the MOST deprived areas in the country. So, therefore, the 'one size fits all' model is actually an indictment to the flaws in the measuring system, which uses a level structure without taking context into consideration. Here, the children are expected to get to Level 4b, coping within this context, and the school next door to my house (within an area of affluence), those children are also expected to get to Level 4b, that's certainly not a level playing field. John (H/A2).

Both responding headteachers voice their opinions that context has a critical effect upon the ability schools have to meet SATs floor targets and how the 'one size fits all' approach, adopted by HST methods, is both unfair and inaccurate in terms of judging a head's or a school's effectiveness. Indeed, John demonstrates anger at what he sees as some schools having an 'easier ride', simply because they are able to produce consistently high SATs results, without having to constantly battle to justify and maintain their pupil attainment outcomes. He views pupil attainment as offering a distorted view of the performance of teachers and schools:

... I actually feel, under the present agenda, I would have no mechanism for getting off the floor... and I would argue strongly that, if you teach in this area for any length of time, you are an outstanding teacher; you have to be just to survive. John (H/A2).

This stance is further supported by Liz (H/B4), an experienced school leader working within an area of extreme inner-city deprivation, who acknowledges that progress made by her children within school is outstanding. However, due to the 'incredibly low' baseline upon entry, the pupils will always fall short of government targets. As such, she believes, due to the fact that inspections are based upon data, her school will always receive an inaccurate measurement of its effectiveness.

The questionnaire data further illustrates that headteachers working within Category A (low deprivation) also perceive socio-economic context as having a significant

effect upon the effectiveness of their school. This notion of effectiveness is viewed, within this context, as the ability to meet HST requirements. Therefore, headteachers were further asked to express their perceptions of how socio-economic context could influence pupil attainment (Table 8.2).

			Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B	Total
3.17a	Do you think a school's socio-economic context directly affects pupil attainment?	Yes	13	18	31
		No	1	0	1
3.18a	Do you think it is more difficult for schools working within areas of high deprivation to achieve good or outstanding status?	Yes	11	15	26
		No	3	3	6

**Table 8.2: Context and pupil attainment.**

The data illustrates that headteachers from both contextual categories identify with the view that context is significant; with only one of the 32 responding headteachers believing that socio-economic context has no direct effect on pupil attainment. Heads working within both categories have the same perceptions; this was also true regarding the effect context has on a school's ability to succeed under HST. Many headteachers perceive that, when working within an area of high deprivation, it becomes more difficult to facilitate accelerated pupil progress to enable the meeting of floor targets and thus, to create what is currently perceived as a successful school. However, those headteachers working within areas of affluence are not immune to some elements of challenge with respect to pupil attainment; Sarah (H/G3) illustrates this:

This is a wealthy area, but we also have social housing and some of the more affluent parents think that, because they're high achievers, their children must be also. So they keep looking at the data. Whilst some parents give lots of support, some don't, so it's really a mixed bag.

Sarah's response illustrates the greater understanding of and use of performativity culture and measures by parents within more affluent areas, but perhaps a lack of understanding of the dynamic nature and composition of schools.

### **8.2.2 Understanding context**

Headteachers view their accountability as intrinsically linked to their success in terms of meeting HST requirements. Therefore, it is vital to fully understand how contextual issues affect these outcomes. As such, issues such as income, housing and quality of life can be seen as directly impacting upon pupil performance and thus, headteacher accountability outcomes.

Whilst discussing poor housing and overcrowding, Rebecca (H/G2) made a valid point that many schools operate within an environment of very mixed housing, which reflects the diverse range of parents within the school's catchment:

I have 40% Free School Meals, but I also have 40% of my families with professional jobs, working in the local industry. [We have] families in poverty who are not on benefits who lose out on everything and others who are quite well off.

Headteachers working within areas of low deprivation specifically highlighted the phenomenon of new parents moving into the catchment, resulting in elevated local property values and greater pupil attainment expectations.

I feel that the nature of our parents has changed significantly within the past ten years...there's been an influx of high achieving affluent families. So basically, it has gone from an acceptable amount of parent pressure, to now, a huge amount, which wasn't there ten years ago. Which I think, because of the nature of the Standards Driven Agenda and also the amount of information that is now available to parents. Sarah (L/G3).

This movement away from a sense of community, identified within areas of low deprivation, by those living within more affluent zones, was an issue which heads felt manifested itself by what could be termed 'academic selfishness', resulting in parents being overtly focused upon the outcomes of their own children, with little or no regard for the needs of others. Jane, an experienced head working within an area of affluence, illustrates this point:



Here, I feel that you get parents who just see their child, they do not see the school as a community and they don't see the bigger picture. So, they want what they want for their child, what they don't see is their child is one of 30. I had to point out to some parents, we are a state school and you have chosen us! And, if you are so unhappy then you will have to go somewhere else. Jane (L/D7).

Headteachers also highlighted the greater willingness of more affluent parents to push for extra support for their children within school. James (L/J2) compared his experiences of working within two socio-economically diverse schools, stating that there were 'more children with special educational needs in areas of low deprivation than high', not because of any specific difference, but because the parents were better informed and more able to 'seek out and keep pushing for the extra support for their children.'

The second theme was that of the link between improving the quality of life of their children and working within the current HST regime. Headteachers working within areas of high deprivation were passionate about directly impacting upon the life experiences of their pupils, citing a significant lack of both knowledge of the world and real life experiences away from their local area. However, heads felt they had to fight to justify this approach if their data did not support a more 'experience based' curriculum. Phil (H/G1), working in a large multicultural inner-city primary, highlighted a further issue, that of attendance. Since pupil attendance is a limiting judgement under the current Ofsted Framework (Ofsted 2014), he felt that the surrounding community culture of his school was working against his HST success. Whilst he believed the quality of teaching and learning within school was of a high standard, the fact that many children would 'go to Pakistan for long periods of time' worked directly against obtaining good SATs data and made it impossible to meet the 96% attendance rate required by Ofsted. As a result, he felt that his school was

'stuffed in terms of the SATs and attendance data, so we are going to be fighting hard on two fronts'.

### **8.2.3 The effects of drugs, alcohol and crime**

Within Chapter 3, I referenced Tomlinson's (2001) argument for the recognition of the link between crime, social exclusion and the negative effects upon school life and attainment. These concerns continue to be evident, with those headteachers working within areas of high deprivation expressing significant fears over the long term effects on children of actually living within these environments. This is supported by the headteachers' questionnaire responses, given within Tables 8.1 and 8.2, which indicate a strong perception that school context is a major element in pupil attainment and, therefore, a school's performance in terms of SATs and inspection outcomes.

Life outside of school is both significant and beyond the direct control of the school. Although many schools aim to address the development of a negative street culture, they have limited resources and thus, limited effect. Liz (H/B4), working within one of the most deprived areas in the country, describes her school context:

80% of my children come from single parent families. Unemployment... extremely high (pause)...Drug and alcohol abuse has a significant impact on the way that we work with children here, it's that [negative] outside environment... with a gang and tribal culture, which is leading to more crime.

Living and learning within such an environment, she believes, has had a very adverse effect on the ability of the children to engage with their learning and feel safe, impacting significantly upon their attainment and the school's HST outcomes.

In school, we don't have problems with racist abuse, but on the streets, it's a different story completely. Violence is very prevalent and every year, since I have been here (8 years), there has been a murder within 100 yards of the

school, so it has been cordoned off, because there has been a shooting or a knifing. Liz (H/B4).

A further side-effect of this type of environment is the social isolation it creates, with parents being fearful of allowing their children to play without direct, trusted supervision, which is very difficult to arrange within a single parent family. This social isolation limits children's ability to engage with their world, thus restricting their imagination and creativity. However, Liz understands this but believes that, because some elements of social structure are missing, the consequences of allowing children to openly explore their environment would result in:

A lot of my kids [being] very streetwise, so their parents don't know where they are. They go out to play in the evenings and they don't know where they are, they could be anywhere. And, they could be getting up to a great deal of mischief I'm afraid. Liz (H/B4).

Whilst further descriptions of socially challenging environments were provided by other headteachers working within areas of high deprivation, a strong commitment was evident to actively overcome these issues and minimise social disadvantage. For example, Peter (H/A3), the executive head of two inner-city schools, had actively sought ways of engaging children outside of school, with the use of after school clubs and a wide range of residential visits, paid for by the school. He justified the expense by saying the sense of achievement and pride gained through these types of activities helped in the development of belonging, thus having a positive impact upon outcomes. He supported this further by budgeting for every child within his school to receive a free school uniform and P.E. kit every year. He believed that this sense of self-worth and community actively supported the children in tackling the very prevalent crime culture which surrounded the school.

Localised crime was not identified as an issue by headteachers working within areas of low deprivation and thus, no possible negative effects upon pupil attainment were identified. In these areas, strong commitment by parents to engage their children in out of school activities was observed. These were tightly controlled and tended to involve outside agencies and some degree of expense. Thus, it could be said that, even though the parents living within areas of relative affluence tend not to be overly concerned about crime directly affecting their children, they do however want to operate within a sphere of controlled safety.

Within areas of low deprivation, the issue of the negative impact of drugs and alcohol abuse was not identified as being significant. However, recent work (4Children 2012) highlights the growing concerns over middle class parents' drinking and, perhaps, offers an explanation for this, stating:

Much more frequently, [middle-class] parental alcohol abuse will be more manageable, only occasionally visible to the world outside the family, and do not result in any activities that could lead to the involvement of social workers, or child protection plans. (p.12)

Therefore, whilst alcohol may well be having a very detrimental effect upon the home life and attachment of children, it is as yet to be recognised as being significant by heads working within areas of wealth.

The lack of concern over the effect crime might have upon their pupils by headteachers working in areas of low deprivation, is not surprising, when the local crime rates are compared against those in more deprived areas.

## 8.2.4 Role of parents

Table 8.3 illustrates the importance placed on the role of parents by headteachers, with nearly all viewing their role as significant or very significant.

			Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B
3.2b	Parent / carer support of children's learning.	No Effect	0	0
		Little Effect	0	0
		Some Effect	2	0
		<b>Significant Effect</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>
		<b>Very Significant Effect</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>
			<b>12/14</b>	<b>18/18</b>
3.3b	Ability of parents / carers to support their children's learning	No Effect	0	0
		Little Effect	0	0
		Some Effect	1	0
		<b>Significant Effect</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>
		<b>Very Significant Effect</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>
			<b>13/14</b>	<b>18/18</b>

**Table 8.3: Importance of parental role.**

This perception of the importance of the role of parents is held equally by headteachers working within both socio-economic contexts. However, 14 out of 18 of the responding headteachers in areas of high deprivation, indicated the ability of the parents to be able to support their children's learning as being very significant. This could indicate some concerns regarding their parents own educational background, particularly regarding language acquisition. This view is exemplified by two heads working in areas of high deprivation:

Most of our families are EAL (English as an Additional Language). So, at home they speak their home language and when they are playing outside, so the only time a significant number of my children speak English is during the school working day. (Liz H/B4).

Not all our parents can read so when you say you must read at home, it's very difficult if you can't read. I had a parent last week saying to me, I listen to him read every day, but I don't know whether he is reading, I don't know what he's reading, because I can't read it. (Rebecca H/G2).

Within areas of low deprivation, parents' academic knowledge and confidence appears to be less of a concern, which could indicate a greater belief on the part of the heads in their parents' academic abilities and educational background.

The importance of the proactive involvement of parents has been previously identified within the work of Epstein (1995 and 2001) and Desforges and Abouchar (2003). Their findings highlighted the impact of material deprivation on both the quantity and quality of involvement, however, what is clearly evident, from a wider literature search, is that the greater the involvement the higher the level of achievement, regardless of social class or material wealth (Burnitt 2010, 6).

Although headteachers working within Category A (low deprivation) recognise the need for parental involvement, they are acutely aware of the challenges this can generate. Concerns over pupil attainment dominated headteacher and parent communications, with heads having to defend their HST outcomes. This supports Bell's (2009) notion of parents as selective consumers, resulting in a significant shift within the power dynamic. James and Jane, respectively, illustrate this issue:

I feel that sometimes, in this context, parents have a fixed agenda for their child and they don't understand the state system and how we support their children. It's about having faith in the school to do a good job. [From my experience of] an area of high deprivation, it was very much around the parents and carers just understanding the routines of the school day. How they can help their child do their homework, especially, if they have literacy problems themselves? James (L/J2).

I have some parents who would be in here every day, sat in the corner of the classroom watching their child's progress and that's quite hard to manage, because I've also got to ensure that my staff get on with the job and they are not badgered by parents, who are being unreasonably challenging. So, that takes up a lot of my time. I am out on the gates every morning and actively on the playground every night managing the parents. Jane (L/D7).

During interview, many headteachers expressed their appreciation of the support given by parents, stating that the majority, irrespective of socio-economic context were supportive. For example, Mary (L/I3), working in an area of extremely low deprivation: 'We generally have strong parental support; parents are keen to be

involved in their children’s learning.’ And as Phil (H/G1) highlights, parental relationships can be a rewarding element of the role.

### 8.3 Perceptions of internal community factors with respect to HST

Figure 8.2 illustrates an overview of the internal community factors, which may directly influence children’s HST performance within a given school and, therefore, the importance of its context. These factors were identified and discussed within Chapter 4 and are now further investigated.

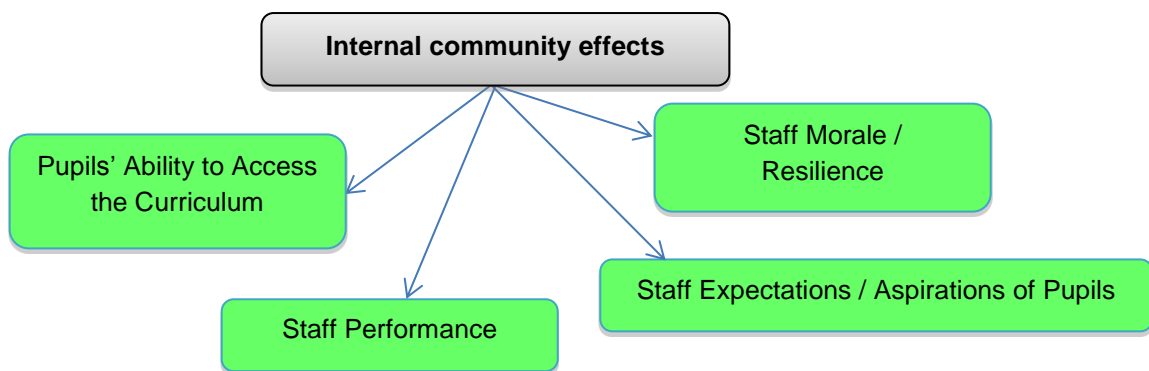


Figure 8.2: Internal community factors.

#### 8.3.1 Pupils’ ability to access the curriculum – Prior to entry

Given that school performance data is based upon testing at the end of each Key Stage of primary education, attainment upon entry can be seen as being highly significant. Table 8.4 illustrates heads’ perceptions of pupil attainment upon entry with respect to future attainment, as measured through HST.

			Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B
3.5b	Children’s attainment prior to starting school.	No Effect	0	0
		Little Effect	0	0
		Some Effect	4	0
		<b>Significant Effect</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
		<b>High Significant Effect</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>12</b>
			<b>10/14</b>	<b>18/18</b>

Table 8.4: Prior attainment upon entry to school.

All responding headteachers identify attainment upon entry as being significant or highly significant; however, a greater effect was noted by headteachers working within areas of high deprivation. Liz and Jane, respectively, highlight the difference in starting points, within the two differing socio-economic contexts:

When the children come into my Reception class, we have to show them how to use a knife and fork. Many of the children don't sit at a table at home to eat; they sit in front of the television. All those things, when I first became a head ten years ago, were taken into account as part of the inspection; there wasn't the weighting towards the academic side of school life...I suppose, that's the attainment focus. Liz (H/B7).

Many of our parents really support their children before they come into school, so their children are both confident and able before any formal teaching has taken place. They know their letter sounds and tend to be very self-assured and sociable. Jane (L/D7).

Analysis of headteachers' perceptions of the effect pupil behaviour has upon entry to school reflects a similar trend. Once again, headteachers working in areas of high deprivation tended to indicate high levels of concern (Table 8.5).

			Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B
3.4b	Behaviour of children prior to starting school.	No Effect	0	0
		Little Effect	1	0
		Some Effect	2	2
		<b>Significant Effect</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>
		<b>Very Significant Effect</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>10</b>
			<b>11/14</b>	<b>15//18</b>

**Table 8.5: Behaviour upon entry.**

This tentatively indicates that behaviour is of a lower level, prior to entry, within more disadvantaged areas. This view is supported by headteachers who have worked within both socio-economic categories.

### **8.3.2 Staff morale, stress, resilience and motivation**

Given the highly demanding nature of working within all primary schools, the notions of staff motivation, morale and resilience play a significant part in the overall performance of both schools and headteachers. Whilst a great challenge exists in



all schools, the character of this can be seen to differ fundamentally with respect to socio-economic context.

2.14a	Do you think the current level of teacher accountability is having a negative effect upon teacher morale?		Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B	Total
		Yes	13	11	24
No	1	7	8		

**Table 8.6: Teacher morale and accountability.**

The questionnaire data (Table 8.6) indicates that nearly all of the headteachers working within areas of affluence suggest that current levels of teacher accountability have resulted in a reduction in teacher morale. However, the view is slightly more positive within areas of high deprivation. This is, perhaps, contrary to expectation, given the high demands these types of schools place on teachers, but this could be due, in part, to what Liz describes as a sense of moral purpose, which promotes empathy and increases morale:

I love being a head here, where I have got a team of very proactive staff, who want whatever it is to work. With their enthusiasm and passion, you have got to have that to work here. It is not easy working in a school like this; it is much easier if you go to a green leafy suburb. We do have to deal with a lot of heart-wrenching situations here, particularly child abuse. Liz (H/B4).

Nevertheless, it was noted that 24 of the 32 responding headteachers indicate a decrease in teacher morale. The longer term effects of this were then explored by reference to headteachers' perceptions of the relationship between accountability and teacher enrolment and retention.

			Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B	Total
2.15a	Do you think the current increased focus on accountability is leading to potentially quality teacher training candidates choosing alternative careers?	Yes	10	10	20
		No	6	6	12
2.16a	Do you think the current high level of teacher accountability is forcing good / outstanding teachers to consider leaving or to leave the teaching profession?	Yes	10	10	20
		No	6	6	12

**Table 8.7: Accountability, teacher enrolment and retention.**

The questionnaire data indicates that many current headteachers perceive increasing accountability as having a significant negative effect upon both entry to the profession and retention. This appears to be irrespective of socio-economic context. This supports the findings of a recent teaching union survey (NUT 2014), which cites excessive workload generated by accountability as a significant contributing factor to teachers leaving the profession. A quote taken from the report illustrates the negative effects of HST:

Data, Ofsted, data, Ofsted... INSANE accountability which fosters a culture of blame, rock-bottom morale and teachers often found crying in corners. (Primary teacher, Nottingham) NUT (2014, 5).

Previous research has indicated a strong connection between increasing accountability and teacher stress (Brimblecombe et al. 1995; Connor 2003; Klassen and Chiu 2010). Returned questionnaire data supports their findings, with the majority of headteachers perceiving some increased stress as a result of the focus on pupil attainment and outcomes.

			Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B	Total
3.14a	Do you think headteachers' making teachers more directly accountable for pupil outcomes has increased teacher stress?	Yes	13	16	29
		No	1	2	3
3.15a	Do you think headteachers' making teachers more directly accountable for pupil outcomes has increased teacher workload?	Yes	13	12	25
		No	1	6	7

**Table 8.8: Teacher stress and workload.**

Table 8.8 illustrates no significant variance in perceptions of teacher stress within the differing socio-economic contexts. This indicates that levels of teacher stress generated by HST can be seen to be independent of context. A slightly different picture is observed in terms of workload, with those heads working within the more affluent areas indicating a more significant increase in workload. The rationale behind this is unclear; however, Jane (L/D7) offers a possible insight, when she

discussed the need to maintain the highest possible standards, because her context generated a greater expectation from stakeholders and the LA.

Significant concerns were expressed by headteachers from both categories regarding teacher stress. Liz (H/B4), working within an area of high deprivation, recalled the trauma caused by being placed into Special Measures following a Section 5 inspection by Ofsted:

...staff morale is dreadful, so bad [that] the staff were actually [off] on long-term sick with stress. So, how can you improve a school in the very short time you're given to improve it when... you're dealing with a teaching force which is sick; it's absolutely impossible. But then, the real question to be asked is why they are sick in the first place?

Mary (L/I3), working within a context of low deprivation, stated that high parental expectation places a more positive spin on the role of teacher stress. Identifying opportunities for professional reflection and improvement, however, she expresses significant concerns regarding the introduction of Performance Related Pay:

This, over the last 12 months, I think, has really skewed the picture somewhat and I am disappointed with the outcomes. Now, we are obsessed with showing test results and progress, to the point where, now we have had to put in such rigorous test procedures to ensure that assessments are absolutely consistent and fair. Mary (L/I3).

Whilst she is at pains to emphasise that her teachers are not prepared to cheat, she openly acknowledges the pressures placed upon them by the need to meet pupil attainment targets.

The notion of staff resilience and motivation can be seen to play a significant part in the overall HST success of a school, since, if both are absent, children are not going to make the progress necessary to meet the SATs floor targets.

	Do you think it is acceptable to 'Teach to the Tests', in order to?		Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B	Total
2.9a	Fully prepare the pupils for the tests?	Yes	7	12	19
		No	6	7	13
2.10a	Maximise results to place pupils in higher sets as they move into KS 3?	Yes	3	2	5
		No	10	17	27
2.11a	Give a positive picture of your school's performance?	Yes	4	4	8
		No	9	15	24
2.12a	Help protect the school's Number on Roll?	Yes	3	3	6
		No	10	16	26

**Table 8.9: Headteachers' perceptions of teaching to the tests.**

Whilst the data within Table 8.9 presents a very mixed picture in terms of headteachers' willingness to direct teachers to 'teach to the tests', there is no doubt about the pressure heads feel that they impose upon their staff. Liz (H/B4) illustrates this point:

The Year 2 and 6 teachers feel under enormous pressure, the Year 6 teacher particularly, because their results are published, they're on our website for everyone to read, it's compulsory.

The data also illustrates a lack of headteachers' concern regarding the number of pupils entering school. This would tend to indicate two possible scenarios. Firstly, heads are currently satisfied with the effect HST outcomes are having upon their school intake, as parents view their school in a positive light and, therefore, their PAN (Pupil Admission Number) is being met. Secondly, parents or potential parents currently place little emphasis on the importance of HST outcomes and have a positive view of their schools regardless of recent SATs or inspection data. This second scenario was described by Kate (H/A1), working within an area of extremely high deprivation:

Our school community doesn't seem unduly concerned about what SATs or Ofsted says. When the school went into Special Measures a number of parents were troubled, but we still had quite a high proportion of parents who never mentioned it and just carried on regardless. But the ones who did mention it as a problem were the parents who are better educated themselves and, therefore, had a wider outlook. Kate (H/A1).

Finally, headteachers' perceptions of staff resilience appear to differ widely depending on context. Heads working within areas of low deprivation view pupil behaviour as generating only low levels of stress and, therefore, teachers' resilience is not a factor. However, heads working within areas of high deprivation view behaviour as highly significant, indicating that staff coping with disruptive or aggressive behaviour generates high levels of stress and calls into play teacher resilience.

### 8.3.3 Staff performance and pupil aspirations

The data within Table 8.10 illustrates the monitoring of teachers' performance in relationship to their work within the classroom, indicating that book scrutinies and lesson observations do cause a level of anxiety for some headteachers, with 9 out of the 32 respondents indicating a significant level of concern.

	Perceived level of concern generated by each activity.		Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B	Total
2.8b	The regular monitoring of teachers through formal lesson observations.	No Concern	5	6	11
		A Little Concern	3	7	10
		Moderate Concern	1	2	3
		Significant Concern	5	4	9
		Very Significant Concern	0	0	0
2.9b	Robustly addressing satisfactory or below teaching to ensure improvement.	No Concern	4	7	11
		A Little Concern	5	2	7
		Moderate Concern	4	3	7
		Significant Concern	0	5	5
		Very Significant Concern	1	1	2
2.10b	Robust scrutiny of planning and pupils' work to identify improvements and then feedback to teachers.	No Concern	5	5	10
		A Little Concern	3	6	9
		Moderate Concern	3	4	7
		Significant Concern	3	3	6
		Very Significant Concern	0	0	0
2.11b	Addressing pupil underachievement with teachers.	No Concern	5	6	11
		A Little Concern	4	3	7
		Moderate Concern	2	4	6
		Significant Concern	2	5	7
		Very Significant Concern	1	0	1

**Table 8.10: Headteachers' perceptions of teacher monitoring.**

No significant variance was observed regarding teacher monitoring practices between heads working within the two categories of socio-economic context.

Interview feedback indicates that headteachers' concerns were centred on the linking of performance monitoring to data, as Sarah illustrates:

In my 11 years as a headteacher, this has changed significantly, in that previously, one could manage/lead by walking around the school. You knew who your good teachers were, the teachers who needed support and the teachers who were outstanding. No one could be outstanding all of the time, but you knew who your quality staff was. What's changed is that data is now key. It's now about being able to prove it, by monitoring of data and lessons... it's being able to prove, as a headteacher, that you are doing the job. Sarah (L/G3)

She progresses to discuss the pressure teachers are currently under and how she believes that the monitoring of lessons, books and pupil attainment is a significant element of this. This has generated a sense of 'professional guilt', which has resulted in concerns over carrying out constant monitoring, thus adding to this stress.

Table 8.11 illustrates heads' perceptions of the effect the focus on standards and testing might be having upon their children.

			Low Deprivation Category A	High Deprivation Category B	Total
1.8a	Has the current level of focus on standards had a negative effect upon pupils' self-esteem?	Yes	6	2	8
		No	8	16	24
1.9a	Has the current level of focus on standards made children more acutely aware of their own performance and that of their peers?	Yes	14	15	29
		No	0	3	3

**Table 8.11: Pupil perceptions of the SDA and HST.**

Whilst 24 of the responding headteachers indicated that they perceived no detrimental effects upon children caused by the increased focus on standards, it is interesting to note that a higher proportion of heads working within areas of low deprivation expressed concern. Whilst the reason behind this is unclear, it could be linked to high parental expectations. This notion is further supported by all the

heads working within this context indicating that their children are more acutely aware of their own performance and that of their peers. Although heads working within areas of high deprivation indicated that their children were also aware of their performance, this appeared to have a significantly less direct effect upon their self-esteem. Sarah (L/G3), working within a low deprivation context, and John (H/A2), working within high deprivation, respectively illustrate this:

The children know they need to achieve, they are fully aware of their targets and they know where they need to get to. I feel that this has a detrimental effect upon our children. The parents are very pushy to get the 'right' SATs results, sometimes it's like a competition. Sarah (L/G3).

Have I seen children being demotivated? I've seen children being drilled and skilled into test outcomes, because, in our context, unless we sort of give them insight, they don't naturally get that support at home. There's no push coming from home. John (H/A2).

The fact that nearly all responding headteachers perceived that their children were aware of their own performance and that of their peers illustrates how continuous testing and assessment has now become entrenched in primary life.

The pressure headteachers currently feel under to maximise HST outcomes is illustrated by their outlook towards having to implement 'maximising' strategies, for example Year 6 booster groups. Heads have significant concerns regarding the demotivating effects of enforced revision programmes aimed directly at getting sufficient children to Level 4 in the May SATs, in order to achieve their floor targets. Their level of concern is demonstrated by the fact that 28 of the 32 responding heads were concerned about at least one cohort who could potentially distort a judgement of their school's performance. This notion of 'jumping through HST hoops' and forcing their children and staff to do the same was a recurring one,

independent of socio-economic context. This 'hoop jumping' generated very clear professional soul-searching.

The pressure current headteachers face is both enormous and relentless, with many feeling that their professional competence and future careers are being judged on a set of data or a 48 hour inspection visit, rather than the real differences that many of them feel their schools make to children's lives.

#### **8.4 Summary**

When examining headteachers' perceptions across the two identified socio-economic categories, it becomes clear that there are many similar concerns. Firstly, there is an acceptance that they need to be accountable for the tax-payers money used to fund their schools, viewing this as a significant element of their role. However, it is the nature of this accountability which concerns them, together with a perception of unfairness. Headteachers working within areas of low deprivation are aware that elements, such as attainment upon entry, parental support and pupil behaviour, all play a significant part in aiding their HST outcomes. Conversely, high deprivation heads indicate that they could not rely upon these 'supporting' elements and, therefore, perceived the challenge of obtaining positive HST outcomes as more problematic. They further pointed out the unfairness of having universal government-set floor targets, by which all schools are judged irrespective of context.

With reference to the core conceptualisation of headteachers' accountabilities (Figure 5.4) developed within Chapter 5, a number of similarities and differences start to emerge in terms of policy technologies and accountabilities associated with



each category of school context. Firstly, heads, irrespective of context, are subjected to state controlled performativity, administrated via HST. This manifests as a notion of providing value for money, whilst ensuring survival through the meeting of top-down imposed performance targets. However, their policy technologies and accountabilities differ significantly with respect to differing stakeholders, particularly the perceptions, demands and beliefs of parents.

Secondly, heads working within areas of affluence are subjected to direct market accountabilities, with parents tending to judge their performance in terms of HST outcomes and, as 'consumers', having the right to demand a consistently high quality 'product'. If these expectations are not fully met then the current performativity culture has created mechanisms for either the removal of the head or the option to 'shop elsewhere'. Contrary to this, heads working within areas of high deprivation have tended to be subjected to less direct market influenced accountability, as outlined above, with their parents and other stakeholders tending to draw more heavily on a professional policy technology and accountability. This manifests with heads being judged less via their HST outcomes and operating within a more trusted, perhaps old fashioned, moral guardian role, as described by Grace (1995). Thus, it could be argued that the concept of professional trust, such an element of pre-reform educational leadership, is actually stronger within areas of deprivation, with parents displaying a willingness to allow the school to operate unobserved and uncriticised. Certainly, the data indicates that more affluent parents are much more vocal in their willingness to address what they perceive as under performance by either the head or school, and less aware and tolerant of the concept of the needs of a wider school community.

Finally, all headteachers expressed significant concerns regarding the demotivating effects of concentrated revision in Year 6, upon both the children and staff. They felt that it caused stress and boredom among all concerned, whilst limiting the curriculum and children's life experiences. Nevertheless, they felt powerless to change it, for fear of a dip in their data and the resultant unwanted scrutiny. This position is a manifestation of the power that both the market and performativity policy technologies and accountabilities currently hold in terms of enforcing managerial approaches upon heads, even those which are contrary to their personal and professional philosophies

## **Chapter 9 - Developing an Understanding of Headteachers' Practice**

### **9.0 Introduction**

This chapter aims to develop further the conceptualisation of headteachers' current positioning with respect to both the SDA and use of HST. The fieldwork data has located each participating head into one of four positions previously outlined (Figure 6.3b). These 'descriptors' are now further developed to provide a detailed understanding of how heads currently position their professional practices with respect to the core conceptualisation (Figure 5.4).



rejection of the belief that direct accountability involves merely teaching and learning, and the measurement of resultant pupil outcomes. The remaining heads in the study, however, adopted a more distinct positioning on the Framework (Figure 6.3b). The classification of each of the headteacher 'types', and their associated scenarios, provides a valuable insight into how headteachers' principles and philosophies impact upon their practice as they implement successive governmental policies, whilst operating within the current culture of performativity.

Tables 9.1, 9.2, 9.3 and 9.4 outline the data collected using the initial questionnaire responses for each headteacher's details and some contextual data. Each head's response was indicated as strong (S), medium (M) or neutral (N), dependent upon the strength of their perceptions with respect to the SDA or their accountability via HST, as plotted on Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b).

## **9.2 Quadrant 1 – The Torch Bearers**

As outlined within Chapter 6, those headteachers positioned within quadrant 1 of the Framework were designated as Torch Bearers, headteachers who have positive perceptions of both the SDA and HST. Eight of the 34 responding headteachers fall within this classification, four from each of the two socio-economic bands (three of whom were interviewed, indicated in yellow). Four of the eight heads expressed strongly positive views, two expressing their commitment to high levels of accountability, and two indicating their firm belief in the SDA.

HT Ref	Strength of HT Perceptions		Ofsted Grading at Last Inspection	FSM (%)	SEN (%)	SATs Writing Data Level 4 and Above (%)
<b>H/A3 Peter</b>	<b>SDA</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>88</b>
	<b>HST</b>	<b>N</b>				
H/D1	SDA	N	1	60	25	97
	HST	S				
L/B2	SDA	S	2	40	54	93
	HST	M				
<b>H/G2 Rebecca</b>	<b>SDA</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>64</b>
	<b>HST</b>	<b>N</b>				
L/B1	SDA	N	2	4	12	100
	HST	N				
H/E2	SDA	M	2	39	33	100
	HST	M				
L/G2	SDA	M	2	4	5	93
	HST	N				
<b>L/I3 Mary</b>	<b>SDA</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>97</b>

**Table 9.1: Quadrant 1 – The Torch Bearers’ data.**

Within his role as an executive headteacher, Peter (H/A3) is the leader of two inner city primary schools, working within an area of high deprivation, as illustrated by the schools’ high uptake of Free School Meals and IDACI data. Both of his schools have recently been inspected and received ‘good’ ratings, with SATs data in the high eighties for reading, writing and maths. Once again, as with other Torch Bearers, for example Mary (L/I3), Peter could be viewed as not in a vulnerable position with respect to a negative HST outcome. Because of his executive head role, Peter was able to provide an in depth insight into how the two different Ofsted teams carried out their inspections. Reflecting on these recent inspections, Peter highlighted his beliefs that ‘Ofsted inspections are data driven’ and this view was reinforced by his recent experiences of a lead inspector who ‘was mad for data’. He also expressed concerns over inspectors not following the guidelines regarding the inspection of supply staff and about the over-inspection of a newly qualified teacher (NQT) with only three weeks’ full time experience. This type of experience, he explained, has clouded his view of the process, even though both his schools received ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ gradings. He progressed to express his views that

he considered testing to disadvantage his school and not to be a true 'reflection of the effort and time spent'.

Nevertheless, Peter believes in the need to be directly accountable for the children's progress and placed their learning as paramount. He was, therefore, a strong advocate of standards and was keen to discuss the high levels of achievement within school. Given the challenging context of his schools, he was passionate about providing an 'oasis' where children could come and 'foster a love of learning'. Peter viewed standards as highly significant, but not the methods of measuring or judging these standards. He viewed the children's experiences within school as critical to their long term future success, focusing on the provision of resources and activities aimed at fostering a greater sense of self-esteem and pride within their school.

Rebecca (H/G2), a headteacher heading towards retirement and with a previous career in industry, has been a head for a relatively short time of four years. She has been teaching for 19 years, so has a wealth of classroom and deputy head experience. Her current school is situated within a small northern coastal town with high levels of deprivation, as indicated by the above national levels of Free School Meals of 40%. The school's most recent SATs results fall below the national floor targets and the school currently has a "Requires Improvement" grading from Ofsted. Her positioning on Conceptual Framework 1a, based on her questionnaire responses, indicates a neutral stance regarding both HST and the SDA. Nonetheless, she voiced some significant concerns during interview. Firstly, she explained that the overt focus on data was wrong, since 'it only reflects your school

within a moment in time,' and as such, results could vary from year to year. All responding headteachers in this quadrant expressed significant concerns over at least one cohort regarding their end of Key Stage 2 attainment and considered it unfair that factors like starting point on entry and context were not taken into account. Rebecca felt that this was particularly significant and unfair since, within her particular school's context, there were many vulnerable children with very unsettled home lives, which had a considerable impact upon their progress and attainment, as measured by HST.

The perceived unfairness of comparing her school's data against schools within different socio-economic circumstances is something Rebecca feels passionate about. Whilst she totally agrees with the 'philosophy that all children should be as good as they can be', she considers it inappropriate and inaccurate to judge the quality of teaching solely on data since:

I had a former life before becoming a teacher; I have an engineering degree and I have studied statistics at university and I believe that the statistics for my school are meaningless, as the cohort is too small to be statistically sound.

Rebecca expressed a neutral stance regarding the implementation of a Standards Driven Agenda in her questionnaire data; however, upon interview she was more supportive of the need to drive up standards. This, she reflected, might require the 'weeding out' of underperforming teachers; however, she continued to have concerns, stating:

[Under the] new appraisal system, a teacher can be in capability and out of the school in 12 weeks. People can underperform for all sorts of reasons. On one hand, the argument is, yes it is affecting children, but you can carefully manage that person who's going through a difficult time and it won't affect children in the long term.



Examining the responses of Mary (L/I3), a relatively young headteacher (under 40 years old), with ten years' experience as a head, it becomes apparent that she views accountability as critical to the fulfilment of her role; however, she continues to have concerns regarding HST. Examining her school data, it becomes clear that she could be considered to be on 'safe ground', with both recent SATs and Ofsted inspections resulting in positive outcomes. She views accountability 'as necessary and something I place a great deal of emphasis on' and 'High Stakes Testing has its place in that'. However, she does have issues with elements of HST, as illustrated below:

You have to be careful not to let SATs take over, it's only one measure and some children aren't good at tests, so it shouldn't be the major measure of either a child's or a school's success.

Whilst positioned within the Torch Bearers quadrant, Mary does not express strong beliefs in the adoption and resultant success of continuous governmental policy and strategy change. She articulates this by focusing upon her concerns over how central government has sought to exert control over the curriculum with the introduction of the Strategies as a 'one size fits all approach' and the 'straitjacketing of teachers' when they are forced to use the intervention programs such as Springboard. She further highlighted her reservations regarding the rate of change, discussing her concerns over the changing Ofsted Inspection Framework, which she felt changed 'every week'. However, she once again expressed her belief in direct accountability, stating that 'Ofsted is a good thing; it keeps us very focused as a leadership team'.

### 9.2.1 Torch Bearers' conceptualisation

Headteacher Scenario	Supportive of Policy Technology	Rejection of Policy Technology
Torch Bearers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market</li> <li>• Performativity</li> <li>• Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalism</li> </ul>

**Figure 5.6a: Torch Bearers' policy technologies conceptualisation.**

Using solely their questionnaire responses, the Torch Bearer headteachers would have been expected to fit within the notion of performative accountability (Ranson 2003), with strong beliefs in data providing an accurate overview and in the power of the market. However, this does not appear to be the case; indeed, there was a very mixed response regarding their belief in whether measures of performance were either accurate or fair. Whilst some heads believed that it provided focus to enable improvement to take place, others had significant concerns over HST's limitations. Upon reflection, the Torch Bearers appeared not to be bastions of performative accountability, but as seekers of a method to manage the demands of HST. Their focus, as exemplified by Peter, Rebecca and Mary, was very much on maximising their school's performance, not just to manage their accountability but, far more significantly, to maximise their children's potential. This ethos places them within what Ranson (2003) terms the age of professionalism, where professional judgement and client needs underpin their work. This initially might appear to fit well into the notion of performativity, in which testing and inspections maximise pupil attainment. However, these heads are effectively managing their performance whilst addressing the total needs of each child and rejecting the notion of what Ranson (2003, 463) terms 'strengthening product quality' which, in this case, is simply the continuous raising of the number of children achieving the externally set SATs floor targets. Thus, these heads are aiming to redefine their conceptualisation of

professionalism, not to reject it, as suggested by the initial Torch Bearers policy technologies conceptualisation (Figure 5.6a).

Here, a discourse starts to emerge, that of headteachers managing the political demands for continuous improvement in attainment, as measured by HST, and their own desire to maximise each child's potential and life chances. All Torch Bearers have a clear commitment to standards, however, not in terms of standards being the measure of their accountability, but as a means of raising the quality of teaching and learning within their schools, thus facilitating positive pupil outcomes. There is an important difference here and one which they are willing and confident to defend. It is interesting to note that all schools falling within this quadrant were currently oversubscribed, regardless of their Ofsted grading, and therefore, were not proactive within the neoliberal model of consumer accountability, based on parental choice. Therefore, the accountability of 'Torch Bearer' heads can be viewed as an uneasy balance of professional and performative, with a strong sense of moral purpose, which underpins their actions, and perhaps as a return to the cult of the 'headmaster tradition' (Grace 1995, 11). Here, they seek to directly meet the needs of the customer (children and parents), whilst maintaining a total belief in their ability to control the curriculum and manage their staff. They are not, however, immune to the stresses generated by the role (Mansell 2007; Phillip et al. 2007; Thomson 2009) and aim to support their staff, whilst ensuring a constant focus upon standards.

### 9.3 Quadrant 2 – Self-Regulators

Table 9.2 outlines the data connected to those headteachers whose questionnaire responses have positioned them within the Self-Regulators quadrant of Conceptual Framework 1a. Their answers have indicated some degree of willingness to take on board new governmental policy and strategies in order to raise standards. However, they expressed some significant concerns over the implementation and accuracy of HST.

HT Ref	Strength of HT Perceptions		Ofsted Grading at Last Inspection	FSM (%)	SEN (%)	SATs Writing Data Level 4 and Above (%)
H/A1 Kate	SDA	N	4	35	28	78
	HST	-S				
H/A4	SDA	N	2	48	23	100
	HST	-S				
H/A6 Rachel	SDA	N	1	31	26	78
	HST	-N				
H/B3	SDA	N	1	49	40	98
	HST	-N				
H/E1	SDA	N	3	25	25	70
	HST	-S				
H/G1 Phil	SDA	N	1	21	20	67
	HST	-M				
H/G3 Jean	SDA	N	1	42	9	n/a
	HST	-M				
L/A1	SDA	M	2	4	22	83
	HST	-M				
L/D1	SDA	M	2	15	32	100
	HST	-S				
L/D7 Jane	SDA	M	2	4	15	93
	HST	-N				
L/G3 Sarah	SDA	N	3	10	15	85
	HST	-S				
L/I2	SDA	N	1	4	10	100
	HST	-M				
L/J2 James	SDA	M	2	7	6	93
	HST	-N				

Table 9.2: Quadrant 2 – Self-Regulators' data.

Of the 34 responding headteachers, 13 fall within this classification, with a balance from each of the two socio-economic bands. Six of the 13 heads expressed strong

views, all expressing their concerns regarding the effectiveness and fairness of HST; two of these headteachers expressed very significant worries. The remaining heads voiced neutral and moderate views with respect to the SDA.

Sarah (L/G3) has been involved in teaching for 25 years and as a head for eleven. She currently works within a medium-sized primary school, situated in a large farming village with some elements of rural deprivation; however, the majority of parents fall within Category B of the socio-economic classification. Recently, her school received a “Requires Improvement’ grading from Ofsted and she has undergone a series of support measures from the Local Authority. Whilst Sarah’s questionnaire data places her within quadrant 2, during interview she considered her best fit as being in quadrant 3, as a ‘Maverick’. She articulated this by stating:

I would consider myself within scenario three [Maverick], because...I don’t believe that the increase in accountability...is a positive and also the Standards Driven Agenda, in real terms, I don’t believe has improved standards.

Sarah, during interview, discussed at length her opinion that she considered inspections as an unfair system, since they were predominantly based upon SATs data and were not a joint, reflective evaluation process. Sarah progressed to highlight her opinion that headteachers, as such, are fully aware of their schools’ strengths and weaknesses and of how to bring about improvement; ‘you do not need the big boys coming in to tell you that.’ This negative view of the inspection process was further justified by Sarah’s firm belief that it was a political tool (a belief also supported by Peter, H/A2) and one used to force through policy. She also expressed serious concerns regarding their demotivating effect on staff, indicating that it could take up to 3 months for a staff to recover from an inspection, regardless of the outcome, and this was mainly due to their lack of belief in the process.

Sarah (L/G3) progressed to question the validity of the testing currently being used in school, an area of concern raised previously by a number of heads. Sarah focused on the inconsistency of the SATs' threshold scores and also on the negative effects of booster classes, with children becoming 'SATs fodder', resulting in the loss of a balanced curriculum and in detrimental effects on children's self-confidence and esteem. However, Sarah is at pains to indicate that she does not have an issue with accountability, stating:

I agree with accountability and with the Standards Driven Agenda. We are all professionals and we are all accountable and we go to our schools in order to do the best for our children. However, the way in which it's being done, I disagree with.

She further highlights a developing trend, in that it is not the accountability that is at issue, but rather how that accountability is managed:

[As] with any business or organisation we need to be accountable, but this needs to be done in a way in which one feels one can succeed, as opposed to being 'beaten by a stick'. And, with the Standards Driven Agenda, again, I am all for children making progress, however, I feel that how this is measured is flawed; it's 'jumping through hoops' again.

Once again, the political nature of HST is brought into the discussion, with Sarah stating that she considered accountability and some of its outcomes to be politically motivated and far removed from the reasons teachers became educationalists; that is, to directly benefit children and to positively impact upon their lives. Nevertheless, Sarah did feel that HST and the SDA had impacted positively upon teacher development and improvement, allowing for a more effective fulfilment of potential.

Kate (H/A1), an experienced headteacher approaching retirement having worked in education for 32 years, seven as a head, is unique in the sample, in that her school is the only one currently judged 'Inadequate' by Ofsted. Her school is situated within

the centre of a large industrial northern city, in an area of high deprivation and cultural diversity, where a large number of languages are spoken.

As with other headteachers, Kate was keen to declare that she did not have a problem with being accountable; however, the difficulty with accountability was that it was solely data driven. She articulated this further:

I think the increase in holding headteachers accountable, as a result of results and Ofsted inspections is flawed. I think headteachers are being blamed for something that isn't based on a true picture, because of the very close link between performance tables and Ofsted inspections.

She also expressed grave concerns over the accountability of heads and teachers and its shift to a very black or white punitive model, one which failed to take into account what actually builds and sustains a 'good' school. However, it is important to note that Kate supported the use of summative testing, stating that it did not harm the children and was, indeed, useful for identifying areas requiring further work. However, she did state:

At first, it was a tool to measure performance, but gradually it became a tool not to make political statements about how high or low the national figure was, but an instrument to attack each single school.

Her recent experience of being placed into Special Measures supported her view. Kate explained that, although her Key Stage 2 results were in line with national expectations, her Key Stage 1 data was 'not quite there'. Even though Kate was able to demonstrate that the school's strategic actions were addressing this issue, she felt that there was no dialogue with the inspectors. An issue with attendance was also raised, since the school was one percentage point below the Ofsted threshold. Despite attendance being the highest ever recorded at the school, with the attendance data demonstrating a year on year improvement, attendance was deemed inadequate. Kate felt aggrieved that no serious dialogue was entered into

and that the inspection team had failed to take sufficient note of the effect of her school's context upon attendance and the steps the school was taking to address the identified issues.

The damaging effects of being placed into Special Measures also caused Kate to question the use of HST as a mechanism of school improvement:

It was very intense and very demoralising for the staff; as a school improvement tool, it's not the best one. It increased stress and our Key Stage 1 Leader had a heart attack. I know it was a congenital heart defect; however, the stress of the inspection certainly didn't help. There have been other health issues as well, such as depression, anxiety and absences; however, most people are back now. It was a difficult time because it had made teachers, who had been good for a long time, ill and start to doubt themselves.

Whilst discussing the continuing concentration on standards, Kate was more supportive, stating that she considered that it had helped to focus schools' attention on to the two core subjects of literacy and maths. However, she had concerns over the use of the two Strategies to raise standards in these areas. She considered them too prescriptive, time consuming and unmanageable, with a tendency to send teachers down a route which was not always productive for children. She also believed that the National Literacy Strategy had removed or, at least, limited teachers' creativity and flexibility. However, the National Numeracy Strategy had enabled teachers to receive professional development, leading to new innovative approaches to maths teaching and thus, a rejuvenation of the subject.

Kate progressed on to discuss the false link between standards and HST, stating that her school 'squeezed' as many children through Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 as possible. This 'squeezing', through the use of booster groups and other forms of intensive coaching resulted in a perceived improvement in standards.



However, in reality the children's learning was not secure or sustainable at Level 4 and as they progressed into secondary school, they would revert back to their true level of understanding. Thus, this 'hothouse' approach would meet the requirement of HST but fail to result in any perceivable improvement in standards.

Jane (L/D7) is an experienced headteacher working in a medium-sized primary school within an area of low deprivation in a small rural town. Despite being under fifty years of age, she will be leaving headship upon the completion of a qualification which will facilitate a change in her career, into educational consultancy.

Jane's current school recently received a 'good' grading from Ofsted and SATs results in all areas in the 90s. The low take up of Free School Meals illustrates the high degree of affluence within the catchment area (Table 9.2). Jane's questionnaire responses position her within the Self-Regulators quadrant and thus, in Scenario 2; however, during interview, she positioned herself more in Scenario 4, stating:

I get accountability, I'm a public servant and I have one of the most difficult jobs in ensuring the quality of education for children. I am very clear about accountability and I agree with that, but I believe that the Standards Driven Agenda is eroding lots of what we are trying to achieve. I agree that the buck stops with me.

Obviously, Jane believes in the need to hold schools directly accountable for pupil outcomes. However, as with previous heads, she questions the validity of the inspection process, raising concerns over the over-reliance on data and whether a true insight can be gained within a one and a half day review, resulting in a 1500 word report. She also highlighted her concerns over the consistency of inspectors and inspections, referring to her own and colleague's experiences of inspectors

wanting to see lessons delivered in a certain way and their lack of flexibility. Jane continued to discuss the stresses placed upon her by HST, stating that waiting for the inspection had placed a ‘ridiculously massive strain on the governing body, on me and the staff’. She recalls being on a weekly knife edge until Wednesday afternoon, and then being able to plan for the rest of week, safe in the knowledge that no inspection could take place until the following week. Since it had been over six years since the previous inspection, Jane had been going through this process for nearly three years stating, ‘schools should not be feeling like that’.

With respect to the SATs, Jane was pragmatic; whilst she understood that schools, including her own, could be criticised for appearing to teach to the tests, she viewed this as a means of maximising the children’s potential for success by actually getting them to experience the process. However, she was fully aware of the necessity to obtain and maintain good data, in terms of exceeding the floor targets and high parental expectations. Whilst Jane expressed concerns over the curriculum limiting effect of the SDA, she was an advocate of the introduction of the National Strategies. She considered the Numeracy Strategy particularly strong, since it provided a clear framework and age related expectations. However, she was keen to point out that her school had worked hard to continue to develop the curriculum, striving to make it relevant and engaging for all her children.

### 9.3.1 Self-Regulators’ conceptualisation

Headteacher Scenario	Supportive of Policy Technology	Rejection of Policy Technology
Self-Regulators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market</li> <li>• Professionalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performativity</li> <li>• Management</li> </ul>

Figure 5.6b: Self-Regulators’ policy technologies conceptualisation

Headteachers positioned within the Self-Regulators quadrant demonstrated a clear rejection of the notion of their accountability being measured directly through HST. Nevertheless, they had a positive perspective regarding the need to continue to raise standards, with the adoption of professional accountability and the placing of the needs of the child at the centre of their practice. However, no heads within this quadrant had a strong perception of the positive effects of the SDA.

Self-regulating headteachers struggle with the impact HST is having upon their staff and children, citing issues such as teacher stress and the limiting of the curriculum. This creates a discourse between their belief in the positives provided by the market, for example freedom from LA control, and the need to meet the requirements imposed by HST resulting in their use of performativity management structures and strategies, which is contrary to their professional and personal beliefs (Table 5.6b).

Self-regulating headteachers believe that 'power should reside with the professionals' (Ranson 1986, 86) and, as such, they have confidence not only in their understanding of their school's context, but in their ability to accurately evaluate their school's performance and to take appropriate action when required. This strong belief in their own professional accountability places them at loggerheads with the HST regime, particularly Ofsted inspections, which they viewed as flawed and misleading. This rejection of performative accountability does not mean it can be ignored, since all heads are aware of the catastrophic consequences of poor performance.

Heads within this category are also subject to consumer accountability, not necessarily in terms of direct competition with other schools, but in terms of meeting the expectations of stakeholders, with parents readily comparing their performance against neighbouring schools, which was particularly prevalent in areas of low deprivation. This process, Ranson (1986, 87) aptly terms the 'cool draft of the market'. These heads continue to strive against the pressures of performativity, which they believe fabricate a perverse notion of performance, believing that accountability should not be a series of hierarchical bureaucratic practices, as with HST, which deny their agency. They further struggle with having to 'optimise performance by maximising outputs (benefits) and minimising inputs' (Lyotard 1997, 12), which manifests as having to 'play the game' of SATs, resulting in the widespread use of data maximising strategies, for example Year 6 booster classes. Thus, these heads seek to minimise the impact of performative accountability, rejecting significant elements of neoliberal corporate accountability, selecting to adopt and adapt systems reflecting a professional accountability stance, perhaps offering evidence against the demise of the peer based accountability outlined in Ranson (2003).

This manipulation of market driven improvement can be seen as being fundamentally at odds with the whole neoliberal philosophy of the setting up of systems where schools compete against each other for pupils, and ultimately for their survival. Heads can be seen to be resisting this, by the setting up of headship groups which meet to share ideas, good practice and offer support, with the express aim of ensuring mutual survival (Chaplain 2001).

## 9.4 Quadrant 3 – Mavericks

Table 9.3 outlines the questionnaire data corresponding to those headteachers positioned within the third quadrant of Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b).

HT Ref	Strength of HT Perceptions		Ofsted Grading at Last Inspection	FSM (%)	SEN (%)	SATs Writing Data Level 4 and above (%)
H/A2 John	SDA	-M	3	56	25	73
	HST	-N				
H/A5	SDA	-N	3	54	28	91
	HST	-S				
H/B1	SDA	-N	2	43	22	100
	HST	-N				
H/B2	SDA	-N	2	40	54	88
	HST	-M				
H/B4 Liz	SDA	-N	2	83	27	65
	HST	-M				
H/C1	SDA	-N	2	56	60	96
	HST	-M				
L/B3	SDA	-N	2	27	21	100
	HST	-S				
L/C1	SDA	-N	2	4	15	90
	HST	-S				
L/F1	SDA	-N	1	10	9	90
	HST	-N				
L/G1	SDA	-N	2	4	5	96
	HST	-S				
L/I1	SDA	-M	1	18	34	78
	HST	-S				
L/J2	SDA	-M	2	7	6	91
	HST	-N				

**Table 9.3: Quadrant 3 – Mavericks’ data.**

These headteachers are termed the Mavericks, whose questionnaire responses have indicated that they have concerns regarding their current level of accountability, viewing HST as inaccurate and unfair. Whilst the ‘Mavericks’ support the drive to improve standards, they view its overt focus as limiting in terms of curriculum coverage and teacher creativity.

Twelve of the 34 responding headteachers are within this classification; once again, a balance from each of the two socio-economic bands was observed. Five of the 12 heads expressed strong views, all of whom had concerns regarding the

effectiveness and fairness of HST; three of these headteachers expressed very significant worries. One of them further expressed very significant concerns regarding the SDA. The remaining three Maverick heads expressed neutral and moderate views with respect to the focus on standards.

Upon inspection of the third quadrant of Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b), it becomes clear that two headteachers (L/C1 and L/G1) have very significant issues with HST. Both these heads work within areas of low deprivation, are highly experienced and currently have 'good' gradings from Ofsted, with recent SATs results in the 90s. It is perhaps surprising for these heads to hold such negative perceptions of HST, given that the system appears to be currently working for them and their schools. Unfortunately, neither headteacher agreed to be interviewed, so I was unable to investigate their stance further. However, this serves to illustrate the complexity of the relationship between headteachers and current accountability practices.

John (H/A2) has been involved in teaching for 28 years and has been a head for ten. He currently works within a medium sized inner city primary in a catchment area including one of the most deprived wards in the country, with high levels of crime, gang violence, unemployment and poor housing. This is reflected in the well above national average uptake of Free School Meals of 56%. Currently, John's school has a 'Requires Improvement' grading from Ofsted and SATs results below the national floor targets.

John views accountability as being intrinsic to the role of a leader and, to a certain extent, stops schools from hiding from underachievement. However, he is acutely aware of the personal cost in terms of work life balance, which he views as a misnomer. John talks about his sense of 'moral purpose and moral commitment' and the need to lead a 'blended lifestyle', in which he aims to stop being a '24/7' headteacher. However, he views headship as his professional choice and his selection of working in an area of high deprivation as a moral mission.

Working within such a challenging context, John feels it is difficult to meet the attainment floor targets and this has resulted in the "Requires Improvement" grading from the last inspection. John feels this grading fails to reflect the quality of teaching within the school and the issues it faces. He states:

This year if Ofsted comes back, based on our RAISEonline, we would be judged as outstanding, and nothing has changed. I wrote case studies for 21 of the 26 children outlining the emotional support and children on support plans – the inspectors were just not interested. In the last three years, in this school, ten children have had a parent die, so there are huge issues that none of this [HST] addresses.

John further highlights how the removal of the Contextual Value Added (CVA) measure of pupil attainment has reflected badly upon the performance of his school. He feels it unfair to judge schools using 'a one size fits all model', which fails to take into account the detrimental effects 'generations of deprivation and multiple deprivation' has upon children's ability to learn. John progresses to highlight how the lack of support from home has caused the school to have to ensure that children are 'drilled and skilled into test outcomes'. However, he is conscious of the demotivating effect this can have, particularly on boys. As with other heads, John is aware of the politicisation of education, which he considers as a means of reducing

the costs of education via privatisation (with the introduction of academies), using the 'rubbishing of standards' as a catalyst for change.

Liz (H/B4) is coming towards the end of her teaching career, after spending seven years as a head. She leads a school within a highly deprived inner city area with a diverse ethnicity. The area is currently experiencing high levels of gang and drug related violent crime. Liz expressed a similar perception to that of the majority of interviewed heads, in that accountability was a necessity, simply because:

[We're] dealing with children, whose parents trust us to educate their children on the first rungs of the ladder and through their lives of learning, to become adults who could live and work within our current world. I think that is very important and we need to be very transparent about how we do support children.

Once again, a strong sense of moral purpose is evident, as is the understanding that accountability comes with the job. Whilst Liz is openly accepting of this, like John, she has serious concerns regarding measurement and the application of the tools used to hold a school accountable. She considers it 'incredibly unfair' to fail to take into account the context of the school and to apply the same SATs floor targets across the whole country.

Liz is passionate about achieving the very best outcomes for her children, but is realistic about their current barriers to learning. These include many children (85%) having English as a second or even third language, extended holidays of up to three months, low parental aspirations and a lack of a positive male role model within many homes. These issues are further compounded by having 'a significant number of families who sadly are known to social services, as well as us, for domestic abuse, sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse'. Based on Liz's recent inspection



experiences, she feels that the process was very data driven and the inspectors were not particularly interested in the complexities of school life, other than the progress in reading, writing, maths and science. She also felt that there was a willingness to adopt a blame culture, stating, ‘[If they haven’t made progress] why not? And if they haven’t, it’s obviously poor teaching and that’s the reason for that’.

The adoption of this default setting, Liz felt, generated immense pressure on her to boost results and ‘play the game the government’s way’, in order to avoid being labelled a failing school. She also expressed guilt – ‘I feel like Judas’ – about passing this pressure onto staff, since she was aware that it generated stress and overwork. Nevertheless, Liz was totally accepting of the notion of being accountable to her stakeholders and of the need to be seen to spend taxpayers’ money effectively; however, she held the strong conviction that the tools currently used in HST set up a school like hers to fail. She expands on this by blaming a lack of an appreciation on the part of policy makers, in terms of fully understanding the diversity of schools and the needs of the communities they serve.

#### 9.4.1 Mavericks’ conceptualisation

Headteacher Scenario	Supportive of Policy Technology	Rejection of Policy Technology
Mavericks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionalism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Market</li> <li>Performativity</li> <li>Management</li> </ul>

**Figure 5.6c: Mavericks’ policy technologies conceptualisation.**

Headteachers within the Mavericks quadrant demonstrated a rejection of accountability via the use of HST as well as of the overt focus on standards. They adopt a predominately ‘professional’ stance regarding their accountability, being

driven by a strong sense of moral purpose; this was particularly evident within those heads working in areas of high deprivation.

These heads fit strongly within the jurisdiction of professional accountability, with the relationship between the professionals (teachers and stakeholders) and the service they provide being at the forefront of their work. This type of accountability focuses 'upon the quality of the whole educational experience young people are being offered' (Ranson 1986, 86), and fits closely with the strong sense of moral purpose 'Maverick' heads exhibit. This sense of purpose conflicts with the performative systems and accountability imposed by HST, as it does with the notion of accountability measures being used to compete within the marketplace, which underpins recent governments' neoliberal models of school improvement and policy. Thus, the notion of 'parental choice' (Ball et al. 1994; Gewitz et al. 1995) being a driver for improvement is also rejected, with their emphasis being placed very much on meeting client need. Therefore, Mavericks share similar concerns to the Self-Regulator heads over the accuracy and fairness of HST tools, and feel that they fail to take into account any limiting effects of their context in terms of maximising pupil outcomes.

Maverick heads' continued belief in the age of professionalism (Ranson 2003) places them at odds with the current focus on performativity and its manifestations of inspections and SATs tables. Thus, they are resistant to the erosion of their professional autonomy, seeking to regain control over the curriculum and shape it to directly meet the current and future needs of their children. They oppose what they view as state-imposed initiatives, curriculum control and school management

(Hatcher 1994), seeking to re-establish or maintain their own professionalism and professional status within their communities. They thus project a strong image comparable to Grace's (1995, 11) notion of the cult of the 'headmaster tradition'.

The Mavericks' rejection of the dominance of data in modern society (Boyle 2001) and the 'policy epidemic' (Levin 1998) enforced by power agents, like the World Bank and OECD (Ball 2003), enables them to place the children's and community's needs at the centre of their practice. This confidence to only 'play the data game' on their own terms is, perhaps, a result of the 'leeway' provided by recent positive inspection outcomes and thus, the removal of some of the pressures imposed by performativity. Maverick heads struggle with what is currently deemed valuable within education, productivity, and actively seek to create learning communities which foster creativity and reinstate what Ball (2003) terms 'teachers' soul'.

Positive HST outcomes remove the immediate threat, allowing the heads time to question what could be viewed from a professionalism stance as the delivery of their client needs. This has shifted their focus towards a more creative curriculum, where the core subjects are more integrated into all elements of their children's learning experiences. However, this 'professional academic freedom' will only be tolerated by the stakeholders if performativity measures continue to be met. So, whilst the Mavericks may appear to have adopted a self-confident stance in their rejection of an overt focus on standards, it is an extremely well measured rejection.

Some heads, for example John (H/A2) and Liz (H/B4), accept their current position regarding HST outcomes and believe that, because of their contexts, it is practically

impossible to meet the ever increasingly demanding floor targets. Therefore, they have placed the wellbeing of their children and staff at the centre of their accountability, resulting in the adoption of a strong pastoral role, which they view as critical if their children are to thrive within areas of extreme poverty. However, a strong commitment to pupil wellbeing was evident in headteachers within both socio-economic contexts. Nevertheless, high deprivation heads have successfully managed to at least manipulate the system, in order for their schools to remain independent and out of the academy system.

### 9.5 Quadrant 4 – Head Downers

Table 9.4 outlines the data collected via the questionnaires, corresponding to those headteachers falling within the fourth quadrant of Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b).

HT Ref	Strength of HT Perceptions		Ofsted Grading at Last Inspection	FSM (%)	SEN (%)	SATs Writing Data Level 4 and above (%)
H/H1	SDA	-M	3	22	12	65
	HST	N				

**Table 9.4: Quadrant 4 – Head Downers’ data.**

These headteachers are termed Head Downers and their questionnaire responses have indicated that they have concerns regarding the focus on standards within their context, but view the current methods of accountability as a positive, in terms of raising attainment.

Only one of the 34 responding headteachers was positioned within this classification. Headteacher H/H1 is a relatively new head, with only three years’ experience. Nevertheless, with over 25 years’ experience as a teacher, she is working within a deprived inner city context, where her school currently has a

“Requires Improvement’ grading from Ofsted, with Year 6 SATs results falling below the national floor targets.

Unfortunately, this headteacher selected not to be interviewed and therefore, it is difficult to develop a detailed understanding of her current views. However, within her questionnaire, she has indicated a moderate stance regarding her perceptions of the SDA, which perhaps shows that she considers the focus on standards limiting, given her current context. A slightly positive stance towards accountability is interesting to note, given her current Ofsted Category 3 grading.

### 9.5.1 Head Downers’ conceptualisation

Headteacher Scenario	Supportive of Policy Technology	Rejection of Policy Technology
Head-Downers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Market (enforced)</li> <li>• Performativity (enforced)</li> <li>• Management (enforced)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionalism</li> </ul>

**Figure 5.6d: Head Downers’ policy technologies conceptualisation.**

The low population of this classification of headteacher is not surprising, given the inescapable connection between the Standards Agenda and HST, as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. Given that Headteacher H/H1 is currently in a vulnerable position (Mansell 2007; Thomson 2009), as a consequence of the school’s recent Ofsted grading, positive future improvements in performative measures are critical to her professional survival. As such, Headteacher H/H1 could be viewed as adopting a series of ‘pathologies of creative compliance’ (Elliott 2001, 202), in that she is starting to apply a degree of gamesmanship, in terms of maximising future ‘output’, the SATs results, most likely resulting in extensive revision sessions for the ‘key’ years, as evidenced through the responses of Sarah (L/G3), Liz (H/B4) and Mary (L/I3).

This vulnerable position enforces a degree of creative curriculum control, since the school will be viewed to a great extent under the performativity microscope, where only what is measured is of importance. Thus, literacy and maths will dominate teaching and learning, in order to achieve the current floor targets of 65%. Nevertheless, she indicates some rejection of the SDA and this could well be a reaction to having to instigate a significant focus on the core subjects. Unfortunately, this head selected not to be interviewed; consequently, some degree of speculation may be applied here. However, her vulnerability with respect to what could be deemed her underperformance, forces a shift away from the adoption of a professionalism stance, which this research shows is becoming the domain of the HST 'successful'. Forcing the adoption of strong performative and management strategies in order to meet the well-defined requirements of the market. Therefore, Head Downer heads, unlike the other three categories, have only a limited choice over how they position themselves with respect to policy

## **9.6 Discussion**

### **9.6.1 An overview of accountability with respect to context**

Previously, I identified the key factors regarding socio-economic context, which current research indicates as being critical to pupil attainment. Using the headteacher responses, I aim to identify how these factors are perceived by school leaders and what actions they take to minimise their negative effect upon both the children and their schools.

Whilst the headteachers working within areas of affluence tended not to mention the effect context had upon their HST and, therefore, upon their accountability, it was a recurring theme with the heads working within areas of high deprivation. The need

to actively combat the negatives of poor housing, crime, low parental expectations and support, and provide their children with a safe learning environment was strong, often driven by a robust sense of moral purpose. Whilst this sense of purpose was strong, heads understood that their role has now taken on board the dangers of what Thomson (2009) terms an 'extreme sport', where personal and professional survival are challenged. Ouston et al. (1996), Earley (1998), Ferguson et al. (2000), Harris (2007) and Thomson (2009) provide strong accounts of the headteacher stress generated by the need to successfully fulfil the requirements of HST monitoring systems. It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that many found it unfair that context was not taken into account, with SATs floor targets being nationally set. They further felt that it generated an inaccurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning taking place within their schools. However, all interviewed headteachers from both socio-economic categories agreed with the notion of being held accountable for the use of public money and the progress of the children under their care.

Headteachers from within both socio-economic categories expressed the importance of re-establishing creativity within their schools and returning to a more open culture of care (Troman et al. 2007), again drawing from the professional culture of the past. This need to promote a supportive culture was more strongly supported by heads within areas of high deprivation, who viewed their role more in terms of the wider community. The limited life experiences of many of their children was also of concern and motivated them to promote 'real learning' (Troman and Jeffery 2008), with a focus on the development of the whole child through the use of

residential trips, out of school experiences and a movement away from 'boring' SATs-based learning.

### **9.6.2 Headteacher balancing of roles and requirements**

Headteachers working within both socio-economic categories expressed significant concerns over the narrowing of the curriculum and the need to boost children in order to meet SATs floor targets. They articulated their concerns over the demotivating effects of being turned into 'SATs fodder', as previously highlighted by Mansell (2007). Heads struggle with the dilemma between having to ensure high standards and the need to provide a stimulating curriculum. Those with 'good' Ofsted gradings and SATs results tended to be more confident in driving forward a more creative curriculum; however, this was not always the case.

A common theme amongst many headteachers was the concern and guilt they felt regarding the workload and stress they place upon their staff. Whilst they endeavoured to shield their staff, many felt that they were in the extremely difficult position of constantly demanding higher and higher standards, as the SATs floor targets continued to be raised.

The current culture of performativity calls for 'individual practitioners to organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations' (Ball 2003, 215). This leaves no space for the 'personal', in that headteachers can no longer allow what could be viewed as misplaced sympathies to cloud their professional judgements. Therefore, underperforming teachers must be dealt with in an efficient manner, in order to minimise their impact upon the children and, perhaps more importantly within a HST regime, upon their data, resulting in a need 'to set aside



personal beliefs and commitments and live an existence of calculation' (Ball 2003, 215).

### **9.6.3 An overview of headteacher positioning**

Of the 34 responding headteachers, 14 expressed strong to very strong perceptions of either HST or the Standards Driven Agenda. The remaining 20 heads' questionnaire responses positioned them within the central zone. The 'centralising' of heads is perhaps not surprising, in that many have found means of maximising the standards by which they are held accountable, for example, focusing on those children requiring extra support to achieve Level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2. Whilst this may cause them some ethical dilemmas, in terms of curriculum narrowing and the over-stressing of staff, they consider themselves in a 'Catch 22' situation and, as such, 'just get on with it and tick those boxes'. (Jane L/D7).

All heads, irrespective of socio-economic context, appear to be extremely keen to show their school in the best possible light, in order to keep at bay the negative consequences of dipping test results or a failed inspection. Headteachers perceive that the 'buck very much stops with them', and perhaps this manifests as positioning themselves within the centre. The SDA, coupled with the proof provided by 'high status' data (league tables and Ofsted inspections), has served to reinforce the general belief that school outcomes are solely dependent on the quality of leadership, and therefore, if the school is 'failing', then sack the head! This is a model which is constantly in use within the public domain, the Football Premier League and banking being two examples, and therefore, the disposability of our

headteachers becomes acceptable for the greater good of our children's futures (Stoll and Fink 1996; Mansell 2007; Thomson, 2009).

Whilst it could be claimed that headteachers are leaders within their own schools, their vulnerability is now evident, so whilst many might have concerns over current practices, in terms of curriculum narrowing, accountability methods and consequences, an open acceptance is in place in which heads are endeavouring to keep their staff and themselves 'out of the spot light' and the unwanted attentions of both the media and Ofsted (Mansell 2007).

There is a very strong sense of maintaining the values from what Ranson (2003, 462) terms the 'age of professionalism', where high levels of public trust existed in professionals being able to deliver high quality public services. Successive scandals connected to all areas of the public sector have eroded this trust, resulting in a call for all professionals to be held to account. Whilst heads accept this, there is concern connected to the current levels of their accountability. This manifests in the number of heads displaying negative perceptions of HST, with over a quarter of responding heads expressing concerns.

The perceptions collected provide strong evidence of Ranson's (2003) notion of the transformation of trust (pre-1976) to the implementation of 'mechanisms of explicit, transparent, systematic public accountability that seeks to secure regulatory compliance of professional practice' (p.468), the most explicit examples being league tables, SATs and Ofsted inspections. This 'formal answerability' is a concern for heads, not only because they have become accountable, but predominately,

because it removes their sense of professionalism and imposes policies, which may be contradictory to their principles or experience.

The introduction of HST has been effective in shaping the professional lives of heads, as evidenced through this research. It has resulted in heads adopting practices specifically aimed at maintaining their school's status, based on measures of performativity. I have gathered examples of how performativity, working from the outside in, has '[bitten] deeply into the attitudes, practices, and identities of state professionals' (Ranson 2003, 269). It is now clear that, whilst many heads reject HST, the power of the neoliberal reforms of the past three decades, with the imposition of the marketplace, has created a political and public perception of data informed customer choice improving services and, as such, heads must now ensure the quality and consistency of their provision.

This shift to performative accountability has, for many heads, been difficult, with deep seated notions of unfairness and concerns over top down control. Again, the idea of the loss of professionalism underpins their concerns. An example of this is the implementation of the two Strategies; whilst some heads considered them effective in raising standards, many identified the pressure placed upon them to conform irrespective of their professional opinions.

Heads further struggled with the power of data and how this had altered their school community. Accounts of parents placing the needs of their children above others were common, particularly in areas of low deprivation, and this again fits within the

market accountability model (Ranson 2003). Clear concerns regarding the erosion of the 'common good' were very evident.

Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b) illustrates that there is a commitment to standards, with the majority of headteachers considering that they are meeting the requirements. There is, however, strong evidence of deep concerns over the methods used to gauge success and the punitive measures used to address underachievement. Through their interview responses, it has become clear that heads are in agreement with Ranson (2003) when he questions whether the current levels of answerability can deliver improvements in achievement, since it is based upon mistaken evaluation criteria and uses only outcomes as a means of improvement.

In conceptualising the current positioning of heads, some commonality starts to emerge. Firstly, heads from both socio-economic contexts have significant concerns over the limiting of the curriculum and its effect of restricting pupil experience, with those working within areas of high deprivation viewing the broadening of children's life experiences as a critical role of their school. Secondly, whilst all heads felt it was correct for themselves to be held to account, many were concerned over the accuracy, fairness and consistency of the current inspection process, principally those heads working within high deprivation contexts above all feeling that HST measures consistently show their school in a 'poor light' (Rebecca H/G3). Thirdly, heads were acutely aware of the stresses that constant rounds of testing, observation and inspections were generating for both themselves and their staff. Feelings of guilt were expressed regarding the effect upon their home life and the

need to constantly introduce new policies to an already overworked staff. Finally, heads felt that they were being forced into introducing revision practices, particularly within Year 6, which bored and demotivated their children; however, they felt helpless to resist, for the fear of 'performative failure'.

Thus, current heads appear to have settled, somewhat grudgingly, into a culture of performativity and the market. However, it is certainly one the majority would not have selected. A strong sense of wishing to return to a mix of what Hargreaves (2000) terms an age of the autonomous and collegial professionalism is prevalent, enabling a return to greater curriculum and creative control relevant to their context and their clients' needs. Here, heads and their schools would be 'granted a measure of trust, material reward, occupational security and professional dignity and discretion in exchange for broadly fulfilling the mandates the state expected of them' (Helsby and McCulloch 1997, 131).

### **9.7 Summary**

This chapter has linked the core conceptualisation (Figure 5.4), containing the Ranson's (2003) and Ball's policy technologies and accountabilities, to the four possible headteacher positions based on their perceptions of SDA and HST. This work is unique in that no previous work has sought to establish current primary headteacher practice directly to their perceptions of neoliberal reforming policy via the production of four distinct headteacher positions. The creation of an original conceptual framework (Figure 6.3b) has allowed for an insight into how heads actually manage the complex and potentially explosive balance of ensuring high

standards, with its associated testing regimes, whilst remaining true to their own professional ethos and ensuring the well-being of their pupils and staff.

The study has highlighted a number of key findings. Firstly, there is strong evidence that primary heads are adopting and adapting a range of policy technologies and accountabilities, whilst displaying an ability to move effectively between these in order to ensure positive outcomes primarily for their pupils and staff, but with some regard for their own careers and professional futures. The need to meet attainment outcomes, enforced by performativity and market forces, has caused significant concerns, with notions of the limiting of the curriculum and experiences, together with teacher and pupil stress being highlighted. Nevertheless, heads are being proactive in managing these, constantly working, on occasion with colleagues, to reduce their negative impact.

Thus, heads are making the various policies work for them and are being effective in manipulating them. For example, the Torch Bearers who readily accept the market and performativity policy technologies, are those heads being proactive in the marketisation of their schools, with 'judged outstanding by Ofsted' banners on their school gates. The contrasting stance of the Mavericks illustrates how heads can manage the requirements and outcomes of performativity, whilst rejecting its controlling and stress inducing nature. So these heads have remained true to, what could be described as, their traditional 'professional' values. However, this 'freedom' could be seen as a direct consequence of successfully meeting both the SDA and HST requirements and hence, they are actually being allowed to 'play the game' their way, simply because all of the top-down agendas and requirements are being effectively met.

## **Chapter 10 – Conclusion**

### **10.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, I present my research findings and contribution to knowledge, framed within my three research questions. I further examine the contribution of the research to the conceptualisation of primary heads working within differing socio-economic contexts as they manage their professional lives within an era of low trust neoliberalism.

### **10.1 Research Question 1**

**How and why has the role and work of the headteacher changed in regard to national standards and testing?**

Research Question 1 focuses on headteachers' perceptions of how the constant drive to improve standards, particularly within literacy and maths, has impacted upon their role. I concentrated upon their insights on the implementation of the National Strategies, since these were arguably the first prominent examples of top-down pedagogical control, requiring headteachers to act as state agents in the control of not only what is being taught in their classrooms, but also its delivery.

A deep concern over the limiting effects of the SDA was voiced by heads, with the provision of examples of how the focus had limited both creativity and professionalism (Settlage and Meadows 2002; Day and Smethem 2009). Nevertheless, heads from both socio-economic groups indicated that, to some extent, standards had been improved via the use of the National Strategies. They voiced their opinion that both the Literacy and Numeracy Strategies had addressed some significant gaps within teacher curriculum knowledge, particularly with less experienced staff, whilst providing a framework on which to structure their planning.

However, concerns were raised over their 'one size fits all' nature and their curriculum limiting effects, resulting from too many teachers literally following them verbatim.

Whilst the drive for the improvement of standards was widely accepted by heads, they view their role within this as managerial, no-longer acting as lead teacher, but as the implementer and monitor of governmental teaching strategy. It was noted that nearly half the responding heads would not have selected to use the National Literacy Strategy and a third the Numeracy Strategy. Given that neither was mandatory, the external pressure of performativity can be seen to act here, with a genuine concern being exhibited by heads regarding their not wanting to stand out by their refusal to use the Strategies in case performance data showed a dip. Furthermore, given supporting research supplied by Ofsted (2002), it would have been very difficult to resist the safer option of using them, even if the heads had serious reservations regarding their effectiveness and appropriateness. This removal of both the headteachers' and teaching staff's complete pedagogical control can be viewed as a further element in the redefining of headteacher and teacher professionalism. Brennan (1996) describes this repositioning as 'managerial professionalism', where the professional (the headteacher) 'works efficiently and effectively in meeting the standardized criteria set for the accomplishment of both pupils and teachers, as well as contributing to the school's formal accountability' (Day and Smethem 2009, 142). But then again, the heads' professional actions are tightly restrained by the need to meet standardised criteria and this actually removes to a degree their ability to apply a traditional notion of professionalism.



Lawn (1996), Robertson (1996) and Smyth et al. (2000) argue that the continuing demands for the production of an efficient workforce, imposed by economic globalisation, has called for the imposition of 'industrial management' (Hargreaves 1997), which has resulted in teachers and school leaders following a 'production path' (outlined in governmental strategies) to achieve performative targets to maximise accountability outcomes.

## **10.2 Research Question 2**

### **What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of national standards and testing on their understanding and practice of accountability?**

Those headteachers taking part in the research readily accept their own and their school's accountability, seeing it in terms of the right of parents to have high expectations of their children's educators and to ensure efficient and honest use of tax payers' money.

A strong sense of moral purpose was prevalent, with the wider needs of children being constantly referenced, particularly within areas of high deprivation. Underpinning this was a concern that the current climate of performativity was both limiting the curriculum and the life experiences of their children (Webb and Vulliamy 2006). It was also having a negative effect upon teaching staff, resulting in a significant loss of creativity and professional identity.

The shift from the professional accountability prior to the 1980s to the neoliberal performativity of today has repositioned the role of headteacher. Many now view the management of standards as their main concern, resulting in an uneasy balance

between the need to achieve high, or at least acceptable, HST outcomes and the maintenance of a culture of care and social skill development.

Headteachers articulate their concerns over the position that the constant threat of sanctions places them in, not only in terms of their own personal and professional well-being, but also in terms of the stresses HST places on their staff and children. The demotivating effects of high levels of pre-test revision on their children were also highlighted (McDonald 2001; Galton et al. 2003; Connors et al. 2009; Burnitt 2011b), as was guilt over compelling teachers to be proactive in what they perceive as the narrowing of the curriculum.

Headteachers also highlight their guilt and frustration at having to implement a zero tolerance approach to underperformance, currently being enforced by Ofsted (Wilshaw 2012). They consider that having to constantly push for higher standards raises teacher stress, resulting in the lowering of teacher and pupil performance; however, they also feel that they are being made to think in terms of results being more important than their staff. Again, this illustrates headteachers' perceptions of the erosion of the power of their professional judgement and the shift away from professional accountability.

Headteachers are fully aware of the key function of HST in that it provides the data to inform their performative accountability and, as such, it is seen as critical to continued survival within a market driven culture.

Whilst all headteachers had grown to accept the tools of HST, they express serious concerns over their accuracy and fairness. With the recent move by the government to place a greater emphasis on inspectors' professional judgements (Baxter and Clarke 2013), there has been a shift away from headteachers' judgements being part of the inspection process, again illustrating the de-professionalisation of their role. This has led to a perception of inconsistency (Webber 2011). Concerns over inspectors' failure to fully understand or take into account school context were also voiced, as were worries over the overreliance on data and a reluctance to listen to any narrative.

Further concerns over the inconsistencies of inspections highlighted significant issues, such as inspectors wanting to see outdated pedagogies or failing to accurately follow statutory guidance. Heads also identified a failure of SATs and Ofsted inspections to identify and fully acknowledge the impact on the whole child, in terms of developing their socialisation and building self-esteem, resulting in schools not receiving full recognition for their hard work and success.

### **10.3 Research Question 3**

#### **What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of the location, catchment and type of school on national standards and testing?**

The concept of selecting contrasting ends of the socio-economic spectrum, by the use of localised IDACI data, provides a valuable insight into the direct effect context has upon headteachers' experiences and perceptions of the SDA and HST. Drawing upon the headteacher interviews, a clear picture starts to emerge of the difficulties many heads face working within areas of high deprivation, in terms of

meeting the targets generated by performative accountability, which mirrors the findings of Courtney (2013).

'High deprivation' heads explain in detail the factors affecting their children's attainment and, therefore, the overall performance of their school. I divided these factors into two categories, namely internal and external community factors, which are those within and outside the head's jurisdiction. Heads presented strong evidence of the steps they had taken to maximise pupil attainment and enjoyment of school. This involved widening their children's experiences of the world and providing clear moral guidance, placing client need very much at the forefront of their accountability. This sense of moral purpose was central to 'high deprivation' headteachers' motivation, since they placed the enabling of children to develop beyond the barriers of their current situation as pivotal to their work. Again, this clashes with the drivers of performativity, since this doctrine calls for the development of the whole child, rather than the meeting of a narrow band of attainment targets and measures.

Many external factors affecting pupil attainment were identified during both the review of literature and within the fieldwork. These presented two polarised positions, indicating a clear advantage towards those schools within areas of affluence, which is perhaps not surprising (Blanden and Gregg 2004; Goodman et al. 2010). Effects such as poor housing, crime and lack of parental support were all identified as significant in areas of high deprivation; whilst schools were proactive in minimising these influences; heads strongly believe that they all have a limiting effect on their children's attainment and, therefore, their school's ability to perform

well within the HST agenda. Heads perceive this as unfair, with some feeling that it would be impossible for their school to progress, since these factors were not taken into account within the performativity narrative currently in place within Ofsted.

Heads working within areas of relative prosperity perceived a distinct advantage over their colleagues working in areas of deprivation, emphasising the high levels of pupil ability, language acquisition and socialisation upon entry, as well as parental involvement and commitment as being critical in terms of their children's progression through school, resulting in higher levels of achievement, as measured by current HST tools. Whilst, to a certain extent, this removed the stresses generated by failing to meet central government floor targets, this was substituted by high levels of parental expectation and the confidence to openly (and, on occasion, very publicly) question headteacher leadership, policy, practice and professional judgement.

The notion of parental involvement was a key difference between the two socio-economic categories, with schools in areas of high deprivation struggling to engage with parents and having to take significant steps to raise the profile of the importance of education, in order to maximise attendance and, once again, to meet a government imposed floor target. Whilst attendance was not identified as an issue within low deprivation schools, unrealistic pupil attainment expectations of parents was a major concern. The provision of a continuous flood of performance data has equipped these parents with the means to constantly review their children's attainment against their peers and nationally. This 'parent power' is fundamental to the neoliberal market policies of the last three decades; however, my research has

indicated that this is more widely used within areas of wealth, not solely in terms of selecting the 'best' school, but as a means of exerting some degree of control over school direction and leadership.

#### **10.4 Contribution to the field of developing a conceptualisation and understanding of primary headteachers' perceptions of the SDA and HST**

The literature consulted within this research presents a complex picture of how neoliberal reforms have dramatically altered primary education within England, resulting in a significant change to the role of headship. Key debates around the introduction of neoliberal market driven policies have been examined, for example, the removal of direct governmental control, the setting up of 'independent' schools, LMS resulting in the notion of parental choice and how this is based upon systems of performativity and performance measurement. This has significantly shifted the requirements of schools from the earlier provision of what could be argued the development of the 'whole child' towards a focus upon a very narrow band of measures incorporated within a system of High Stakes Testing. This has, my research reasons, removed or significantly altered substantial elements of the headteacher's role. This shift has resulted in a loss of professionalism identified by Grace (1995) and Ball (2003), which is constantly reinforced by continuous governmental policy, accompanied by the high profile monitoring of all state schools. The aim of the research has been to understand how headteachers actually position themselves within this myriad of policy and associated demands.

Alongside the drive to improve standards is the discourse generated by the various systems used to monitor the success, or otherwise, of schools in meeting these standards. The various stresses generated by the constant testing of pupils and

monitoring of teachers is well documented (McDonald 2001; Galton et al. 2003; Connors et al. 2009; Thomson 2009; Burnitt 2011b). However, this study has progressed further in focusing upon headteachers' perceptions, identifying areas such as guilt and deep-seated concerns over the narrowing of the curriculum and the resultant limiting of the children's experiences, solely as a consequence of having to meet the requirements imposed through the use of HST. This study has identified headteachers' reserved acceptance of the standards agenda, and an understanding for the need to drive up standards from the pre-reform days, prior to the ERA (DfES 1988). However, it has also isolated inconsistencies and side effects, created by what many see as an over-reliance on summative testing and data driven inspections.

The research has provided an insight into how the pressure of the open market, and the need for schools to be competitive have created significant uncertainties and ethical reservations for current primary heads. They battle to resolve the discourse created by the need to meet the requirements of the power holders, whilst ensuring the obligations created by their 'professional conscience' are met.

The research has also sought to investigate the debate surrounding the impact of context upon the attainment of children. Whilst this has been a well-documented area, the contribution of this study has been the focus on how both internal and external factors directly influence the accountability of headteachers as measured through High Stakes Testing.

#### **10.4.1 Methodological and conceptual contribution to knowledge**

The expansion of Creswell's Sequential Explanatory Design (Figure 6.2) has led to the development of a method to quantify primary headteachers' perceptions of the SDA and HST. The quantitative data allowed for the relationship between headteachers' perceptions of how strategy and practice based on neoliberal doctrine and policy has affected their practice, and how the associated accountability has impacted upon their agency. The identification of the link between perceptions of SDA and HST allowed for the creation of an innovative conceptualisation. The development of a series of scenarios outlined the various headteacher 'types' derived from their questionnaire responses. The resultant Conceptual Framework 1a (Figure 6.3b) is unique in that it illustrates headteachers' perceptions quantifiably. The resultant location of each headteacher when linked to the policy technologies and accountabilities core conceptual framework (Figure 5.4) provides a distinctive insight into how each of the heads within the study locates their professional practices, management structures and relates these to their accountability. By developing the original conceptualisations of Ranson (2003) and Ball (2003), the study has created a greater understanding of how the various policy technologies used within neoliberal education reform have significantly altered headteacher practice and agency. This has resulted in, for example, a move away from what could be termed the traditional notion of headteacher professionalism, based upon long established routines and bureaucratic systems under the direct control of the state, via the Local Authority, towards what Ball (2003, 216) terms, '[The alignment of] public sector organizations with the methods, culture and ethical systems of the private sector'. Thus, heads within the study have sought to operate



within a culture of the policy technologies of the market, managerialism and performativity.

The study has provided robust evidence of and an insight into how these policy technologies now dominate the professional work and consciousness of primary heads working in the north of England. The creation and development of the two conceptualisations (Figures 5.4 and 6.3b) has provided an understanding as to how heads relate to these policy technologies, adopting and adapting their practice in order to ensure the continued success of their school.

Whilst the creation of the Framework was analytically strong, its deployment could be problematic, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the positioning of the headteachers through the quantitative data used within its construction should not be viewed as stable or fixed. The dynamics of the policy context with the permanent 'ratcheting up' of performance data, means that respondent views can be affected by a number of variables, for example, recent communications/inspections from Ofsted and recent successes or concerns over SATs data. These could potentially have an impact on heads' perceptions, where particular views could be reactive and transient, and so might not actually reflect a more long term or sustained view of the SDA and HST. Secondly, it could be argued that successive governmental policy would best be served by heads located within the torch-bearers quadrant as system leaders, those most open to enforcing the Standards focus and direct high stakes monitoring and, as such, it could potentially be difficult for heads to appear not to be fitting in to DfE requirements, particularly those new to the role. Therefore, these heads might be somewhat reticent in being identified within other quadrants if this

conceptualisation were to be used as a potential training tool within, for example, the Future Leaders programme (NCSL) or Headspace programme (Education Support Partnership).

The fieldwork has indicated that many heads have sought to reinstate Ranson's (2003) 'age of professionalism' (p.462), calling for a return to a focus on children as individuals, not as elements of a data set used to prove the effectiveness of a policy or strategy, as with the National Strategies, but as clients with more diverse needs, other than purely academic ones.

The study has generated strong evidence which indicates that the doctrine of performative accountability has led to a 'data dictatorship', where the nature of HST and the drive to improve standards have limited the curriculum, controlled pedagogies and de-professionalised a generation of heads and teachers. The notion of answerability is now such an integral element of public sector accountability that it seems very unlikely that a return to complete public trust, previously afforded to professionals, will ever return. This mind-set calls for the continuation of ever more rigorous monitoring systems, the outcomes of which come to dominate the customers' perceptions of success and effectiveness. The implementation of national standards and inspections has started to remove the need for specialist knowledge and judgement previously required of heads, replacing it with systems of performativity.

Headteachers' resistance to the neoliberalisation of education is evidenced within the research, with the fieldwork and resultant conceptualisation (Figure 6.3b)

illustrating a significant number rejecting the notion of performativity enforced by High Stakes Testing. A 'distrust' of governmental motives is apparent, with heads viewing elements of reform as mechanisms to promote a privatisation agenda, as illustrated with the growing introduction of academies and free schools, resulting in the perversion of accountability and what John (H/A2) terms, [the] 'rubbishing of standards' as a catalyst for change.

The research has further contributed to a greater understanding of the impact socio-economic context has on pupil attainment, classifying these factors in accordance to the control schools have in mitigating them. Whilst previous research has sought to examine such factors (Harris and Ranson 2005 and Lupton 2005), little has examined the impact of context on headteachers' agency and practice, with respect to managing HST outcomes. This research has identified significant differences in the expectations and actions of stakeholders, notably parents, across the two socio-economic categories. It has also sought to examine how heads adapt and adopt the various policy technologies, in order to meet the significant needs of their location.

### **10.5 Further research**

A significant strength of this work has been the opportunity it has provided to gain an insight in to the current perceptions of serving headteachers via the generating of a unique conceptual framework (Figure 6.3b). It has illustrated the positioning of heads as they deal with the complex issues connected to raising standards and successfully meeting the needs of all stakeholders. Whilst the study was small in scale, generating data from 34 primary heads within the North of England, it provided an insight into schools operating within very different socio-economic contexts and this has not previously been done. However, to improve validity and

take into account the changing landscape of primary provision, future work could open up the research to include a range of academy chains and trusts, including those in the south of England. This national survey would also allow for the analysis of the perceptions of heads within a wider range of Ofsted inspection categories and increase the validity of the data collected via the initial headteacher questionnaire.

Once a greater understanding of current perceptions had been gathered, a robust conceptualisation could be constructed aimed at the development of an accurate understanding of where current headteachers position themselves with respect to the SDA and HST. This could be a step forward in terms of re-establishing the relevant elements of 'headteacher professionalism', which has been superseded by recent educational reform. Further research on the role of headteachers in promoting creativity, community links and moral leadership could be used to inform future policy and, perhaps, start to reinstate some of the more traditional roles of schools, as opposed to an overt focus on standards and attainment outcomes. Whilst this research was not focused directly on the notion and experience of headteacher identity, further work could start to identify the inter-sectionality of gender, age and socio-economic background on headteacher positioning within the conceptual framework.

This research was not intended to locate answers to the issues surrounding neoliberal educational reform, but to identify how heads currently manage its requirements. Whilst the accountabilities identified by Ranson (2003) have been evident, so has the willingness of heads to minimise their negative effects upon their schools. Further research focusing upon the notions of resilience, managing

enforced policies and coping with negative High Stakes Testing outcomes could build on the data so far collected.

### **10.6 In conclusion**

This research has added a unique contribution to the understanding of current primary headship within state funded and regulated schools. The study has aimed to support headteachers in their understanding of the history, politics and theory which have underpinned the current neoliberal reform and policy within which they all operate.

The empirical research examined questions of how heads resolve the issues of meeting the challenges of the market, whilst remaining faithful to their own professionalism and ethics. The research has aimed to understand the current pressures placed on heads, creating a conceptual interpretation of how each 'type' of head interprets and acts upon top-down policy. Finally, the study has sought to provide an academic platform from which current school leaders, from the two extremes of the social spectrum, can voice their insights and experiences of the impact of both the Standards Driven Agenda and its associated High Stake Testing upon themselves, their staff and pupils.

In terms of my own 'researcher development', this work has provided the opportunity for me to progress from an epistemology of positivism and a reliance on quantitative data, a consequence of my chemistry degree and analytical work, towards a greater understanding of less data driven collection methods. This has been a significant shift and I believe the use of mixed methods within the research

has provided an insight into the head's perceptions which would not have been possible solely by the use of a quantitative approach. Nevertheless, it has been a challenge to overcome a long established bias or belief in the more trustworthiness of numerical data and fully embrace the insights provided by a qualitative approach.

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## Appendix 1: Headteacher Questionnaire

### About Your School and You as the Headteacher.

L/

Your age (Please circle):

25 - 30	31 - 35	36 - 40	41 - 45	46 - 50	51 - 55	56 - 60	61 - 65	66+
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Number of years in teaching:  Number of years in your career as a Headteacher:

Please give details of your career as a HEADTEACHER to date:

Post	Start Date – Finish Date (MM/YY)	Which OfSTED Category is/was the school currently or when you left? <i>Please circle the appropriate NUMBER.</i>	Which is/was the Socio-economic Category / categories of the <u>majority</u> of your parents / carers? <i>(Please circle the appropriate LETTER).</i>
1 Current Post	m   m   y   y	Outstanding Good Satisfactory Inadequate	<b>A</b> High managerial, administrative or professional <b>B</b> Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional <b>C<sub>1</sub></b> Administrative or professional <b>C<sub>2</sub></b> Skilled manual workers, supervisory, clerical and junior managerial <b>D</b> Semi and unskilled manual workers <b>E</b> Unemployed with state benefits only
	to		
	m   m   y   y		
2	m   m   y   y	Outstanding Good Satisfactory Inadequate	<b>A</b> High managerial, administrative or professional <b>B</b> Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional <b>C<sub>1</sub></b> Administrative or professional <b>C<sub>2</sub></b> Skilled manual workers, supervisory, clerical and junior managerial <b>D</b> Semi and unskilled manual workers <b>E</b> Unemployed with state benefits only
	to		
	m   m   y   y		
3	m   m   y   y	Outstanding Good Satisfactory Inadequate	<b>A</b> High managerial, administrative or professional <b>B</b> Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional <b>C<sub>1</sub></b> Administrative or professional <b>C<sub>2</sub></b> Skilled manual workers, supervisory, clerical and junior managerial <b>D</b> Semi and unskilled manual workers <b>E</b> Unemployed with state benefits only
	to		
	m   m   y   y		

### About your PRESENT school

In order to ensure I have collected a representative sample, I would find it helpful if you could please complete the section below.

School Size.  pupils

Number of Teaching Staff (excluding the Headteacher)  teachers (F.T.E.)

Number of Teaching Assistants  TAs (F.T.E.)

Free School Meals  %

SEN  %

Which statement best describes your PRESENT school?

(Please circle)

Inner City	Urban	Semi-Urban	Rural
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**Research Question 1**

**How and why has the role and work of the headteacher changed in regard to national standards and testing?**

**What are your perceptions of the impact of the emphasis on raising pupil attainment and standards in the teaching and learning of literacy and maths?**

**Question 1a**

Please tick the relevant box...		Yes	No
1.1a	Has the recent focus on standards resulted in improvements in pupils' learning?		
1.2a	Did the introduction of NLS result in higher Literacy attainment?		
1.3a	Did the introduction of NNS result in higher Numeracy attainment?		
1.4a	Given a <b>free</b> choice would you have used the NLS?		
1.5a	Given a <b>free</b> choice would you have used the NNS?		
1.6a	Given a <b>free</b> choice would you have used Letters and Sounds?		
1.7a	Has the Standards Driven Agenda altered the role of Teaching Assistants within school?		
1.8a	Has the current level of focus on standards had a negative effect upon pupils' self-esteem?		
1.9a	Has the current level of focus on standards made children more acutely aware of their own performance and that of their peers?		
1.10a	Do you have a willingness to take on board new initiatives and approaches which could lead to significantly better SATs results, whether you believe in the initiative or not?		
1.11a	Has the introduction of a Standards Driven Agenda lead to a limiting of the curriculum?		
1.12a	Do you believe that the introduction of a Standards Driven Agenda has led to your school becoming a less enjoyable environment in which children learn?		
1.13a	Do you believe that the focus on Literacy and Maths has resulted in a lowering of pupil motivation?		
1.14a	Do you believe that the focus on Literacy and Maths has resulted in a decrease in pupil creativity?		
1.15a	Do you believe that the constant use of High Stakes Testing (SATs and OfSTED inspections) has resulted in schools becoming less able to develop the creativity of children?		

Please tick only one box		Significantly decreased	Shown some decrease	Stayed the Same	Shown some increase
1.1b	Do you believe that over the past five years the amount of teaching time focussing on the development of Literacy skills has...?				
1.2b	Do you believe that over the past five years the amount of teaching time focussing on the development of Maths skills has...?				
1.3b	Do you believe that over the past five years the time spent by Teaching Assistants on direct intervention (e.g. Wave 3) has...?				

**Question 1b**

Do you believe that over the past five years the amount of curriculum time spent on the following subjects has...?		Significantly decreased	Shown some decrease	Stayed the Same	Shown some increase	Significantly increased
1.4b	• Science					
1.5b	• Art					
1.6b	• History					
1.7b	• Geography					
1.8b	• PE					
1.9b	• RE					
1.10b	• PSHE					
1.11b	• Music					

## Research Question 2

What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of national standards and testing on their understanding and practice of accountability?

Has your job changed over recent years owing to the focus on standards and its associated testing and monitoring?

### Question 2a.

These questions focus on your perceptions of the effectiveness of High Stakes Testing within YOUR school.

Please tick the relevant box...		Yes	No
2.1a	Do you think annual SATs provide an accurate picture of pupil attainment in the core subjects?		
2.2a	Do you think school performance data is a useful tool in aiding parent / carer selection of suitable schools?		
2.3a	Do you think OfSTED inspections provide an accurate picture of the effectiveness of a school?		
<b>Do you think OfSTED inspections provide useful information about:</b>			
2.4a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achievement of pupils at the school?</li> </ul>		
2.5a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of teaching in the school?</li> </ul>		
2.6a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Behaviour and safety of pupils at the school?</li> </ul>		
2.7a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Quality of leadership and management of the school?</li> </ul>		
2.8a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents'/Carers' views?</li> </ul>		
<b>Do you think it is acceptable to 'Teach to the Tests', in order to?</b>			
2.9a	To fully prepare the pupils for the tests?		
2.10a	Maximise results to place pupils in higher sets as they move into KS 3?		
2.11a	Give a positive picture of your school's performance?		
2.12a	Help protect the school's Number on Roll?		
2.13a	Do you consider that there is a particular cohort within your school which could potentially distort a future judgement by OfSTED?		
2.14a	Do you think the current level of teacher accountability is having a negative effect upon teacher morale?		
2.15a	Do you think the current increased focus on accountability is leading to potentially quality teacher training candidates choosing alternative careers?		
2.16a	Do you think the current high level of teacher accountability is forcing good /outstanding teachers to consider leaving or to leave the teaching profession?		
2.17a	Do you think the current high levels of Headteacher accountability is forcing good/outstanding members of Senior Leadership Teams to re-consider their career progression and to not apply for Headteacher positions?		
2.18a	Do you consider that Ofsted's current measurement of a school's effectiveness (based upon the Standards Driven Agenda) fails to include the true picture of a school's impact upon the social and emotional development of its pupils?		
2.19a	Do you consider that some schools are unfairly deemed 'unsuccessful' when measured by high stakes testing (SATs results and OfSTED inspections)?		
2.20a	Do you consider that less external accountability would allow you the time to drive the school forward more effectively?		
2.21a	Have you ever considered leaving your post because of the importance placed on pupil attainment?		
2.22a	Have you ever considered leaving your post because of the pressure of your own direct accountability?		
2.23a	Have you any professional experience of what you perceive as an UNFAIR OfSTED inspection?		
2.24a	Have you any professional experience of what you perceive as an INACCURATE OfSTED inspection?		

**Question 2b**

Please indicate how much pressure (i.e. level of concern), in your role of Headteacher, the following situations generate.

Please tick only one box		No concern	A little concern	Moderate concern	Significant concern	Very significant concern
2.1b	Publication of annual SATs results.					
2.2b	Release of RAISEonline Data (comparison against similar schools and national).					
2.3b	Number of pupils entering school each year.					
2.4b	OfSTED inspections.					
2.5b	The local media's view of your school's attainment / performance.					
2.6b	Parent / Carer expectations based on their children's expected attainment.					
2.7b	Dealing with <b>unrealistic</b> parent / carer expectations of their child's progress/attainment					
2.8b	The regular monitoring of teachers through formal lesson observations.					
2.9b	Robustly addressing satisfactory or below teaching to ensure improvement.					
2.10b	Robust scrutiny of planning and pupils' work to identify improvements and then feedback to teachers.					
2.11b	Addressing pupil underachievement with teachers.					
2.12b	The setting of aspirational pupil targets during performance management.					

**Question 2c**

Please indicate how you perceive your role has changed over the past five years with the continued focus on standards and testing.

Please tick the relevant box...		Yes	No
2.1c	Do you consider that the primary function of your strategic planning is aimed directly at improving or maintaining pupil attainment standards?		
2.2c	Do you consider your primary role as Headteacher is to organise and monitor teaching and learning in order to improve or maintain pupil attainment standards?		
2.3c	Do you consider that the focus on standards has made it harder to manage and organise your school?		
2.4c	Do you consider that the focus on standards has led to you being significantly limited in terms of how you proportion your school's finances?		
2.5c	Do you consider that the focus on standards has made it more difficult for you to effectively manage staff?		
2.6c	Do you consider that strong community links are an important element in securing high standards?		
2.7c	Do you consider that you have been able to maintain your own professional development in recent years?		
2.8c	Do you consider that you have managed to maintain a healthy work/life balance in recent years?		
2.9c	Do you consider that you now spend more time discussing children's attainment with their parents / carers?		

### Research Question 3

What are your perceptions of how the location, catchment and type of school directly affect your accountability?

#### Question 3a

Please tick the relevant box...		Yes	No
3.1a	Do you think you should lose your job if your RAISEonline data shows <b>BELOW SATISFACTORY</b> pupil progress?		
3.2a	Do you think you should lose your job if your RAISEonline data shows <b>SATISFACTORY</b> pupil progress?		
3.3a	Do you think you should lose your job if your OfSTED inspection rates your school as <b>INADEQUATE</b> ?		
3.4a	Do you think you should lose your job if <b>TWO</b> OfSTED inspections continue to rate your school as <b>SATISFACTORY</b> ?		
3.5a	Do you think you should lose your job if <b>THREE</b> OfSTED inspections continue to rate your school as <b>SATISFACTORY</b> ?		
3.6a	Do you think, as Headteacher, you should be held completely accountable for pupil progress / attainment within your school?		
3.7a	Do you think if you fail to meet your Performance Management Targets you should lose your job regardless of any external factors?		
<b>Do you agree that increased Headteacher accountability to the following stakeholders has directly improved pupil attainment / outcomes?</b>		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
3.8a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DfE</li> </ul>		
3.9a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LA</li> </ul>		
3.10a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Governors</li> </ul>		
3.11a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents / Carers</li> </ul>		
3.12a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pupils</li> </ul>		
3.13a	Do you think Headteachers' making teachers more directly accountable for pupil outcomes has increased pupil attainment?		
3.14a	Do you think Headteachers' making teachers more directly accountable for pupil outcomes has increased teacher stress?		
3.15a	Do you think Headteachers' making teachers more directly accountable for pupil outcomes has increased teacher workload?		
3.16a	Do you think Headteachers' making teachers more directly accountable for pupil outcomes has increased the quality of lessons (pupil learning opportunities)?		
3.17a	Do you think a school's socio-economic context directly affects pupil attainment?		
3.18a	Do you think it is <b>MORE</b> difficult for schools working within areas of <b>HIGH</b> deprivation to achieve <b>GOOD</b> or <b>OUTSTANDING</b> OfSTED status?		

#### Question 3b

How do you consider the effect of the following factors in relation to the effectiveness of YOUR school?

Please tick only one box		No effect	Little effect	Some effect	Significant effect	Very significant effect
3.1b	The socio-economic context of your school.					
3.2b	Parent / carer support of children's learning.					
3.3b	Ability of parents / carers to support their children's learning.					
3.4b	Behaviour of children <b>PRIOR</b> to starting school.					
3.5b	Children's attainment <b>PRIOR</b> to starting school.					
3.6b	Pupil attendance.					
3.7b	Number of children with SEN and how this might reflect in terms of the school's performance.					
3.8b	Health and wellbeing of children <b>PRIOR</b> to starting school.					
3.9b	Health and wellbeing of children <b>WHILST BEING AT</b> school.					

**Appendix 2: Letter of Introduction**

**Michael Burnitt  
Doctoral Research**

Please take a few minutes to complete this very straight forward questionnaire.  
Your professional input is a VITAL element of my doctoral research.

**LETTER OF INTRODUCTION**

**An investigation into  
Primary Headteachers: Perceptions on Standards, Accountability and School  
Context**

Dear Headteacher,

I am writing to introduce myself and to ask for your help in taking part in a research project, as part of my doctoral thesis, which I am undertaking within 200 Primary Schools in the North of England.

My name is Michael Burnitt and I am presently a third year Doctorate student at the School of Education, University of Manchester. I am also a full time teacher working within a primary school in Cheshire.

My research will focus on gaining an understanding of the perceptions of Headteachers of the effects of the attainment focus on primary school children and staff within the North of England. I will also be examining the effects of socio-economic context upon pupil attainment.

I would really appreciate your valuable insight and, therefore, I would be most grateful if you could complete the short enclosed Questionnaire, which should take less than 12 minutes to complete and return to me in the enclosed SAE.

Please note that you are NOT obliged to take part in the study.

Please refer to the accompanying Participant Information Sheet for further details.

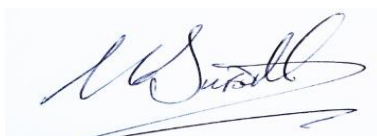
If you have any questions regarding this or any other aspect of the research please do not hesitate to contact me.

My email address is: [Michael.Burnitt@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Michael.Burnitt@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk)

Completing the Questionnaire means you are giving your consent to participate in the research. I will guarantee that the data is confidential and anonymous, and I will not attach your name to any data.

**Many thanks for your time and effort in assisting me with my thesis and ultimately my doctorate.**

Yours sincerely,



## **Appendix 3: Research Outline**

### **Headteacher Participant Information Sheet**

#### ***Research title:***

#### **Primary Headteachers: Perceptions on Standards, Accountability and School Context**

You are being invited to take part in a research study, which I am undertaking as part of my doctoral thesis, at the University of Manchester, in 200 primary schools in the North of England.

Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others, if you wish. Please ask if there is anything which is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

***Thank you for reading this.***

#### **Who will conduct the research?**

**Michael Burnitt M.Ed. NPQH,  
School of Education,  
University of Manchester,  
Oxford Road,  
Manchester.  
M13 9PL**

I am a primary school teacher of over twenty years' experience, presently working in a primary school in Cheshire.

#### **What is the aim of the research?**

This research aims to develop a detailed understanding of Headteachers' perceptions of their own accountability, what this actually means in terms of their own school, their professional performance and future career.

It will also investigate the relationship between the Standards Driven Agenda, the focus on continuing improving pupil attainment outcomes, and the perceptions of Headteachers actively involved in delivering the associated strategies. Links between the types and levels of accountability of Headteachers and the socio-economic contexts of their school will also be investigated.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

I am carrying out research in 200 primary schools within the North of England.

I have chosen to contact you because as a Headteacher you are well positioned to give an expert insight into the effects of the Standards Driven Agenda in terms of pupil attainment, motivation and creativity. The research will also focus on the pressures faced by Headteachers in terms of their accountability and resource organisation.

Eight Headteachers will be asked (from those expressing a willingness to participate) to take part in a 30 minute interview. The selection process for the interview stage of the research will be based upon the responses given within the completed questionnaires. A further information sheet will be posted to those who have been asked to participate in this next stage of data collection.

### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

I would like to ask you to complete the attached very straight forward questionnaire, which will take a maximum of 12 minutes and return using the SAE provided, followed by a voluntary interview lasting approximately 40 minutes.

### **What happens to the data collected?**

I will be analysing the data to look for key themes, which will help form a portrait of the effects of the pupil attainment focus within primary schools in the North of England, identifying any areas of commonality and discourse. A summary report of the findings will be available to you upon request.

### **How is confidentiality maintained?**

I will ensure that your name and/or the name of your school are not attached to any data. All the data will be kept secure, encrypted and your name and/or the name of your school will not be included. Within the completed research report each establishment will only be referred to via the use of a reference number or pseudonym, in order to ensure complete anonymity.

In order to comply with the University of Manchester's stringent confidentiality requirements, all data must be archived for a minimum of 5 years after the publication of the data. All data will be stored within a secure archive at the University of Manchester, under the custody of my doctorate research supervisor.

### **What happens if I do not want to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part.

### **Will I be paid for participating in the research?**

There is no payment for involvement in the project, however, please notes that the completion of the questionnaire is a critical element of my research.

### **What is the duration of the research?**

One questionnaire taking up to 12 minutes to complete.

### **Where will the research be conducted?**

The Questionnaire will be sent out to 200 Headteachers within the North of England whose schools have been identified as falling within two diverse socio-economic bands via data obtained from within the Pupil Domain. Eight primary Headteachers (of the 200, who have indicated their willingness to be interviewed at the foot of the Questionnaire) will be contacted in order to take part in a 30 minute structured interview at their school.

### **Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

The completed report will be submitted as my doctoral thesis to the University of Manchester as part of the requirement for my (Ed.D) Doctorate in Educational Leadership course.

### **Criminal Records Check**

I have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau and the University has a copy of my certificate.

### **Contact for further information**

Please contact me via:

[Michael.Burnitt@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Michael.Burnitt@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk)



**What if something goes wrong?**

Please do contact me if anything prevents you from participating.

If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research then you should contact:

**Head of the Research Office,  
Christie Building,  
University of Manchester,  
Oxford Road,  
Manchester,  
M13 9PL**

**Appendix 4: Interview Request Form**

**Headteacher Interview Request Form**

If you are willing to take part in a 30 minute interview (at a location and time agreeable to you) in order to discuss your experiences and views of both the Standards Driven Agenda and Headteacher Accountability, please indicate below by providing your contact details.

Those contacted to take part in the interview stage of data collection will be based upon the following criteria:

- The socio-economic context of their school.
- Their positioning in terms of perceptions of both their accountability and the Standards Driven Agenda.

The interview will be recorded digitally and stored in accordance to the data storage given by the University of Manchester

*Please note that volunteering does not mean that you will automatically be asked to take part in this stage of the data collection.*

<b>Name</b>	
<b>School Address</b>	
<b>School Phone No</b>	
<b>Email Address</b>	

## **Appendix 5: Interview Schedule**

### **Schedule for Semi-Structured Interviews linked to Conceptual Framework 2013 – To be developed after Piloting.**

- Thank you for taking the time to complete both the Headteacher Questionnaire and agreeing to take part in this 40 minute interview.
- The responses given within your completed Questionnaire indicate that you are positioning yourself within one of the following areas regarding your perceptions of both the Standards Driven Agenda and your own professional accountability.

MTB to read out the appropriate Scenarios (Appendix 8)

- **Torch Bearer** – Positive perceptions of both SDA and Accountability
- **Self - Regulator** - Positive perceptions of SDA, but negative perceptions of accountability
- **Maverick** – Negative perceptions of both SDA and Accountability
- **Head Downer** – Negative perceptions of SDA, but positive perceptions of accountability

NOTE DO NOT DISCUSS ABOVE LABELS WITH HEADS

#### **Research Question 1**

#### **How and why has the role and work of the headteacher changed in regard to national standards and testing?**

What are your perceptions of the impact of the emphasis on raising pupil attainment and standards in the teaching and learning of literacy and maths via the use of the National Strategies?

- How do you view the introduction of the NLS and NNS in terms of improving pupil attainment?
- You have indicated that you would / wouldn't have used the Strategies within your school, why?
- You have indicated that the focus on standards particularly in Literacy and Maths has had a negative / no negative effect on pupil's self-esteem, why do you believe this?
- You have indicated that you have a willingness to actively take on board new initiatives and approaches, which could lead to a significant improvement in SATs results, whether you believe in the initiative or not, can you give me an example?

How do you consider the experiences of children have changed over the past five years with the primary focus being on standards?

#### **Prompts focusing on:**

- ❖ Motivation
- ❖ Enjoyment
- ❖ Stress to achieve from both within school and outside
- ❖ Creativity
- ❖ Boredom leading to behaviour issues

Has your role changed over recent years owing to the focus on standards and its associated testing and monitoring?

- Have you noticed any change in your relationships with the following stakeholders over the last five years which could be related to the continued

focus on standards?

- **Pupils**
- **Staff**
- **Parents**
- **Governors**
- **LA**
- **DfE**

### **Research Question 2**

**What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of national standards and testing on their understanding and practice of accountability?**

What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of national standards and testing on their understanding and practice of accountability?

Has your role changed over recent years owing to the focus on standards and its associated testing and monitoring?

- The following questions are aimed at gauging your perceptions and experiences of Ofsted Inspections:
  - Have they been a useful mechanism in aiding school improvement / development?
  - Are they an effective mechanism in helping you gauge the effectiveness of your school?
  - Do they provide an opportunity to engage in open discussion with knowledgeable professionals regarding the next steps for school development?
  - What do you consider to be the impact of the Ofsted inspections process on you as a professional?
- What stance does your current LA take in terms of your school's pupil attainment / standards? How do you find this?
- Data from 2007 shows that Year 6 spend 42% of their teaching time directly involved within some element of SATs revision (Mansell, 2007), does this reflect practice within your school? Do you believe this is effective learning?
  - What are your experiences of the effects of High Stakes Testing (SATs) on Year 6 pupils?
  - What are your experiences of the effects of High Stakes Testing (SATs and Ofsted) on teachers?
  - Have you any experience of effective teachers leaving the profession?
  - Have you any experience of capable teachers not wanting to progress further within their career?
- What are your experiences of SDA and High Stakes testing effectively driving school change?
- Have you any experience of schools being judged unfairly by the use of High Stakes Testing?
- How do you view your role as a Headteacher in terms of making the staff more accountable for standards (pupil attainment)?
- You have indicated that....
  - **SATs results** cause you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?
  - **Ofsted Inspections** causes you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?

- **RAISEonline** causes you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?
- **Number of pupils coming into school** causes you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?
- **Media reporting about your school and school results** causes you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?
- **Parental/Carer views of school and school results** cause you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?
- As a Headteacher you have indicated that monitoring causes you (1 to 5) level of concern. How do you feel about monitoring the following...
  - **Lessons** cause you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?
  - **Pupils' books / work** cause you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?
  - **Teachers' planning** causes you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?
  - **Addressing pupil underachievement within a specific class** causes you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?
  - **Performance management of targets directly linked to standards** causes you 1 to 5 level of concern, why?

**Prompts focusing on:**

- ❖ What do you consider to be the main advantages of High Stakes Testing (SATs and Ofsted)
- ❖ What do you consider to be the main disadvantages of High Stakes Testing (SATs and Ofsted)?

**Research Question 3**

**What are headteacher perceptions of the impact of the location, catchment and type of school on national standards and testing?**

- How does the socio-economic context of your school have a direct bearing on your school's:
  - Pupil attainment (standards)?
  - Ofsted reports?
  - Direct involvement from the LA?
  - What are the challenges and joys of working within this school (context)?

**Prompts focusing on:**

- Understanding of context
- Issues particular to that given context
- Stresses generated by context
- What is special about context
- Parental involvement
- Links between context and HST results

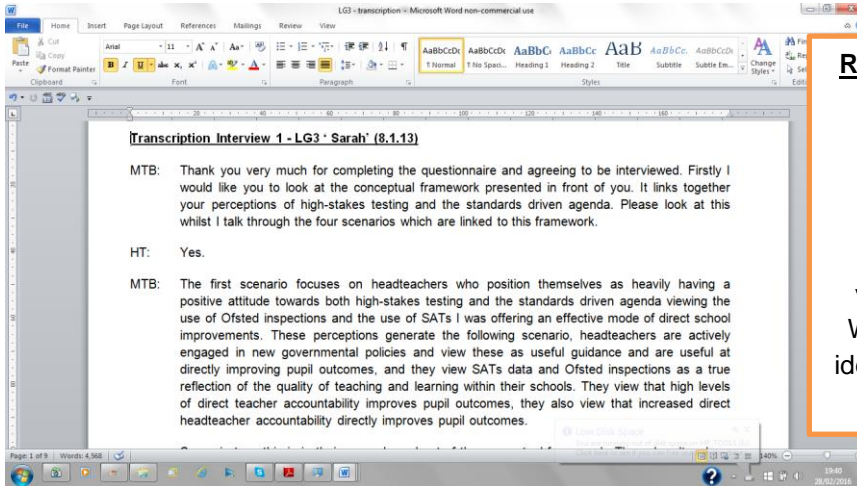
**Finally many thanks for taking the time to discuss these matters with me today.**

## Appendix 6: Example of Headteacher Questionnaire Analysis

### Headteacher Questionnaire Data Analysis

School REF			SECTION B HIGH											
			1 H/A1	2 H/A2	3 H/A3	4 H/A4	5 H/A5	6 H/A6	7 H/B1	8 H/B2	17 H/B3	18 H/B4		
1.1a	Has the recent focus on standards resulted in improvements in pupils' learning?	Yes	1		1		1	1	1		1		9	64%
		No		1		1				1	1		5	36%
1.2a	Did the introduction of NLS result in higher Literacy attainment?	Yes	1	1	1	1				1	1		9	64%
		No					1	1	1				5	36%
1.3a	Did the introduction of NNS result in higher Numeracy attainment?	Yes	1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1		11	79%
		No						1					3	21%
1.4a	Given a <b>free</b> choice would you have used the NLS?	Yes	1		1	1			1		1		8	57%
		No		1			1	1		1			6	43%
1.5a	Given a <b>free</b> choice would you have used the NNS?	Yes	1		1	1	1		1		1		9	64%
		No		1				1		1			5	36%
1.6a	Given a <b>free</b> choice would you have used Letters and Sounds?	Yes	1		1	1	1	1	1	1	1		12	86%
		No		1							1		2	14%
1.7a	Has the Standards Driven Agenda altered the role of Teaching Assistants within school?	Yes		1	1	1	1		1	1	1		11	79%
		No	1					1				1	3	21%
1.8a	Has the current level of focus on standards had a negative effect upon pupils' self-esteem?	Yes											1	7%
		No	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13	93%

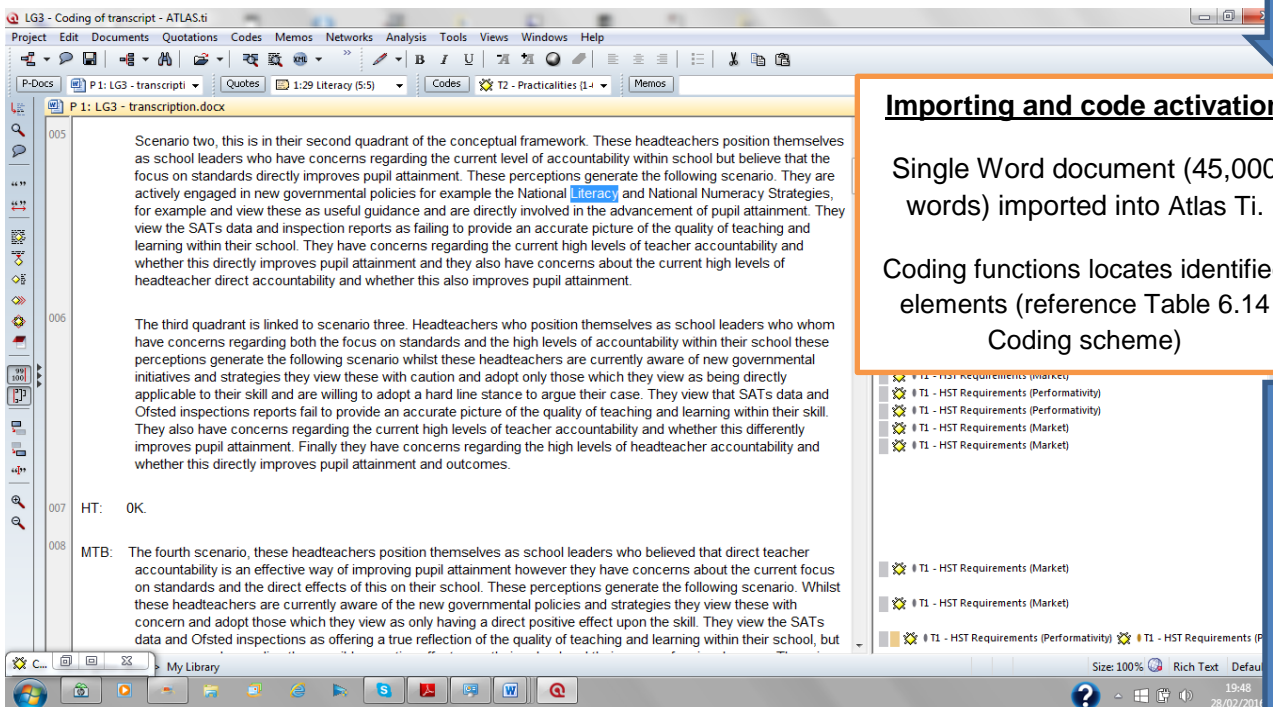
# Appendix 7: Qualitative Data Analysis - Example of Interview Analysis using *Atlas Ti*



## Recording and transcription phase

Interviews digitally recorded and transcribed using MS Word.

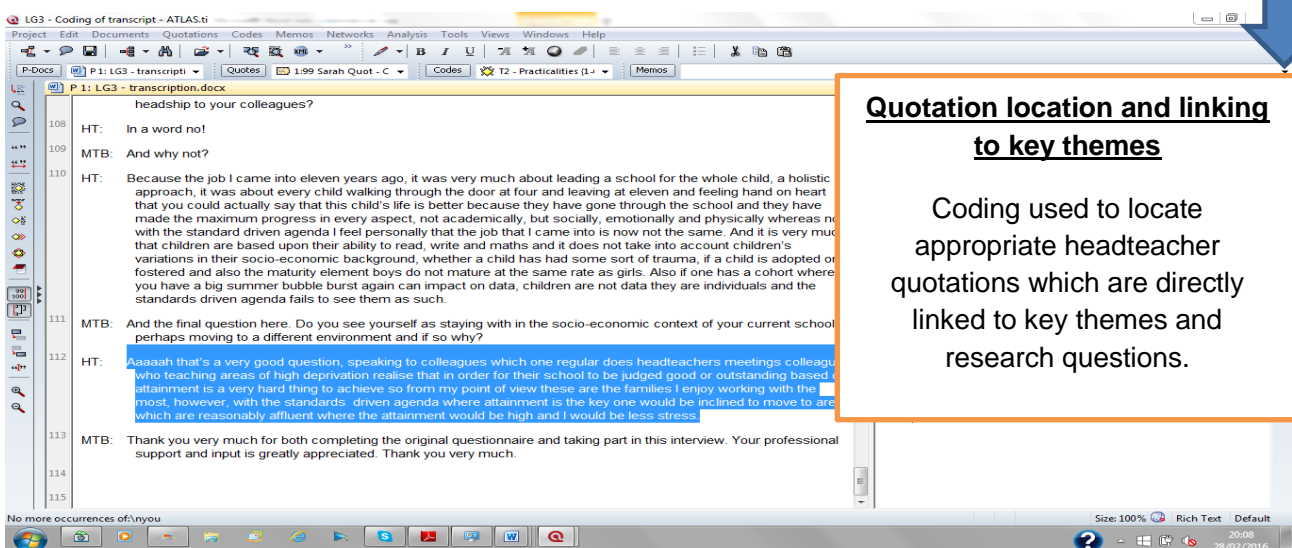
13 hours of interviews transcribed using Dragon Naturally Speaking voice recognition software into one Word document. Responding heads identification codes checked to ensure anonymity.



## Importing and code activation

Single Word document (45,000 words) imported into Atlas Ti.

Coding functions locates identified elements (reference Table 6.14 Coding scheme)



## Quotation location and linking to key themes

Coding used to locate appropriate headteacher quotations which are directly linked to key themes and research questions.

## **Appendix 8: Headteachers' Scenarios**

### **Scenario 1**

**Headteachers who position themselves as having a positive attitude towards new initiatives and view high stakes testing approaches (SATs and inspections) as an effective mode of direct school improvement.**

**These perceptions generate the following scenario:**

- They actively engage with new governmental policy / strategies and view these as useful guidance to directly improve pupil attainment.
- They view that SATs data and Ofsted inspection reports offer a true reflection of quality of teaching and learning within their school.
- They view that high levels of direct teacher accountability directly improves pupil attainment.
- They view that high levels of direct headteacher accountability directly improves pupil attainment.

### **Scenario 2**

**Headteachers who position themselves as a School Leader who has concerns regarding the current level of accountability within school, however, they believe that the focus on standards has improved pupil attainment.**

**These perceptions generate the following scenario:**

- They actively engage with new governmental policy / strategies and view these as useful guidance to directly improve pupil attainment.
- They view that SATs data and Ofsted inspection reports fail to provide an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning within their school.
- They have concerns regarding the current high levels of direct teacher accountability and whether this directly improves pupil attainment.
- They have concerns regarding the current high levels of direct headteacher accountability and whether this directly improves pupil attainment.

### **Scenario 3**

**Headteachers who position themselves as a School Leader who has concerns regarding both the current focus on standards and the level of accountability within school.**

**These perceptions generate the following scenario:**

- Whilst they are currently aware of new governmental policy / strategies, they view these with caution and adopt those which they view as being directly applicable to their school. They are willing to adopt a hard line stance to argue their case.
- They view that SATs data and Ofsted inspection reports fail to provide an accurate picture of the quality of teaching and learning within their school.



- They have concerns regarding the current high levels of direct teacher accountability and whether this directly improves pupil attainment.
- They have concerns regarding the current high levels of direct headteacher accountability and whether this directly improves pupil attainment

#### **Scenario 4**

**Headteachers who position themselves as a school leader who believes that increased direct accountability is an effective method of improving pupil attainment. However, they have significant concerns regarding the current focus on standards and the effect on their school.**

**These perceptions generate the following scenario:**

- Whilst they are currently aware of new governmental policy / strategies, they view these with caution and adopt those which they view as being directly applicable to their school's high stakes testing performance.
- They view that SATs data and Ofsted inspection reports offer a true reflection of the quality of teaching and learning within their school, but are concerned regarding their possible negative effects upon their school and their own professional career.
- They view that high levels of direct teacher accountability directly improves pupil attainment, but are concerned about the current standards (attainment) focus.
- They view that high levels of direct headteacher accountability directly improves pupil attainment, but are concerned about the current standards (attainment) focus.