

## *the new school leader*

Sir Iain Hall

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Over the last three decades, education in England has seen a series of distinct external pressures modify the leadership behaviours of its school leaders. Some of these challenges were inspiring to those leaders but many, sadly, were both functional and uninspiring.

The mid-eighties saw the emergence of the **financial leader** as schools were given responsibility for their own resources. Cost-centred leadership became the vogue. Even the fictional headteacher in the children's television series Grange Hill became imprisoned behind budget spreadsheets that he continually complained about. The freedom to use money creatively to drive the curriculum forward was lost in the time that was needed to understand, develop and implement the budget.

This role quickly developed into the **target driven leader** as external targets were set to drive up individual school performance. Early targets were unrelated to the context of the school and, quite often, showed schools serving the most challenging of our urban environments in an unfair light. These targets deflected headteachers away from exciting curriculum breadth into a narrower curriculum designed to produce 'target matched' performance from children.

The emergence of league tables based on externally measured outcomes saw the development of the leader as a **manipulative statistician**. Schools became data intensive, measuring anything that moved in an attempt to improve outcomes. Individual pupils, at the edge of outcome targets, were continually weighed, measured and adjusted until their outcome profile became supportive of the external judgement of the school's success. The performance of young people who would not improve the school's standing in the league tables was often ignored. Many initiatives were implemented at target boundaries to improve a school's position in the league tables - either by fact, or sometimes, by illusion.

Now, we are entering a new era. The school leader is being encouraged to develop the school as an integral part of extended children's services designed to offer each individual pupil one-stop support from an array of agencies. The era of the **social services school leader** may be emerging as the extended schools initiative takes hold.

The brave school leaders have maintained their focus despite these external pressures and influences. They have used these initiatives to support their core business of educating young people, through the development of a rich and diverse curriculum focused on individual need and aspiration. They have not been distracted from the relentless challenge of improving the quality of teaching and learning within the school. They understand the pressures and challenges of today's classrooms because they have remained close to them.

Today, these brave new school leaders must be recognised by their staff as excellent classroom practitioners, whose skills extend to that of being not only the leader but a very successful performance coach. Both in terms of classroom practice and motivating others, they must be totally committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning within their school. Continuous coached progression for individual teachers must become the mantra of our new leaders. Thus we shall have schools that offer rich and diverse educational experiences for our children, rather than turning out cloned outcomes for the sake of target fulfilment and the external judgement of a school's effectiveness.

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Sir Iain Hall is of the National Education Trust's Leading Thinkers.

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