Journal of Education Policy

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tedp20

Place-based governance and leadership in decentralised school systems: evidence from England

Toby Greany

To cite this article: Toby Greany (2020): Place-based governance and leadership in decentralised school systems: evidence from England, Journal of Education Policy, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2020.1792554

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2020.1792554

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 12 Jul 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 193

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=tedp20

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION POLICY
https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2020.1792554

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS

Place-based governance and leadership in decentralised school systems: evidence from England

Toby Greany

Centre for Research in Educational Leadership and Management (CRELM), School of Education, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

ABSTRACT
Relatively few studies have explored the ways in which 'middle tier' institutional arrangements in education, such as school districts and local authorities, are responding to New Public Management reforms characterized by centralization, decentralization, marketization and disintermediation. This paper analyses these issues, drawing on governance and path dependency theories, together with evidence from five locality case studies in England. It finds that the process and impact of 'middle tier' disintermediation is uneven and often fraught, with significant implications for place-based coherence, equity and legitimacy. It shows how national hierarchical mechanisms work in concert to require and/or incentivise change across local school systems, most obviously by reducing the remit and capacity of traditional Local Authorities. This process can open up new opportunities for emerging and existing actors to work together through network and community forms of governance to counteract the negative impact of fragmentation, a process dub 'middle out' change. However, responses and outcomes vary widely across the five localities and productive 'middle out' change is by no means a given, so the article analyses the processes at work and their impact across different contexts. It concludes by assessing implications for research, policy and practice in contemporary education systems.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 30 March 2020
Accepted 2 July 2020

KEYWORDS
Place-based governance and leadership; decentralization; markets; disintermediation; school districts/Local Authorities; middle tier/mediating/meso layer

Introduction

School systems around the world have been subject to increasingly rapid change and reform efforts in recent decades (Mullis, Martin, and Loveless 2016). Globalisation has raised the importance of education as a means of enhancing human capital and social mobility, while the expansion of international benchmarking assessments and bodies (e.g. PISA and OECD) has encouraged policy-borrowing and the development of what Sahlberg (2011) calls a Global Education Reform Movement.

Many governments are stepping back from hierarchical control of schools, adopting marketization and other New Public Management (NPM) approaches as they seek to increase choice, improve quality, enhance equity and encourage innovation (Hood 1991). This does not prevent governments from 'steering at a distance' (Hudson 2007), through meta-governance (Jessop 2011). Indeed, at a structural level two parallel shifts can be

CONTACT Toby Greany ✉ toby.greany@nottingham.ac.uk Centre for Research in Educational Leadership and Management (CRELM), School of Education University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK

© 2020 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

discerned. Decentralisation comes through granting schools greater autonomy (aka ‘school-based management’), with school leaders taking responsibility for operational areas such as staffing, pedagogy and budgets, usually in combination with competitive market incentives such as parental choice of school (Caldwell and Spinks 2013). Meanwhile, centralisation develops as national and/or state/provincial governments seek to measure school quality and sharpen accountability, for example through the development of national curricula, standardised testing and the publication of performance data (Ozga 2011).

Centralisation and decentralisation have significant consequences for traditional ‘middle tier’ structures, such as school districts and local authorities (Greany 2015). These pressures are exacerbated by NPM liberalisation; for example, where this encourages new public, private and charity sector actors – such as professional development providers and charter-school groups – to take on roles that compete with traditional structures, creating heterarchical governance landscapes (Chapman 2019; Ball 2007). A minority of systems have removed the ‘middle tier’ completely, partly in response to an ideological critique of districts as bureaucratic ‘vested interests’ (Moe 2019). More common is an incremental process of reshaping as decentralisation combines with centralisation and marketization to reduce but not completely remove the need for local oversight and co-ordination: a process that Lubienski (2014) terms disintermediation.

Existing analyses of how ‘middle tier’ governance and leadership in education might respond to these shifts reveal four contrasting interpretations. The first argues that existing ‘middle tier’ bodies can be reformed to support priorities set by national or provincial government, through ‘tri-level’ (i.e. centre, district, schools) efforts (Levin 2012). A second view is that local agency is fatally diminished in the face of ‘highly centralized system steering’ (Ozga 2009:149), with ‘middle tier’ bodies ‘reconstituted as conduits of central information and policy’ (ibid:156). The third perspective sees space for local agency, whether for new or existing players, so long as they are willing and able to reform themselves to work within the new heterarchical governance environment (Cousin 2018; Ball and Junemann 2012). Finally, the fourth group draws on complexity theory and eco-system analogies to argue that diverse players, including schools, can collaborate around shared agendas to achieve productive ‘middle out’ change (Munby and Fullan 2016; OECD 2015).

These four interpretations provide a useful lens for assessing the evidence in this article, which explores ‘middle tier’ governance, leadership and change in England’s school system. It analyses these issues through the lens of governance (Tenbensel 2017) and path dependency (Streeck and Thelen 2005) theories, drawing on data from five locality case studies undertaken as part of two larger studies (Greany and Higham 2018; Greany 2018). Governance theory encompasses a broad arena and draws on a range of conceptual tools (Bevir 2011), but the focus here is on the ways in which actors at national, ‘middle tier’ and school levels draw on individual and hybrid mechanisms (hierarchy, markets, networks and community) to steer action. This analysis reveals the ways in which ‘middle tier’ governance is replacing traditional forms of local democratic government by Local Authorities (LAs) in England. However, this analysis of governance mechanisms does little to illuminate processes of change or the ways in which individual and collective agency can shape different outcomes, so it is combined with an assessment of divergent trajectories using Streeck and Thelen's path dependency framework 2005. In undertaking this analysis, the article adopts an interpretive approach and a critical policy stance, recognising that policy is practiced and contested in local sites and, equally, that notions of 'place' are part of political practice (Hanson-Thiem 2008; Ball 1994).

The article starts by setting out core definitions and reviewing recent research into 'middle tier' leadership and governance in education. It then describes recent developments in the English school system, focussing on the 'self-improving, school-led system' policy changes introduced since 2010 and the ways in which they have impacted on the existing 'middle tier', particularly LAs. The conceptual framework is then set out along with a summary of the methodology for the two empirical studies. The findings are presented and analysed in two sections: the first provides vignettes of specific locality responses, categorised using path dependency, while the second assesses the nature of hierarchy, markets, networks and community. Finally, the conclusion identifies and discusses three overarching implications and considers the paper's contribution and limitations.

Existing evidence and conceptions of the 'middle tier'

This section starts by defining what is meant by 'middle tier' for the purposes of this article and by outlining the key roles that it can play. It then briefly reviews existing research into district and local authority structures and leadership across different school systems.

Most large school systems have a 'middle tier' which operates between the centre and the individual school, although structures vary widely (Barber, Chijoke, and Mourshed 2010). In several parts of the world, including Australia, Singapore and China, the 'middle tier' is not separate from national or provincial government, but is embedded within it, with 'middle tier' officials employed as civil servants (Pritchett 2018). In other areas, including most of Europe, locally elected municipal authorities oversee schools in their area, while in the US and Canada, locally elected school districts/Local Education Authorities are separate from other parts of government (Newton and Da Costa 2016; Daly and Finnigan 2016).

Bubb et al. (2019) categorise 'middle tier' roles in four broad areas: finance (allocating funding and monitoring expenditure); accountability (including holding schools accountable and providing improvement/implementation support); access (planning and allocating school places, ensuring provision for children with additional needs or at risk of exclusion); and people (professional development, employment and performance management).

The definition of the 'middle tier' adopted in this paper is deliberately broad, encompassing any aspect of statutory or non-statutory support and influence which operates between individual schools and central government. This definition allows for an analysis of both formally constituted, hierarchical bodies, such as LAs, and also less formal networks, providers and partnerships. It also allows for scale and place to be interpreted at different levels and in different ways, although the focus here is largely on LA areas (Papanastasiou 2017). Following Streeck and Thelen (2005), the 'middle tier' is thus conceived as an institutional regime, which establishes legitimate mutually related rights and responsibilities for actors (primarily schools) and so organises behaviour into predictable and reliable patterns. LAs have traditionally played a central role in establishing and enforcing these rights and responsibilities, drawing on their local democratic mandate, but this does not preclude other actors from participating in the 'middle tier' regime.

Most existing research into the 'middle tier' focusses on the role of school boards and superintendents in the US and Canada, where districts are relatively homogenous and hierarchical. These studies conclude that effective districts can impact positively on school quality, equity and outcomes for pupils – in particular where they are focused on building the collective capacity of teachers and school leaders to address shared improvement priorities (Anderson and Young 2018; Leithwood and Azah 2017; Leithwood and Mccullough 2017; Daly and Finnigan 2016). In addition an effective 'middle tier' can also help to: secure local ownership, accountability and legitimacy; achieve economies of scale; address and ameliorate inclusion and disadvantage issues; integrate education with wider services; and focus attention on shared strategic challenges, such as demographic change. Trujillo (2013) concludes that 'districts matter for student outcomes' (p.442), but argues that many studies in this area have limited validity and reliability, an overly narrow conceptualisation of schooling and school outcomes, and an under-theorised understanding of how and why educational outcomes differ across different contexts.

Research on the 'middle tier' beyond North America is limited and disparate, with no overarching reviews available. Bubb et al. (2019) focus on 'middle tier' arrangements in four high performing school systems, arguing that all have a coherent, educator-led 'middle tier' that is focussed on directing resources and support towards ensuring equitable improvement and performance by all students in all schools. Other studies indicate the extent to which approaches and impact vary based on local contexts and histories, but highlight common challenges relating to equity and coherence where market-based reforms are introduced that disrupt existing cultures and ways of working (Wilkinson et al. 2019; Chapman 2019).

The 'middle tier' in England's 'self-improving school-led system'

This section briefly describes the 'middle tier' in England, including the ways in which it has evolved in recent decades and the impact of more recent reforms.

England's post-war school system was described as 'a national system, locally delivered' (Volansky 2003), signalling the central role played by LAs in mediating national policies and steering the work of schools. However, from the 1970s onwards, the remit and structure of LAs has been subject to a process of almost continuous reform – meaning that they have been 'relentlessly squeezed', while school-level autonomy and national oversight has increased (Woods and Simkins 2014). The 1988 Education Reform Act introduced Local Management of Schools, with schools given control over budgets and staffing and with parental choice introduced as a means of incentivising competition between schools. By 2009 school leaders in England were ranked among the most autonomous in the world in terms their decision making powers (OECD 2011). Alongside these changes, the introduction of a National Curriculum, standardised tests for all pupils, and a national school inspectorate (Ofsted) all served to enhance the power of central government at the expense of LAs (Newsam 2014).

The election of Conservative-led governments since 2010 has led to significant changes in the school landscape, with far reaching implications for both LAs and schools (Earley 2013). New policies have aimed to develop what the government has called a 'self-improving, school-led system' (DfE, 2010). A key development has been a rapid expansion in the proportion of academy schools. In 2010 there were around 200 academies (out of 24,000 publicly-funded schools), but by February 2020 more than a third of all primary schools (35%) and more than three quarters of all secondary schools (77%) were academies. Academies are non-profit companies that are wholly funded and overseen by national – rather than local – government. This means that academies are not bound by existing LA developed protocols, for example on student admissions and exclusions. An academy can operate as a single stand-alone school, but most (i.e. three quarters of primary and half of all secondary academies) have now formed or joined a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). A MAT is a charitable non-profit company with a board and Chief Executive Officer, which operates a number of academies via a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education (West and Wolfe 2018).

The government's 2010 White Paper signalled a nebulous role for LAs as 'champions for children' (DfE 2010). In practice, LAs have retained a range of statutory duties, including securing provision for Looked After Children, place planning, and funding and co-ordinating support for children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND).[1] In relation to schools, LA responsibilities differ by type of school: the LA retains some oversight powers in relation to any remaining maintained schools, but almost none in relation to academies. Meanwhile, LAs have faced sharp funding cuts as a result of both reductions in national funding and the effect of schools becoming academies.[2]

These changes have created more fragmented local school landscapes, with one clear consequence being that 'place-based' oversight has become less coherent (Crawford et al. 2020; Richmond 2019). At the structural level, in addition to the 152 LAs, by March 2020 there were: around 1200 MATs operating 7600 academies (with each MAT responsible for between two and forty-plus academies); almost 1500 stand-alone academies; eight Regional Schools Commissioners (RSCs – civil servants who oversee the MATs and academies, on behalf of the Secretary of State); around 1500 government designated 'system leader' schools (Teaching School Alliances – TSAs – and National Leaders of Education – NLEs), and a number of quasi-public organisations (e.g. Ambition Institute and the Education Endowment Foundation[3]) fulfilling various ministerial priorities. Greany and Higham (2018) show that these organisations have differing – but often overlapping – remits, sources of legitimacy, capacity and claims to knowledge about the needs of schools.

No research has yet mapped the ways in which LAs and localities nationally have responded to these changes, although various studies have explored aspects of this picture (Crawford et al. 2020; Ofsted 2018; Ainscow 2015; Greany 2015; Simkins et al. 2015). Responses vary widely, reflecting differing rates of academisation – from 93% to 6% of schools in different LA areas – and differences between the primary and secondary sectors. Crawford et al. (2020) argue that the biggest change is in who provides support for school quality and improvement: whereas, previously, this was undertaken by LA-employed advisers, it is now done by 'system leader' schools and MATs. Greany and Higham (2018) characterise the wider process as one of 'chaotic centralisation', as power and control moves towards the centre, but in uneven and often fraught ways, while LAs work together or in competition with MATs, TSAs and other players to shape local provision. Ofsted (2018) has highlighted worrying consequences, such as a number of 'orphan' schools that are left without any support and the fact that rising numbers of children are being excluded ('off-rolled') by schools that seek to game the accountability system. In some areas, the various 'middle tier' players are working together in formal place-based partnerships, sometimes taking responsibility for statutory LA functions, such as school improvement (Gilbert 2017), but these arrangements have not been formally evaluated and are critiqued by Hatcher for operating as 'closed managerialist networks' (2014).

Conceptual framework: combining governance and path dependency theories

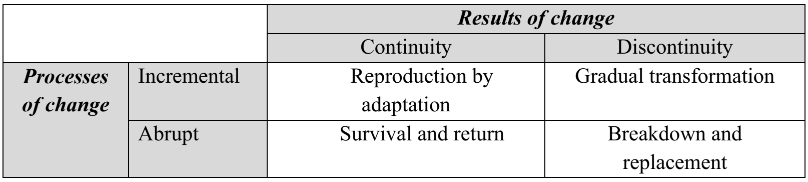
This article seeks to illuminate the ways in which the 'middle tier' regime in five different localities in England is responding to the changes introduced since 2010. It focuses in particular on the role of LAs, on the basis that these bodies retain local democratic legitimacy and a unique responsibility for 'place-based' coherence. It assesses these changes through an original conceptual framework that combines path dependency (Streeck and Thelen 2005) and governance theory (Tenbensel 2017).

This analysis builds on, but further develops, an approach used by Greany and Higham (2018), who sought to understand the ways in which hierarchy, markets and networks operate separately and in hybrid ways to steer the work of schools. These co-ordinating mechanisms are positioned as 'ideal types' – or heuristics – that can be harnessed by governmental and non-governmental actors in their attempts to steer policy problems and public service delivery. Each has its own strengths and limitations, for example Adler (2001) explains that while Hierarchy can enable control by using formal authority as a means of co-ordination, it can also weaken collaboration and lateral innovation. Most governance arrangements involve hybrid combinations of these mechanisms, which are adapted to context and change over time.

Greany and Higham (2018) adopt the following definitions, which are also used here:

- *Hierarchy* – the formal authority exercised by the state, including through statutory policies and guidance, national, regional and local bureaucracies, and performance management and intervention
- *Markets* – incentives and (de)regulation aimed at encouraging choice, competition, contestability and commercialisation
- *Networks* – the (re)creation of interdependencies that support and/or coerce inter-organisational collaboration, partnership and participation.

This paper also considers a fourth mechanism – *Community*, which Tenbensel (2005:279) describes as founded on identity, whether based on geography, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or simply a common recreational interest. Tenbensel argues that distinguishing between network and community mechanisms helps differentiate between providers of public services and the communities that engage with them. Both providers and communities can be engaged in 'network governance' (as,



		Results of change	
		Continuity	Discontinuity
Processes of change	Incremental	Reproduction by adaptation	Gradual transformation
	Abrupt	Survival and return	Breakdown and replacement

Figure 1. Types of institutional change: processes and results (Streeck and Thelen 2005).

indeed, can government), but providers are often better placed than communities to participate and benefit, due to both their organisational capacity and the ways in which their shared professional norms, values and trust can be drawn upon to facilitate collaboration. ‘Network governance’ can therefore be seen positively as a model for professional control or provider autonomy, or less positively in terms of ‘provider capture’ (Tenbensel 2005: 283). By contrast, ‘community governance’ is generally associated with populist movements and grass-roots community activism. Other authors have similarly distinguished between ‘network governance’ and a fourth mode centred on self-organising communities (Frankowski et al. 2018; Nederhand, Bekkers, and Voorberg 2016).

The following definition is used here:

> *Community* – the encouragement of self-reliant solutions by citizens, cooperatives and providers based on shared values, identities and accountabilities, including through the removal of pre-existing funding and services and/or the active fostering of ‘bottom up’ approaches.

Using the framework of *hierarchy, markets, networks and community* can reveal the ways in which local school systems are co-ordinated and steered, but it does little to illuminate processes of change or the ways in which individual and collective agency can shape different responses to change. Therefore, the analysis combines a focus on governance with Streeck and Thelen's (2005) historical institutionalist work on path dependency and institutional change. This distinguishes between *processes* of change, which can be incremental or abrupt, and *results* of change, which may amount to continuity or discontinuity. This supports four types of change, as shown in Figure 1.

Methods

The publicly available reports on Greany and Higham (2018) and Greany’s (2018) research include detailed methodological outlines. This section focusses specifically on how the locality case studies were undertaken.

Greany and Higham’s mixed methods study was carried out between 2014–18 and involved several quantitative strands not drawn on here. The ‘middle tier’ data comes from four locality case studies: two areas with relatively high (top quintile) and two areas with relatively low (bottom quintile) proportions of academies and nationally designated ‘system leaders’ (TSAs and NLEs). The four localities and schools within them were also sampled to reflect a range of socio-economic contexts, performance against national metrics and geographic, LA and school type differences. Forty-seven primary and secondary school case studies were completed across the four localities, based on interviews with headteachers and a range of other staff in each school. Interviews with a further 18 system informants (i.e. RSCs, Ofsted regional directors and LA leaders) were conducted. Detailed case studies were written for each school and, subsequently, for each locality.

Greany's (2018) research was carried out in 2018 and aimed to explore sustainable improvement in multi-school groups. It involved a number of strands, but the evidence drawn on here comes from two LA-wide case studies, based on 29 interviews with school and LA leaders. The LAs were selected based on an analysis of national data and in consultation with the project Advisory Group. Each case study was written up separately, followed by cross-case analysis. Emerging findings and conclusions were shared and discussed with case study participants through a focus group.

Findings – five locality vignettes

This section sets out five vignettes, drawn from the more detailed locality case studies, which illustrate different 'middle tier' responses to change. It categorises and analyses these using the path dependency framework.

Before introducing the vignettes it is worth summarising the findings regarding the 'middle tier' in Greany and Higham (2018) study. The four LAs they studied had all embarked on major reorganizations since 2010, rationalizing their provision while seeking to retain some strategic influence over local academies and some level of service delivery for their remaining maintained schools. Greany and Higham characterise these trends as a move away from local hierarchical governance and towards 'commercialized network governance'. On the one hand, the LAs were creating new commercial structures to trade services to schools; while at the same time working to develop new local governing networks, for example through 'strategic school improvement boards', that seek to co-ordinate the work of new school-led groupings, such as MATs and TSAs.

Path dependency: vignettes

The classification of each vignette is based on an assessment of the processes (incremental or abrupt) and outcomes (continuity or discontinuity) of change in each locality. The focus for analysing processes of change is on LA-level strategy and actions, while the focus for assessing the outcomes of change is on school and academy performance (i.e. pupil test outcomes at the end of primary – Key Stage 2 – and secondary – Key Stage 4) over a five year period (2014–19). These classifications are not hard and fast, but illustrate the range of responses from different LAs. Figure 2, below, shows how the five vignettes are distributed across the Streeck and Thelen framework.

Reproduction by adaptation: incremental process, continuity of outcomes

Western is a shire county (i.e. mainly rural, with some urban centres) spanning a wide geographical area, with over 300 schools and academies in total. The LA had low proportions of academies and 'system leader' schools in 2014. The LA saw a slight decline

		Results of change	
		Continuity	Discontinuity
Processes of change	Incremental	Western: gradual evolution away from a ‘dependency culture’ on the LA	Eastern: new LA team reshapes approach and works to build coherence following historic poor relationships with schools and fragmentation caused by academisation
	Abrupt	Northern: LA created an Education Partnership in 2010, having ‘foreseen its own demise’	Suburban: Soviet-style LA collapse leads to fragmentation Urban: LA disbands in-house school improvement team and outsources work to MATs and TSA

Figure 2. Overview of the vignettes.

in the relative performance of its primary schools and academies between 2014 and 2019 (dropping from the second to the third quintile nationally at Key Stage 2) while its secondary schools and academies remained in the fourth quintile nationally (i.e. below average at Key Stage 4) over the period.

The Assistant Director of Education in Western LA argued that at the start of this period (i.e. 2014) there was a ‘dependency culture’ among schools as a result of an historically ‘very, very well thought of and very highly valued advisory service’. This service was no longer viable in the context of a reducing council budget, so the LA was managing the transition to a new model: ‘the idea is that as (the budget) reduces the actual self-sustaining nature of the system increases, so we’re trying to match that’. The approach was two-fold. The LA was reducing and reshaping its school improvement service to focus more clearly on improving the quality of leadership and ‘using systems leaders in a more focused way’ to provide school to school support where a school was struggling. Meanwhile, it was also working to strengthen local school clusters to become ‘self-improving’. Two new ‘network governance’ groups had been established to co-ordinate this work.

Survival and return: abrupt process, continuity of outcomes

Northern LA is a small suburban authority within a large metropolitan area, with fewer than 100 schools. It has low levels of deprivation, but notable pockets of higher deprivation and substantially above average ethnic diversity. The LA had high proportions of academies and schools designated as ‘system leaders’ in 2014. Primary and secondary schools in the LA performed above average throughout the 2014–19 period, appearing in the first or second quintile nationally at Key Stages 2 and 4.

Northern LA was reported by one headteacher to have ‘foreseen its own demise’ and, from 2010, had encouraged and helped schools in the locality to establish an Educational Partnership (EP). After an initial start-up grant from the LA, the EP was core funded by an annual subscription from member schools, although it also raised income by trading services. The EP was governed by headteachers elected from subscribing schools, two school governor representatives and a co-opted LA officer. It was led by a seconded LA officer who managed a small team of school improvement advisors. Schools could choose whether or not to buy-in to the EP, but all primary schools in the LA and a majority of secondary schools did so in 2015–16. The EP provided member schools with termly advisor visits, numeracy and literacy support and subsidized CPD. Rather than local clusters, the EP accredited 'hub' schools to provide training and 'tailored support' to other schools. The LA had closed down its internal school improvement function at the time it created the EP, but had retained a small core team which commissioned support from the EP for schools 'causing concern'.

Gradual transformation: incremental process, discontinuity of outcomes

Eastern LA is a regional city with above average levels of deprivation and ethnic diversity, but with significant differences between different parts of the city. The LA is a large unitary, with almost 200 schools, and with high proportions of academies and schools designated as 'system leaders' in 2014. Primary and secondary schools and academies in the LA performed well below average in 2014 (5th quintile Key Stage 4, 4th quintile Key Stage 2), but by 2019 had improved to perform around the national average (third quintile) in both Key Stages.

The LA had struggled in terms of both performance and its relationship with schools in the past, with high rates of academisation creating further fragmentation. More recently, the LA had appointed a new senior team who had focused on reengaging with the academies and MATs, seeking to foster a stronger, city-wide culture and collaborative approach to improvement, and beginning to reshape the LA's support for its maintained schools (predominantly primaries). The LA had created a traded services directorate covering HR, finance and other services, which it was hiving off as a stand-alone organisation. Meanwhile, it was working to build capacity so that schools could take on more responsibility for their own collective improvement, including through a network of Teaching Schools. The LA had established a 'strategic partnership' comprised of school 'system leaders', diocesan and local business representatives.

Breakdown and replacement: abrupt process, discontinuity of outcomes

This section includes two vignettes to illustrate the different approaches adopted.

Suburban LA covers a suburban and rural area that adjoins a large city, characterised by low levels of deprivation and ethnic diversity. The LA includes fewer than 150 schools and in 2014 it had relatively low proportions of academies and designated system leader schools. Primary schools performed around the national average in 2014 (3rd quintile) and improved slightly by 2019 (2nd quintile), while secondary schools performed below average throughout the period (4th quintile). These performance levels are well below the locality's historic high performance (i.e. pre-2010) and are lower than would be expected given its relative affluence.

School leaders interviewed in Suburban described an LA that had historically provided very good support to schools with a strong local ethos and vision, but with a very rapid decline in the years after 2010 – 'it's been like the collapse of the Soviet Union' (primary head). This meant that schools were left to fend for themselves, which had 'led to a real fracturing in relationships' (primary head) and growing fragmentation, as schools focussed on working in more or less exclusive partnerships and MATs that could address their immediate needs.

The second vignette is of a small unitary authority – Urban – in a deprived urban context with relatively low levels of ethnic diversity. The LA has fewer than 100 schools and has had historically low school standards. It had average levels of academies and designated 'system leader' schools in 2014. It was well below average (5th quintile) for pupil outcomes at Key Stages 2 and 4 in 2014, but had improved slightly in both phases by 2019 (4th quintile).

Soon after 2014, the LA's school improvement services received a critical Ofsted inspection. In response, the LA decided to disband its in-house school improvement team and to outsource the delivery of improvement services to the local TSA. It has encouraged its remaining maintained schools to join one of the 12 MATs that operate in the city, although around 40% were still maintained at the end of 2018. Meanwhile, the LA has been working to redefine its own role as a champion for children and the convenor of a local partnership. This partnership has no legal basis or structure and schools are not required to make a financial contribution. The aim is that each MAT should be an engine of improvement, with the partnership operating to bring those engines together. A school improvement board, chaired by a secondary headteacher and including the LA and RSC, categorises schools and academies and commissions offers of support. This support is either delivered by or brokered through the TSA, largely drawing on the expertise of stronger schools and MATs in the area.

Governance and leadership in the new 'middle tier'

Viewing the vignettes through the lens of path dependency reveals important differences in approach, whilst supporting Greany and Higham's overall analysis. All five LAs have been forced to reconceptualise their approach, becoming less reliant on their traditional, hierarchical authority over schools, especially academies. All have either reduced or closed their internal school improvement teams in the face of reducing numbers of maintained schools and associated budget cuts, and all are having to become more commercial in their approach. Four of the five (i.e. all except Suburban) are developing new network governance groups that seek to engage key stakeholders and to ensure a level of local coherence.

However, there are also significant differences between the five LAs, which supports their categorisation in different quadrants of Streeck and Thelen's framework. For example, Western's attempt to achieve a managed transition away from a 'dependency culture' is very different from Northern's 'big bang' approach in creating the Education Partnership. Even within one single quadrant, Suburban's 'Soviet-style' collapse is very different from Urban's decision to push all schools into MATs and to reinvent its own role as a 'champion for children'. The following section therefore explores why and how these differences occur, drawing on governance theory.

Hierarchy

The 'middle tier' in England is being re-shaped by national hierarchical mechanisms. This enforced change is, in turn, re-shaping the ways in which hierarchical control occurs at the local level: essentially shifting from a model of place-based oversight of relatively autonomous schools by LAs, towards non-place-based oversight of non-autonomous schools by MATs. However, even in the most extreme case (Urban – where the LA is encouraging all its schools to join a MAT) this shift is far from complete and the hierarchical role of the LA (for example in relation to place planning or SEND) does not disappear.

National mechanisms here include changes in statute and regulatory requirements as well as accountability and funding pressures. The Academies Act, passed in 2010, gave the Secretary of State the power to remove a lower performing school from LA control and to force it to become a sponsored academy within a MAT. One consequence of this is that the LA 'loses' the associated funding for the sponsored academy, thereby weakening its capacity to support its remaining schools. Meanwhile, Ofsted has responsibility for inspecting LA services, as we saw in Urban, where a negative report drives the LA's decision to change its approach.

These national hierarchical mechanisms impact differently in each locality and over time, shaped by historical and contextual issues. The vignettes help illustrate these differences: thus, whereas Urban has come to embrace the government's preferred MAT model (under pressure following is poor Ofsted report), Western has actively resisted it. Western LA's Director of Education explained that the Labour-controlled council had initially disagreed with the Conservative government's academies policy, which they saw as an attempt to privatise education and to remove it from democratic control. Western was described by its RSC as having 'an anti-academy stance', which had made it 'a barrier … it's always a battle'. The RSC had managed to force through a small number of sponsorship arrangements, but others had been subverted by 'all sorts of political plays'. A further challenge for the RSC was that relatively few high performing schools in the LA had chosen to convert to academy status and sponsor under-performing academies. This lack of appetite for academy sponsorship among schools in Western reflected a degree of 'loyalty' to the LA, especially among primary schools, coupled to a dislike, even fear, of nationally imposed change and a preference for finding 'local solutions' to improvement challenges. As a result the RSC admitted that: 'We're not getting anywhere … so we'll back off … then, once we've had a bit more success, we go back again'. However, in the meantime, the LA had already decided to change course, towards a reluctant but pragmatic acceptance of academisation: 'there's now a shift (among LA elected councillors) from "while we don't agree with this politically, we are in a position where we need to work with it"' (LA Director).

So we see how Western's initial resistance to academies is successful in getting the RSC to 'back off', largely because the LA and most of its schools present a united front. However, this resistance cannot be sustained, leading some schools to break ranks (i.e. to convert to academy status) and the LA to grudgingly accept the new agenda. Western LA's new strategy aims to achieve a gradual evolution away from the 'dependency culture' of the past and towards a more school-led, but hopefully still coherent, model in which the LA continues to play a significant role.

Two points are worth noting here. Firstly, LAs are responding to the new national hierarchical pressures in different ways, but their ability to embrace or resist change is circumscribed by wider factors, such as how far local schools are willing and able to support their position. Secondly, this situation can put school leaders in a difficult political position (i.e. forcing them to 'take sides' between their local LA agenda and the national/academy agenda). For those 'well-positioned' (Coldron et al. 2014) and entrepreneurial heads who are willing and able to embrace the government's agenda (for example by forming a MAT), the personal and organisational benefits can be significant.

Markets

Greany and Higham argue that the 'middle tier' is becoming more commercialised in the context of LA budget cuts and academisation. This can be seen in the vignettes, for example in how Eastern LA has created a separate traded services company, which then sells 'back office' services (such as Human Resources and budgeting support) to schools.

Greany and Higham also argue that a 'new economy of knowledge' is emerging, which is reshaping the ways in which school improvement advice and support are exchanged. Policy reforms, such as the new National Curriculum and new national tests and exams, coupled with high-stakes accountability (e.g. via Ofsted), have placed pressure on schools to develop new skillsets and ways of working. As sources of 'free' advice and support from LAs have been removed, schools have had to look elsewhere to access the knowledge and expertise they need to respond to these new requirements. In this context, higher performing schools – particularly those that are officially designated as 'system leaders', such as TSAs – have been 'well-positioned' to package and 'sell' their expertise to other schools. These 'system leader' schools have several commercial advantages compared with LAs, including preferential access to central government funding for key initiatives and a perceived level of credibility that comes from working at the 'chalk-face'.

The 'new economy of knowledge' thus involves disrupting traditional LA monopoly provision and funding models. Schools themselves must learn to navigate this new array of competing providers, which some see as a benefit, but many find confusing, time-consuming and professionally uncomfortable. Greany and Higham argue that this 'new economy' is problematic, because it leads to a focus on the kinds of knowledge that can be easily codified and commoditised (as 'best practices'), rather than on the kinds of developmental and evidence-informed learning processes that have been shown to support professional growth for teachers (Timperley et al. 2007; Kennedy 2016).

The LA interviewees invariably described their role as being 'the glue' in this new, more complex environment: working to secure a level of coherence and to ensure that no schools were left unsupported. However, as the vignettes show, they did this in very different ways. Northern and Urban had both decided to stop providing improvement services directly and to disband their internal teams. In Northern school improvement is now co-ordinated by a membership organisation (the Education Partnership), drawing on the 'hub' schools, while in Urban it is undertaken by the MATs and the TSA. By contrast, Western and Eastern are both much larger, with many more schools and a more diverse provider landscape, making it harder to move to a single model. Both LAs are seeking to engage and work strategically with local TSAs, for example to manage competition and to reduce duplication of effort. However, such market-management by these LAs is problematic – because they are also providers of services themselves, so are in competition with the 'school-led' providers they are seeking to organise.

Networks and community

Greany and Higham explore the ways in which the LAs they studied are developing network governance in some depth, so this section summarises these arrangements very briefly. It then focusses in more detail on differences between 'network' and 'community' forms of governance.

In terms of 'network' governance, three of the five LAs had established local strategic partnership boards to try to engage and align key players around a shared place-based agenda, while Northern had achieved a similar outcome by creating the EP as a separate entity. Greany and Higham highlight a number of challenges with these arrangements, particularly in relation to equity and legitimacy given that membership is generally restricted to Ofsted Outstanding schools and excludes those schools most in need of support.

Turning to the relationships between 'network' and 'community' forms of governance, most of the LA interviewees were interested in how they could generate more autonomous 'school-led' (i.e. community governance) improvement arrangements. One common approach was to encourage schools to work together in clusters and partnerships, for example to undertake peer reviews and to share and develop expertise (Greany 2020). If this could be achieved, then the need for hierarchical oversight and support from the LA or from the market-place would, theoretically, reduce.

One key area of debate was around whether and how the LA should 'step back' from providing direct services and support, as a means of forcing schools to find their own solutions. As one LA Director explained:

> *I see different things happening [in LAs] nationally. Some areas where they have taken everything out and they are starting to build it up again, but that having taken it all out, from what I can see, there developed in the system a kind of stand-on-your-own-two-feet mentality, which has led schools to group together to work out how to do it for themselves. So be less dependent, which I think has some strengths in it.*

Certainly, some of the case study schools were clear that reductions in LA capacity and support had spurred them on to re-focus and re-energise their partnership work, reflecting a degree of 'community' governance. However, as Greany and Higham show, while the schools involved in these kinds of 'school-led' partnerships did usually share an identity and set of values (for example, they might all serve disadvantaged communities), their motives were not purely altruistic: rather, head teachers engaged in them in order to access additional resources and/or to ensure that their school would be ready to pass its next Ofsted inspection. Greany and Higham also show how collaboration between schools is complicated by competitive pressures, while many schools lack the capacity for such 'school-led' improvement.

These differential responses from schools meant that LA leaders were concerned about issues of equity and fragmentation if they 'stepped back' too quickly without putting alternative arrangements in place. Their concerns were borne out by evidence from Suburban, where the previously visionary LA collapsed in 'Soviet-style' fashion. The response from school leaders there was generally to focus on securing their own school's needs and future. For example, one primary head explained that he had formed a tightknit partnership (which later became a MAT) with a group of five other high-performing primaries in his town. However, he acknowledged that this arrangement had consciously excluded six other 'more vulnerable' local schools from joining, because it was felt that to include them would slow down the pace of improvement for the six founding schools.

Thus it seems that 'self-improving' community forms of governance can be more or less exclusive – a 'coalition of the willing' – with more vulnerable schools left unsupported. The challenge for LA leaders is then around how best to facilitate the development of 'school-led' improvement whilst also maintaining equity and a level of universal support. Northern achieved this by creating the EP, a membership organisation that could claim to be 'school led' in its governance and membership approach, despite being facilitated by the LA through its start-up funding and seconded director. This approach was arguably more feasible in a small and historically high performing urban context. By contrast, Western – a large, rural county – was struggling to get the balance right as it worked to transition from its 'highly respected' LA service to a cluster-based 'school-led' approach. While some school clusters in Western were operating as the LA hoped, others had struggled to become established in the face of historic competitive pressures, rurality and, sometimes, personality differences between individual leaders.

In Eastern, the arrival of new leaders at the LA had helped to unlock new, more networked and community forms of governance. The LA's historic low performance meant that it had high proportions of sponsored academies in MATs, even in 2014. Interviewees described the city as competitive and fragmented at that time, with large numbers of children attending private schools or schools outside the city's boundaries. The appointment of two new LA directors around that time was seen to have helped establish a new style and approach which had, in turn, engendered new ways of thinking and working from schools, particularly at secondary level. One MAT CEO argued that academisation had 'freed people up from the notion of "we meet to moan about the LA."' Instead he argued there was now a culture in which schools came together to share practice and to develop solutions to shared challenges. The LA was seen to be at work behind the scenes in these developments, quietly nudging and facilitating these ostensibly 'school-led' developments. At other times the LA was more overt, using its convening powers and ability to challenge schools based on data to initiate discussions around problematic policy issues, such as pupil exclusions, where the behaviour of one school or academy could impact negatively on others. As a result, school and academy leaders in Eastern argued that the LA had skilfully repositioned itself, moving from a hierarchical approach to a more facilitative one, and that this had helped to create a coherent, inclusive, city-wide ethos and approach. These changes might perhaps help to explain Eastern's rapid improvement in its Key Stage 2 and 4 outcomes over the five-year period.

Discussion and conclusion

This article combines path dependency and governance theories to explore the ways in which 'middle tier' institutional regimes are evolving in England. These changes are shaped by wider NPM liberalisation processes – centralisation, decentralisation, markets and disintermediation. This final section starts by identifying three overarching conclusions from this analysis. It then focuses briefly on the theoretical contribution of the article and identifies limitations as well as areas for further research.

Firstly, we see how a combination of national hierarchical mechanisms (statutory, accountability and funding) work in concert to require and/or incentivise change across local school landscapes. The path dependency vignettes illustrate that 'middle tier' responses are not uniform and reflect the accumulated actions and logics of multiple players. These differences may partially reflect contextual factors, such as differing levels of deprivation or the size of LAs, but they also go beyond these. Greany and Higham (2018:96) identify three factors which consistently influence local responses to change: the history of relationships between schools and with the LA; the context of individual schools; and the agency of local actors. This article supports and develops that analysis, not least by adding in LA context alongside that of individual schools. It shows that the presence or absence of 'middle tier' agency, in particular from LA leaders, can both build on and reshape historical relationships with schools to influence how key actors come together – or not – to address collective, place-based priorities and outcomes. Critically, the article signals that different 'middle tier' responses might be associated with different academic outcomes for children: thus, while Northern sustains its high performance over the five years and Eastern sees a gradual improvement, Suburban's collapse means it performs well below pre-2010 and expected levels.

Secondly, the reduction in the remit and capacity of LAs has reshaped but not removed the 'middle tier' in England. This process has shifted the balance across and between different governance mechanisms. So, for example, academies within MATs are now subject to much tighter oversight and hierarchical control than their predecessor LA maintained schools, while MATs are regulated by RSCs on behalf of national, rather than local, government.[4] Meanwhile, LAs are less able to rely on hierarchical control over schools and are more subject to market forces in their provision of 'back office' and improvement services. The result of these and the wider changes outlined above is that local school systems are now more fragmented and less clearly place-based, creating what Crawford et al. (2020: 14) call a 'multi-dimensional middle'. All five local areas now encompass multiple MATs, stand-alone academies and maintained schools, while many of these MATs operate regionally and even nationally. New players have emerged to steer the work of academies and schools, from RSCs to TSAs, usually working across geographical boundaries that are not coterminous with LAs. The Introduction set out four interpretations of how traditional 'middle tier' frameworks might develop in the context of NPM liberalisation: i) aligned, tri-level reform; ii) 'highly centralized system steering' (Ozga 2009:149); iii) heterarchical governance; and iv) 'middle out' change. England has clearly not pursued the 'tri-level' approach, but neither has the 'middle tier' become redundant, despite increased central steering. Instead it is in the process of being reshaped in ways which are certainly more complex and heterarchical, but in which there is scope for LAs and other players to exercise agency – aligning around place-based agendas in ways that can be characterised as 'middle out' change.

Thirdly, leading and managing at the local level requires new leadership skills and qualities from local 'system' leaders, including LA staff, school leaders and other stakeholders. A number of observers have argued that decentralisation requires creative, systems thinkers and boundary spanners, able to engage and facilitate contributions from multiple stakeholders across complex adaptive systems (Burns and Koster 2016; Hallgarten, Hannon, and Beresford 2015; Williams 2012). This article broadly supports these assessments, particularly where LA leaders are seeking to foster network and community forms of governance which support 'middle out' change. However, the article also highlights how LA leaders must combine and align such facilitative styles with their continuing hierarchical and market-management roles. Used judiciously, these roles can offer a level of influence, legitimacy and moral authority, even as LA capacity declines. The alternative – i.e. 'stepping back' and hoping that schools will 'self-improve' – appears naïve at best, and is certainly not successful in Suburban. That said, it does appear that the LA can step back from certain areas – most obviously the delivery of hands-on improvement and professional development work, which, with the right brokerage and support, can be undertaken by others. Where the LA's influence appears particularly critical is in sustaining collective commitment to a shared local identity and set of rules, for example agreeing and policing a set of protocols on pupil exclusions. This suggests that in addition to boundary spanning skills, LA leaders must also use 'scale-craft' skills (Papanastasiou 2017). In this sense, 'system' leaders must be able to shape a shared and meaningful conception of why and how a particular notion of 'place' matters, even while also working across multiple, alternative scale-based realities, because by doing so they can bind diverse stakeholders together to work towards realising this place-based vision.

Turning, briefly, to the theoretical contribution from this paper, the approach adopted here is by no means the only option for analysing 'middle tier' change in the context of NPM, as other authors have shown (Woods and Simkins 2014; Glazer, Massell, and Malone 2019). What seems clear is that the pitfalls and unintended consequences associated with NPM are becoming ever more apparent at this 'middle tier' level. However, as Hanno Theisens (2016:60) puts it 'there is no simple way back' because 'traditional centralised governance structures simply won't work in contemporary societies', so 'the big question is: what's next?' Understanding local processes of, and outcomes from, change, in the ways attempted here, appears to be a fruitful avenue for addressing this question. Streeck and Thelen's framework was initially developed to analyse processes of endogenous change, but by combining it with an assessment of governance mechanisms, including 'community', the framework can enhance this analysis of exogenously influenced change. Critically, this approach allows for an assessment of the 'middle tier' as a site of what Streeck and Thelen describe as constant 'ongoing skirmishing' between structure and agency, as different actors seek advantage by 'interpreting or redirecting institutions in pursuit of their goals, or by subverting or circumnavigating rules' (2005:19). Proponents of decentralisation argue that it can unlock local agency and collective ownership of complex problems, enabling more effective, joined-up and contextually sensitive approaches to the provision of public services (Naylor and Wellings 2019; Hambleton 2016). This article challenges any simplistic assumption that government can simply 'step back' or that 'middle out' change will develop automatically, but it also shows that network and community forms of governance are possible and necessary if place-based coherence and equity are to be achieved.

Inevitably, in such a complex area, this article has limitations. By seeking to combine an original conceptual analysis with a focus on specific developments and empirical data from England, it risks trying to achieve too much in too short a space. The counter argument is that the empirical examples allow for a richer, more adaptive approach to theory development and application, informed by England's relative outlier status as a crucible of hyper-reform (Layder 1998). Certainly, the empirical analysis is limited and there is a case for a much wider study of the ways in which the 'middle tier' is developing, both in England and in other NPM contexts. Such a study could help to address the many research questions that emerge from this analysis, but particularly the issue of how macro governance processes play out in local practice and the impact this has on outcomes as well as equity and legitimacy in contemporary public services.

Notes

1. See here for a list of LA statutory responsibilities: https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/118245/Education-in-partnership-Local-Authority-education-duties-v2.pdf
2. LA services to maintained schools are mainly funded through a percentage topslice, taken from the local schools budget. Academies receive their funding direct from national government, so this topslice does not apply.
3. Ambition Institute is a charitable company funded by government to provide leadership development programmes to schools – see https://www.ambition.org.uk/. The EEF is charity, endowed by the government, with a remit to promote evidence-based research and programmes – see https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/
4. Once within a MAT, an academy has no independent powers and cannot choose to leave, although the MAT board can choose to delegate some decision-making rights to individual academy level.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Dr Rob Higham (UCL Institute of Education) for his work with me on the 'Hierarchies, Market and Networks' research. I am also grateful to the team that worked with me at UCL IOE (Becky Allen, Iain Barnes, Ruth McGinity, Trevor Male, Rebecca Nelson and Louise Stoll) and ISOS Partnership (Simon Day, Robert Hill, Peter Matthews, Natalie Parish, Simon Rea and Kate Wilson) to undertake the 'Sustainable Improvement in School Groups' research.

Disclosure statement

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The 'Hierarchies, Market and Networks' research (Greany and Higham 2018) was funded by the Nuffield Foundation. The 'Sustainable Improvement in School Groups' research (Greany 2018) was funded by the Department for Education, UK.

Notes on contributor

Toby Greany is Professor of Education at the University of Nottingham, UK. His research focuses on the ways in which governance mechanisms, leadership agency and evidence interact to influence current and potential educational opportunities, processes and outcomes, in particular for disadvantaged groups. He is a former Senior Civil Servant and adviser to the House of Commons Education Select Committee.

ORCID

Toby Greany http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3045-7047

References

Adler, P. 2001. "Market, Hierarchy and Trust: The Knowledge Economy and the Future of Capitalism." *Organisation Science* 12 (2): 215–234.

Ainscow, M. 2015. *Towards Self-Improving School Systems: Lessons from a City Challenge*. London: Routledge.

Anderson, E., and M. Young. 2018. "If They Knew Then What We Know Now, Why Haven't Things Changed? An Examination of District Effectiveness Research." *Frontiers in Education* 3: 87. doi:10.3389/feduc.2018.00087.

Ball, S. 1994. *Education Reform: A Critical and Post-structural Approach*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Ball, S. 2007. *Education Plc: Understanding Private Sector Participation in Public Sector Education*. London: Routledge.

Ball, S., and C. Junemann. 2012. *Networks, New Governance and Education*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Barber, M., C. Chijoke, and M. Mourshed. 2010. *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*. London: McKinseys.

Bernardinelli, D., S. Rutt, T. Greany, and R. Higham. 2018. *Multi-academy Trusts: Do They Make a Difference to Pupil Outcomes?* London: UCL IOE Press. www.ucl-ioe-press.com/books/education-policy/hierarchy-markets-and-networks/

Bevir, M., ed. 2011. *The Sage Handbook of Governance*. London: Sage.

Bubb, S., J. Crossley-Holland, J. Cordiner, S. Cousin, and P. Earley. 2019. *Understanding the Middle Tier: Comparative Costs of Academy and LA-maintained School Systems*. London: Sara Bubb Associates.

Burns, T., and F. Koster, eds. 2016. *Governing Education in a Complex World, Educational Research and Innovation'*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Caldwell, B., and J. Spinks. 2013. *The Self-transforming School*. Oxford: Routledge.

Chapman, C. 2019. "From Hierarchies to Networks: Possibilities and Pitfalls for Educational Reform of the Middle Tier." *Journal of Educational Administration* 57 (5): 554–570. doi:10.1108/JEA-12-2018-0222.

Coldron, J., Crawford, M., Jones, S., Simkins, T., (2014) The restructuring of schooling in England: the responses of well-positioned headteachers. Educational Management, Educational Management Administration & Leadership 42 (3), 387-403. doi:10.1177/1741143214521592

Cousin, S. 2018. "System Leaders in England: Leaders of a Profession, or Instruments of Government?" *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*. http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1741143217751726

Crawford, M., B. Maxwell, J. Coldron, and T. Simkins. 2020. "Local Authorities as Actors in the Emerging "School-led" System in England." *Educational Review*. doi:10.1080/00131911.2020.1739625.

Daly, A., and K. Finnigan, Eds. 2016. *Thinking and Acting Systemically: Improving School Districts under Pressure*. Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

DfE (Department for Education). 2010. *The Importance of Teaching: The Schools White Paper*. London: HMSO.

Earley, P. 2013. *Exploring the School Leadership Landscape: Changing Demands, Changing Realities*. London: Bloomsbury.

Frankowski, A., M. van der Steen, D. Bressers, and M. Schulz. 2018. "Dilemmas of Central Governance and Distributed Autonomy in Education: Three Education Policies in the Netherlands' OECD Education." *Working Paper No. 189*. Paris.

Gilbert, C., (2017) Optimism of the will: the development of local area-based partnerships. London: LCLL.

Glazer, J., D. Massell, and M. Malone. 2019. “Charter Schools in Turnaround: Competing Institutional Logics in the Tennessee Achievement School District.” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 41/1: 5–33. doi:10.3102/0162373718795051.

Greany, T. 2015. “More Fragmented, and yet More Networked: Analysing the Responses of Two Local Authorities in England to the Coalition’s ‘Self-improving School-led System’ Reforms.” *London Review of Education* 13 (2): 125–143(19). doi:10.18546/LRE.13.2.11.

Greany, T. 2018. “Sustainable Improvement in Multi-school Groups.” *Department for Education Research report 2017/038*. London: Department for Education.

Greany, T. 2020. “Self-policing or Self-improving?: Analysing Peer Reviews between Schools in England through the Lens of Isomorphism.” In *School Peer Review for Educational Improvement and Accountability: Theory, Practice and Policy Implications*, edited by D. Godfrey, (pp. 18-32). London: Springer.

Greany, T., and R. Higham. 2018. *Hierarchy, Markets and Networks: Analysing the ‘Self-improving School-led System’ Agenda in England and the Implications for Schools*. London: UCL IOE Press.

Hallgarten, J., V. Hannon, and T. Beresford. 2015. *Creative Public Leadership: How School System Leaders Can Create the Conditions for System-wide Innovation*. Dubai: WISE.

Hambleton, R. 2016. “Place Based Leadership.” *RSA*. https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-comment/2016/11/place-based-leadership

Hanson-Thiem, C. 2008. “Thinking through Education: The Geographies of Contemporary Educational Restructuring.” *Progress in Human Geography* 33 (2): 154–173. doi:10.1177/0309132508093475.

Hatcher, R. 2014. “Local Authorities and the School System: The New Authority-wide Structures.” *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* 42 (3): 355–371. doi:10.1177/1741143214521591.

Hood, C. 1991. “A Public Management for All Seasons.” *Public Administration* 69 (1): 3–19. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.1991.tb00779.x.

Hudson, G. 2007. “Governing the Governance of Education: The State Strikes Back?” *European Educational Research Journal* 6 (3): 266–282. doi:10.2304/eerj.2007.6.3.266.

Jessop, B. 2011. “Metagovernance.” In *The Sage Handbook of Governance*, edited by M. Bevir, 106–123. London: Sage.

Kennedy, M. 2016. “How Does Professional Development Improve Teaching?” *Review of Educational Research* 86 (4): 945–980. doi:10.3102/0034654315626800.

Layder, D. 1998. *Sociological Practice: Linking Theory and Research*. London: Sage.

Leithwood, K., and C. Mccullough. 2017. *Strong Districts and Their Leadership Project (Executive Summary)*. Toronto: Council of Ontario Directors of Education.

Leithwood, K., and V. N. Azah. 2017. “Characteristics of High-performing School Districts.” *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 16: 27–53. doi:10.1080/15700763.2016.1197282.

Levin, B. 2012. *System-wide Improvement in Education*. Brussels: Jointly published by UNESCO, Paris and The International Academy of Education.

Lubienski, C. 2014. “Re-making the Middle: Dis-intermediation in International Context.” *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 42 (3): 434–435. doi:10.1177/1741143214521594.

Moe, T. 2019. *The Politics of Institutional Reform: Katrina, Education and the Second Face of Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mullis, I., M. Martin, and T. Loveless. 2016. *20 Years of TIMSS: International Trends in Mathematics and Science Achievement, Curriculum and Instruction*. Boston: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).

Munby, S., and M. Fullan. 2016. “Inside-out and Downside-up: How Leading from the Middle Has the Power to Transform Education Systems.” Education Development Trust/Motion Leadership. Accessed 27 March 2020. https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/EducationDevelopmentTrust/files/51/51251173-e25d-4b34-80ae-033fcd7685ab.pdf

Naylor, C., and D. Wellings. 2019. *A Citizen-led Approach to Health and Social Care: Lessons from the Wigan Deal*. London: King’s Fund.

Nederhand, J., V. Bekkers, and W. Voorberg. 2016. “Self-Organization and the Role of Government: How and Why Does Self-organization Evolve in the Shadow of Hierarchy?” *Public Management Review* 18 (7): 1063–1084. doi:10.1080/14719037.2015.1066417.

Newsam, P. 2014. *The Autobiography of an Education, Part Two: Inner London Education Authority 1972–1982*. Pickering: Greenlea Books.

Newton, P., and J. da Costa. 2016. “School Autonomy and 21st Century Learning: The Canadian Context.” *International Journal of Educational Management* 30 (7): 1279–1292.

OECD. 2011. “PISA In Focus 2011/9 (October).” Accessed 15 July 2015. www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/pisa-in-focus_22260919

OECD. 2015. *Schooling Redesigned: Towards Innovative Learning Systems (Educational Research and Innovation)*. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi:10.1787/9789264245914-en.

Ofsted. 2018. *The annual report of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills: 2017/18*. London: Ofsted.

Ozga, J. 2009. “Governing Education through Data in England: From Regulation to Self-evaluation.” *Journal of Education Policy* 24 (2): 149–162. doi:10.1080/02680930902733121.

Ozga, J. 2011. “Governing Narratives: ‘Local’ Meanings and Globalising Education Policy.” *Education Inquiry* 2 (2): 305–318. doi:10.3402/edui.v2i2.21982.

Papanastasiou, N. 2017. “The Practice of Scalecraft: Scale, Policy and the Politics of the Market in England’s Academy Schools.” *Environment and Planning A* 49 (5): 1060–1079. doi:10.1177/0308518X16687764.

Pritchett, L. 2018. “The Politics of Learning: Directions for Future Research.” *RISE Working Paper 18/020*. Accessed 30 March 2020. https://www.riseprogramme.org/sites/www.riseprogramme.org/files/publications/RISE_WP-020_Pritchett.pdf

Richmond, R., EDSK. 2019. *Trust Issues: How to Bring Academies and Maintained Schools into a Unified State School System*. London.

Sahlberg, P. 2011. *Finnish Lessons*. New York: Columbia Teachers College Press.

Simkins, T., J. Coldron, M. Crawford, and S. Jones. 2015. “Emerging Local Schooling Landscapes: The Role of the Local Authority.” *School Leadership & Management* 35 (1): 1–16. doi:10.1080/13632434.2014.962501.

Streeck, W., and K. Thelen. 2005. 'Introduction' in Streeck, W., and Thelen, K., (2005) (Eds.) Beyond continuity: institutional change in advanced political economies pp1-39. Oxford: OUP.

Tenbensel, T. 2005. “Multiple Modes of Governance.” *Public Management Review* 7 (2): 267–288. doi:10.1080/14719030500091566.

Tenbensel, T. 2017. “Bridging Complexity Theory and Hierarchies, Markets, Networks, Communities: A ‘Population Genetics’ Framework for Understanding Institutional Change from Within.” *Public Management Review*. doi:10.1080/14719037.2017.1364409.

Theisens, H. 2016. “Chapter 3. Hierarchies, Networks and Improvisation in Education Governance.” In *Governing Education in a Complex World. Educational Research and Innovation*, edited by T. Burns and F. Koster, (pp. 55-70). Paris: OECD Publishing.

Theisens, H., (2016) 'Hierarchies, networks and improvisation in education governance', in Burns, T., and Koster, F., (Eds.) (2016) Governing Education in a Complex World pp55-70. Paris: OECD.

Timperley, H., A. Wilson, H. Barrar, and I. Fung. 2007. *Teacher Professional Learning and Development - Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.

Trujillo, T. 2013. “The Reincarnation of the Effective Schools Research: Rethinking the Literature on District Effectiveness.” *Journal of Educational Administration* 51/4: 426–452. doi:10.1108/09578231311325640.

Volansky, A. 2003. *The Pendulum Syndrome: Centralisation and Decentralisation of Education in England and Wales*. Tel Aviv: Ramot Publishing.

West, A., and D. Wolfe. 2018. “Academies, the School System in England and a Vision for the Future: Executive Summary.” *Clare Market Papers No. 23*.

Wilkinson, J., C. Edwards-Groves, P. Grootenboer, and S. Kemmis. 2019. “District Offices Fostering Educational Change through Instructional Leadership Practices in Australian

Catholic Secondary Schools." *Journal of Educational Administration* 57/5: 501–518. doi:10.1108/JEA-09-2018-0179.

Williams, P., (2012) Collaboration in Public Policy and Practice: perspectives on boundary spanners. Bristol: Policy Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctt1t89g31

Woods, P., and T. Simkins. 2014. "Structural Reform in England: Emerging Configurations of Governance and Leadership in the New 'Local'." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 42 (3): 321–323. doi:10.1177/1741143214532070.