



CONCEPT NOTE

# School Leadership

Concept Note on Promoting  
Effective School Leadership

June 2019

## Rationale for School Leadership

School leaders play a vital role in creating the conditions for effective teaching and learning. No school has sustainably improved the quality of education without effective school leadership. Good leaders identify the aspects of their schools on which to focus to help students learn. They do this through various dimensions of leadership practices (figure 1). Research (e.g., Robinson et al., 2008; Leithwood et al., 2008; Bloom, Lemos, Sadun, & Van Reenen, 2015) has shown that school leadership matters for quality education because:

- the impact of school leadership on learning outcomes is second only to the quality of teaching and learning;
- school leaders who develop, support and evaluate the quality of teaching have a big influence on learning outcomes;
- effective school leadership is critical for raising learners’ achievement;
- effective school leadership is particularly important in improving poorly performing and disadvantaged schools;
- successful school leadership has a positive impact on the entire school.

In many school systems, effective school leadership is far from the norm. It is often assumed that good teachers will make good school leaders and that they will learn school leadership “on the job”. However, not only are the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required for head teachers different from those required for teachers, head teachers also need to develop their identity as a head teacher. This search for identity, as well as the “structural loneliness” of a head teacher, often leads to anxiety (Kelchtermans et al., 2011). This is enhanced by the increasing complexity and diversification of leadership in schools, where deputy head teachers, mentor teachers, School General Assembly Committees and others assume leadership roles.



Figure 1: Dimensions of strong school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2008)

## Policy Framework on School Leadership in Rwanda

The Teacher Development and Management policy has identified the need to make school leadership and management effective as a priority (strategic objective 6). Planned activities under this strategic objective include the establishment of professional standards for school leaders, the organisation of continuous professional development for school leaders and the creation of professional learning networks. Anticipating the approval of the policy, the School Leadership and Management Unit and VVOB have developed, piloted and researched professional learning networks for head teachers as a cost-effective form of in-service training (Ife, 2013).

The new ESSP (2018/19 to 2022/23) is structured around nine strategic priorities, of which strategic priority 9 (Strengthened governance and accountability across all levels of education) is particularly relevant for school leaders. Strategic priority 9 states that the focus on improved learning demands the development of strong school leadership. The ESSP highlights the challenge to transform the role of school leaders from a largely administrative role to becoming true leaders of their schools with more focus on leading teaching and learning in the school. The ESSP recognizes the need for training, capacity building and support, and refers to the role of effective professional learning communities and positive learning environments in this. School leaders also play an important role in the realisation of strategic priorities in the ESSP, notably strategic priority 1 (enhanced quality learning outcomes that are relevant to Rwanda’s social and economic development), strategic priority 2 (Strengthened CPD and management of teachers across all levels of education in Rwanda), and strategic priority 6 (Strengthened modern school infrastructure and facilities across all levels of education in Rwanda).

## Promoting Effective School Leadership in Rwanda

Focusing on the stakeholders at sector and school level, VVOB, in partnership with REB and University of Rwanda, College of Education (UR-CE) has been developing a school leadership system, based on research evidence on school leadership, aligned with the priorities and strategies of the Government of Rwanda, and in close consultation and cooperation with other development partners in the education sector.

With support of VVOB, REB has developed and piloted professional standards for school leaders (figure 2) that describe the main competences for head teachers and deputy head teachers. These standards have been approved by REB and are awaiting approval from MINEDUC. To ensure head teachers and deputy head teachers can perform up to these standards, REB and UR-CE, in partnership with VVOB, initiated a support system for school leaders that reflects the characteristics of effective professional development for education professionals: it is sustained, ongoing and intensive, with regular follow-up support in schools; emphasizes learning by doing; tailored to head teachers’ existing knowledge and practices; focused on student learning; and supported by education leadership at sector and district level .

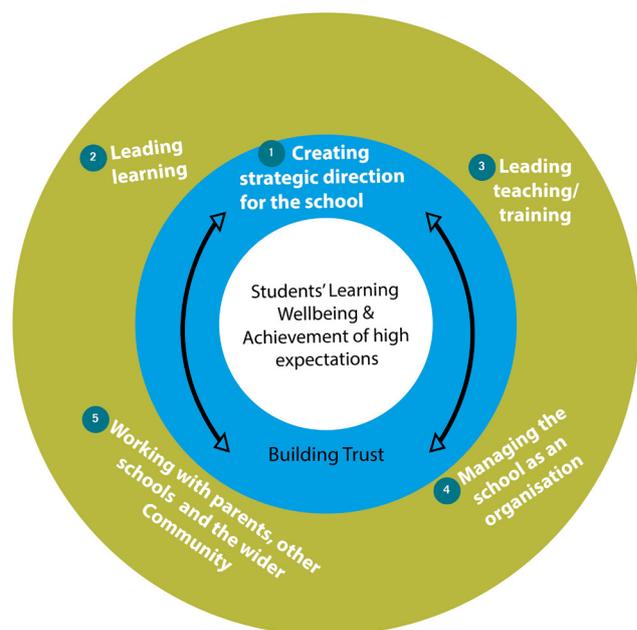


Figure 2: National School Leadership Standards

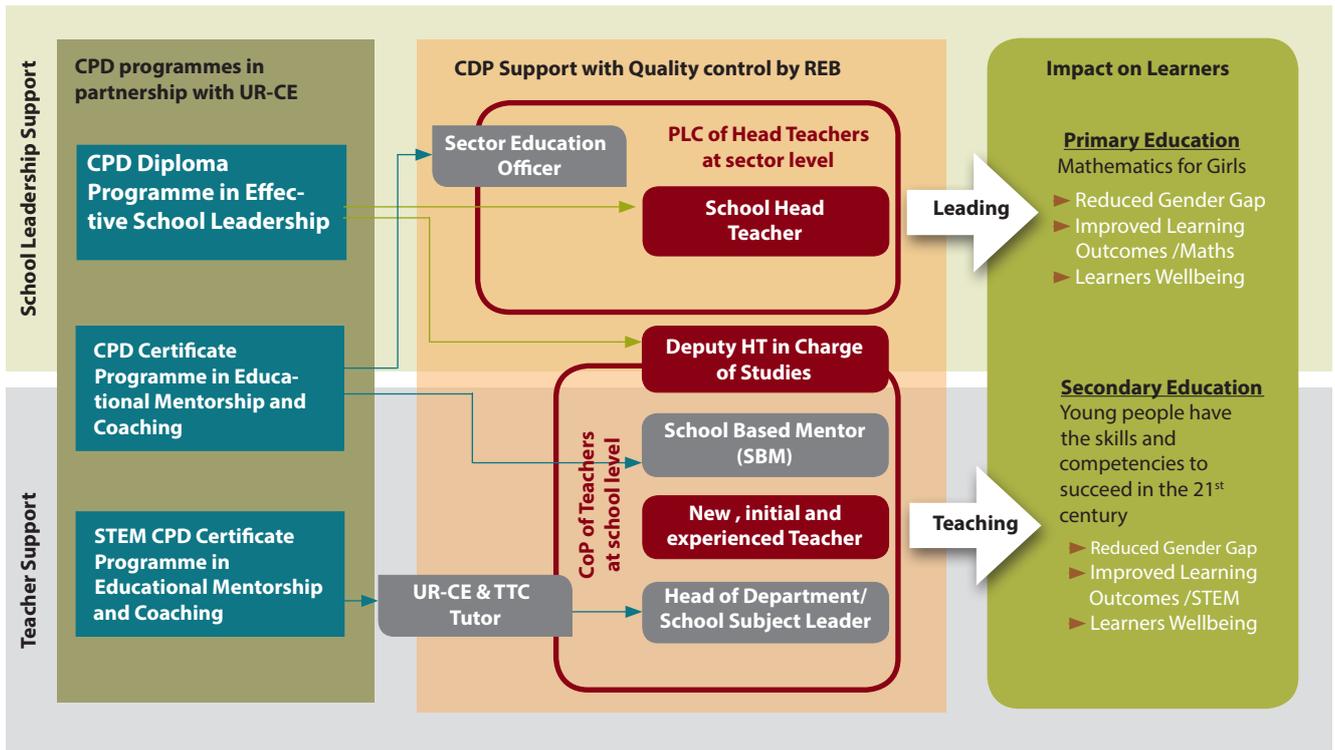


Figure 3: Overview of support to school leaders and teachers in Leading, Teaching and Learning Together (LT)<sup>2</sup> Programme



VVOB through its multi-year programme “Leading, Teaching and Learning Together (LT)<sup>2</sup>” aims at raising the effectiveness of school leaders by improving the delivery, sustainability and institutionalisation of CPD services. This is done through two modalities of providing CPD: URCE certified CPD training programmes that are spaced in time and CPD support in peer communities under the guidance of trained sector officials. Based on these modalities, VVOB strengthens the quality of school leadership through three capacity development interventions.

## CPD Diploma Programme in Effective School Leadership

The programme aims at equipping head teachers and deputy head teachers with the competences to fulfil their roles as school leaders. The standards for effective school leadership form the backbone of the programme. Attention is paid to both concentrated and distributed forms of leadership, inclusive education and both task and emotional dimensions of school leadership. The course is offered as a year-long programme with 18 contact days (16 training days and 2 examination days).

The programme was first offered by UR-CE as a Diploma Programme in 2016 when 397 head teachers from schools with a primary section graduated (1 head teacher per sector was enrolled). Monitoring, evaluation and research formed the basis for extensive revisions of the programme in 2017 (VVOB, 2016a) and 2018. Since 2018, the programme is offered to head teachers and deputy head teachers. Between 2018 and 2021, all head teachers from primary schools (including 9-year and 12-year basic education schools) in 6 districts and all head teachers and deputy head teachers from secondary schools (including 9-year and 12-year basic education schools) in 14 districts will take part in the one-year programme. During this period, about 2000 school leaders from 1322 schools will take part in the programme. District Directors of Education (DDEs) and District Education Officers (DEOs) from 17 districts enrol in the programme in 2019.

As of 2019, the Diploma Programme is offered as a blended programme (VVOB, 2019). In between face to face sessions, participants will take part in online discussions, activities and readings.

## CPD Certificate Programme in Educational Mentorship and Coaching

This certificate programme is delivered by URCE with the aim of equipping Sector Education Officers (SEOs), currently Sector Education Inspectors (SEIs) with skills for coaching School Leaders in leading their schools effectively based on their oversight role for quality education in their respective sectors and building the capacity of School Based Mentors (SBMs) to support teachers and school leaders (Head Teachers and Deputy head teachers) in coordination of CPD through planning and implementation of CPD activities for teachers in general, as a significant means for improving quality of teaching and learning. Tutors from Teacher Training Centres also benefit from this programme to be able to support schools in the induction of New Teachers.

This programme was first offered in 2018 to 85 Sector Education Officers (SEOs) and 40 SBMs in primary schools and 139 SEOs and 227 SBMs in secondary schools in 17 districts. In this regard, SEOs are provided with coaching and mentoring skills for guiding and organizing sector-based Professional Learning Communities of school leaders. All SEOs in the 17 intervention districts will take part in the certificate programme.

## Professional Learning Communities (PLC) under guidance of SEOs

VVOB's experience has shown that trainings alone are insufficient and need to be complemented by strategies that provide continuous support and involve school leaders themselves. PLCs can be an effective form of professional development (e.g., Vescio et al., 2008; Ingvarson et al., 2005). They bridge the gap between theory, policy and practice, focus on practice, provide opportunities to participants to break out of their isolation, create a forum for sharing and contribute to job satisfaction and motivation (Vande Walle and Fransen, 2017). Their cost-effectiveness and embeddedness into existing structures at sector level contributes to their sustainability as an instrument for professional development.

Research has underlined the importance of a competent and motivated leader for PLCs to introduce fresh insights and ideas and avoid group thinking (e.g. Brodie, 2013). VVOB's experience has confirmed the need for extensive coaching and feedback to help PLC members understand the bottom-up and collaborative nature of PLCs and the positive impact on head teachers' and teachers' motivation (VVOB, 2017).

As inspectors at the local level, SEOs play a central role in collecting and analysing school performance data. These data form the basis of identifying areas for improvement and establishing collaboration among schools. Through their engagement in PLCs of school leaders, SEOs obtain better insight in school performance and take more data-driven decisions.

## Assessment of practices

School leadership practices are assessed in various ways to ensure that capacity development interventions result in demonstrable, sustainable and desirable changes in leadership practices:

- As part of their formative assessment, participants in the Diploma Programme submit eight practice-based written assignments that challenge them to relate the course content to their school practice in collaboration with school stakeholders. Similarly, SEOs submit an assignment after each of their 4 sessions.
- An assessment tool for school leaders on the five professional standards has been developed and approved by REB. This tool is used by school leaders to assess their competences at the start of the Diploma Programme and identify priorities.
- Throughout the Diploma Programme, participants construct a Portfolio of Evidence that documents how they implement each professional standard for school leaders as a result of taking part in the programme. Similarly, SEOs document how the certificate programme has helped them to implement their oversight role of quality implementation of education policy and strategy at the sector level and of organizing PLCs.
- The Diploma Programme includes a field visit by trainers to support participants in implementing what they have learned and providing them with constructive feedback, based on the assessment tool for school leaders. The Certificate Programme includes two field visits, one supportive and one evaluative.

## M&E and research findings

The effectiveness of the Diploma Programme has been investigated through quantitative and qualitative methods (VVOB, 2018). Results from Knowledge – Attitude -Practices (KAP) surveys with the first cohort (primary education only) indicate that head teachers show more favourable attitudes about shared leadership and their instructional role as a result of the Diploma Programme. Additionally, some significant improvements were found in the importance head teachers assign to aspects of professional climate, such as the relationships between teachers and students, a culture of sharing among teachers and a common set of beliefs about education among teachers. These results were confirmed by a qualitative study that found an impact on both head teachers’ actions and “thinking” about school leadership, their tasks and their involvement of others within the school community.



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