

HEADTEACHERS OF SMALL SCOTTISH PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A MATCH FOR THE JOB?

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[Being the Headteacher of a small school] is something I have wanted to do for such a long time. I can see me being happy here and I am very happy at the moment. (Headteacher: 58 pupil school)

I would like to move to a non-teaching headship at a larger school. I don't want to stagnate by remaining in the same school for a long period. Also the lack of time will become even more acute when I lose the other teacher next year. (Headteacher: 18 pupil school)

SYNOPSIS

This article is based upon the findings from a SOEID-funded two-year study of the management of change in small Scottish primary schools. As 38 per cent of all primary schools in Scotland are small, this is not an insignificant issue for Scottish education. Despite the high percentage, there has been little previous research on the headteachers who work in small schools. Our aim here is two-fold: first, we set the research in context and present a 'snapshot' of small school headteachers, their qualifications, experiences, routes to headship and career aspirations; second, we compare the emerging picture of this group of headteachers, most of whom have extensive teaching responsibilities, with the unique nature of management in small primary schools. In conclusion, we suggest that either by accident or design a good match between the two emerges.

INTRODUCTION

The need to develop a more realistic picture of how small primary schools are managed was the focus of a Scottish Office-funded research project undertaken by the Scottish Council for Research in Education. The research explored the management of change, including Devolved School Management, in small primary schools throughout Scotland using a two-stage approach. The first phase of the research was based upon the results of a postal survey of headteachers of every small Scottish primary school in October 1996. The second phase of the study, conducted from January to April 1997, included an examination of the effective management of change in 18 case-study small schools. The findings from both stages were combined to provide a picture of the management of change in small schools which we have reported elsewhere (Wilson & McPake, 1998a, 1998b). In this article, our aim is two-fold: first, we explore the career histories of headteachers in small schools, their qualifications and previous experiences, their routes to headship and their career aspirations; second, we compare these with the reality of managing small schools, pointing out potential matches and mismatches between the two.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The aims of the research should be located against a background of rapid, multiple educational innovation, both curricular and managerial, which has occurred during the past decade. In Scotland, this includes the 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines, School Development Planning (SDP), Staff Development and Appraisal (SDA) [relaunched as Staff Development and Review in 1998] and Devolved School Management (DSM). Headteachers in all Scottish schools have had to manage these initiatives:

our particular concern was to identify the strategies adopted by headteachers in small schools. Specifically the research aimed to:

- identify management strategies and activities adopted by headteachers in small schools to manage change; and
- assess available support and development opportunities.

Here we wish to focus on the headteachers who work in small schools, 82% of whom responded to our postal questionnaire. We hope this ‘snapshot’ will provide a clear, more complete picture of small school management than has previously existed.

BACKGROUND

The Scottish Context

This research should be seen in the context of both the number and distribution of small primary schools throughout Scotland, and also the variety of initiatives which all schools have had to manage in recent years. Thirty-eight percent of primary schools (to be precise 863 schools) in Scotland are small. In this project, a small school is defined as one with a roll of 120 pupils or less. The distinguishing feature of such schools, apart from school size, is the headteachers’ teaching obligations. This does present challenges in terms of school management. As one would expect, the majority of small primary schools are sited predominantly in the ten Education Authorities which cover the rural and island areas. In those councils, the preponderance of small schools meant that managing a small school was not a minority experience for headteachers or the Education Authorities.

A number of other factors may also influence how small schools are managed. Somekh (1995) suggests that location has a crucial role to play in the development of headteachers’ managerial style. She quotes Forsythe *et al* (1983) who report that respondents in the Highlands perceived their primary schools to be an important and integral part of their community. This may not be the case in smaller schools which are located close to urban centres, or where parental choice has resulted in a high proportion of pupils from outwith the schools’ traditional catchment areas. Legislation passed since 1988 has significantly altered the role of the headteacher and the status of parents through policies promoting parental choice of schools and School Board membership. In addition, a more ancient statute, the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act still influences school size and distribution, as it guarantees Roman Catholics (approximately one sixth of the population) the right to separate schools funded by the state. It is, therefore, possible that both denominational and non-denominational primary schools may exist within relatively close proximity of each other, resulting in even smaller school rolls for the locality. Finally, the siting of Gaelic medium units, sometimes as one composite class attached to a small primary school, poses additional managerial challenges for some.

HEADTEACHERS AND THEIR CAREERS

Although in general there is a paucity of literature on small primary schools in Scotland, a number of salient issues emerge from either previous small-scale studies or ones conducted exclusively in England. Some (Comber, 1981; Bell & Sigsworth, 1987; Wallace, 1988, 1989; Way, 1989; Galton, 1993) argue the fact that small school headteachers teach has a significant implication for school management. In previous research on 5-14 undertaken by SCRE (Harlen and Malcolm, 1993), several other factors also appeared to influence the management of curricular innovation. Time, or the lack of it, was perceived to be an issue, and headteachers, who teach for up to four and a half days per week, clearly have less time for management than their non-teaching colleagues and significantly less than the Scottish average (68% on

non-contact duties and 32% on class contact time, SOEID, 1996).

It may also be the case that teachers and headteachers in small schools (and particularly small rural schools) have different career backgrounds and aspirations to those in larger schools. In their study of 68 small primary schools from nine local education authorities in England, Galton and Patrick (1993) conclude that: [teachers in small schools] 'had similar qualifications, similar ages, attended the same number of in-service activities and also displayed similar values and concerns as before taking up their present posts'. We will argue in this article that this is not necessarily the case in Scotland.

Size of school and attitude towards headship may also be related. We hypothesised at the beginning of our research that headship of a small school may be viewed in two distinct but not necessarily compatible ways: as 'a post for life', perhaps associated with a life/career choice, or a route to 'bigger things'. (Both are exemplified by our respondents quoted at the beginning of this article.) How the job is perceived, by teachers and also by Education Authorities, whose experiences of relating to and providing support for small schools vary according to the percentage of small schools within each authority, may crucially affect the management style adopted and, ultimately, the curricular outcomes.

Finally, we must remember that School Boards, parents and the larger community can support headteachers in their management tasks, although this in itself presents a management challenge. As Southworth (1995) points out in an English context, there are real differences between *working with* and *working on* governing bodies as they undertake their legal responsibilities.

A 'SNAPSHOT' OF HEADSHIP IN SMALL SCOTTISH SCHOOLS

As we saw from the literature, there is limited information on the backgrounds, qualifications, experiences and aspirations of headteachers of small schools. One study conducted in England (Galton, 1993) reports that in most respects teachers in small schools are similar to those in larger schools. Comparable data for Scotland (see SOEID, 1996) is absent and to provide it would have been beyond the remit of our study, which focused exclusively on small schools. However, in the following sections of this article, we shall report the relevant findings from a postal survey of headteachers in all 863 small schools in Scotland and illustrate the emerging issues with selected statements from interviews conducted in 18 case-study schools. In general, we know little of what prompts teachers to apply for headships in small schools. It may, as one of our respondents explained, be as much to do with serendipity as career planning:

The job came up and I had never ever in my whole life even thought of promotion in any way because I was completely happy in the classroom. And I was given encouragement through my family, and also through people in education... and I did get, people in the town itself, you know people within the community actually encouraged me. (Headteacher, under 60 pupil school)

Gender

Gender appears to be a distinguishing factor in small school headship: 81% per cent of respondents (or 571 heads) were female, 19% male (135). This finding differs both from the gender balance nationally in primary school teaching (92% female and 8% male), and from the national picture of primary headteachers (73% female, 27% male) However, in small schools with four teachers or more, the balance of female (76%) and male (24%) headteachers is close to the national figure. It is clear that the smaller the school, the more likely it is that a woman will be headteacher,

although even in the smallest schools (i.e. those with fewer than 60 pupils), there is still an over-representation of male heads (16%), given the overwhelmingly female primary teacher population.

Age

Most survey respondents (483 or 68%) were aged between 35 and 50. This suggests that a substantial number became teachers before teaching in Scotland became an all-graduate profession in 1984/85. This is interesting when we consider their qualifications.

Qualifications and early career histories

The overwhelming majority of small-school headteachers (604 or 85%) had attended a Scottish College of Education, and although 77% possessed a College Diploma in Education, over a third (35%) were graduates (B.Ed., M.A., or M.Ed.). This is considerably less than the picture of probationers provided in the last School Census (SOEID, 1996), in which two-thirds of all primary probationers held a B.Ed. degree, and a further 27 per cent held another degree. A substantial number of our respondents (41%) possessed more than one qualification. This contrasts with Southworth's (1995) research into headship in England, in which only one of his ten headteachers was a graduate. A small proportion (10% of our sample) had gained qualifications from higher education institutions in England, and relatively few were Open University graduates (5% of all participants).

From interviews conducted in our 18 case-study schools, it emerged that small school headteachers had quite diverse career histories. Although the majority had been primary teachers throughout their careers, a small number had worked in other sectors at the start of their careers: in industry, youth work, community development and child-care. Most case-study headteachers had taught in several schools before taking up their current posts, and several drew attention to the breadth of their experience: some had worked in very different types of schools, including larger schools and city schools, sometimes in areas of considerable deprivation; others had worked both in the classroom and as peripatetic teachers; and several had been curriculum development officers. We suggest that there may, in fact, be a relationship between the breadth of previous experience and the ability to manage the range of activities demanded of headteachers of small schools, a point to which we shall return later. The following give a 'flavour' of the range of career histories encountered in the course of the case study interviews:

I started life in a large, inner-city school... and then left teaching to have children. I did various jobs in between, including working for an insurance company and being manager of a small company. I decided to go to university and do a part-time degree while I was doing supply teaching... Then when I was supply teaching I developed an interest in special education and I actually worked full-time then in special education, teaching outreach from a special school. Then I decided to become a class teacher again with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties... (School 2: 28 pupils).

I came to teaching late. I went to university and then worked at a Steiner school. I worked on various things, playschemes, in hotels, then as nursery assistant in a children's home for babies... I trained at Moray House. I taught for 12 years in two schools in the city, and then applied for a Senior Teacher. I began to understand that I was good at management when I realised I was good with people and could relate to them... I was made Assistant Head Teacher in a third school... (School 7: 106 pupils).

Rural roots?

Do small schools headteachers have established links with rural communities where the majority of small schools are located? From our evidence we see that a substantial number of headteachers (41%) came originally from rural areas, and almost a third (31%) had, themselves, been educated in small primary schools. From interviews with case-study headteachers, it is clear that this is one factor which influenced their decision to work in small, rural schools. As two recall:

It sounds very sentimental to say so, but as a child I went to a four-teacher school in the countryside and I had very fond memories of it. (School 1: 58 pupils)

I was brought up in the village, and have been headteacher at the school for 24 years. I have no desire at all to leave... My loyalty would always be here. (School 8: 11 pupils)

However, the majority of respondents (71%) reported currently living outwith their schools' catchment area. This was more common among headteachers working in 'mixed' or urban schools (85% lived outwith the school's catchment area) than those in rural schools (71%). However, two-thirds (66%) of island school headteachers, perhaps not surprisingly, did live in their school's catchment area. The decision to live elsewhere may reflect a lack of suitable accommodation, particularly where 'school houses' have been sold by Education Authorities; or may be associated with a desire for privacy for themselves and their families. As some case-study heads suggested:

I much prefer [living outside the village] because once you leave you can say 'Right, I'm not really at anybody's beck and call'. (School 3: 57 pupils)

When I drive home—14 miles—I just change into me, I change from being 'Mrs Jones' to 'Mum' or 'Mary' or whatever. (School 4: 118 pupils)

Clearly, if the headteacher lives elsewhere, this may have implications for community relationships and perceptions of close relationships in rural communities.

Management experience

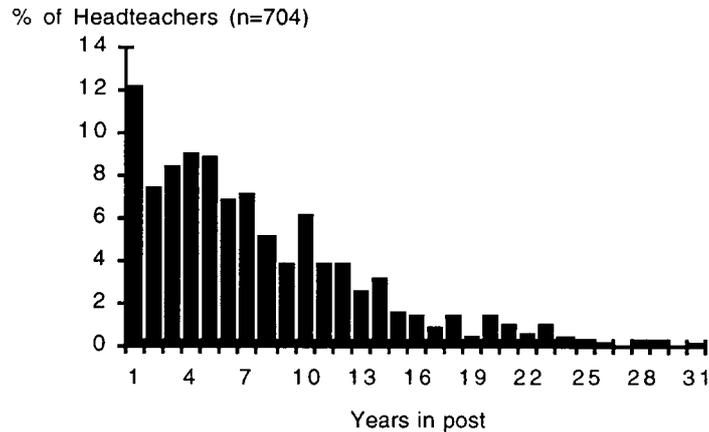
What routes to headship had our respondents taken? From the evidence of the survey it emerges that relatively few (18%) had previous experience of headship. For the majority (572 or 82%), their current post was their first headship. However, a range of management experiences was reported by the 126 headteachers, who had previously held promoted posts as is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Previous management experiences of small school headteachers

Experiences	Number of headteachers n=126
Headship in another small school	47 (37%)
Headship in single-teacher school	26 (21%)
Headship (unspecified)	21 (17%)
Acting headteacher	15 (12%)
Headship in larger school	10 (8%)
Head of teaching department	3 (2%)
Deputy headship	3 (2%)
Headship in small special school	1 (<1%)

Most (75%) small-school headteachers had been in their current post for ten years or less, and a minority (12%) were particularly new to the job, having taken up post during the past year. A similarly small group (10%) had been in post for 16 years or more, as is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Headteachers' years in post



Management training

Most headteachers (79%) reported that they had received some form of management training. However, it seems likely that for many headteachers, training occurs some time after they take up post, a situation which will probably change as the Scottish Qualification for Headship is introduced in 1999. Those least likely to have had training are those who have been in post for one year or less, as is shown in Table 2 below, which highlights a possible training need.

Table 2: Management training in relation to length of time in post

Length of time in current post	% of respondents with management training (n=448)
1 year or less	43
2-5 years	85
6-10 years	87
11-15 years	83
16-20 years	77
21 years or over	73

Prior to their appointment as small school headteachers, most had neither management experience nor training for headship. This highlights the importance of 'on-the-job' learning for this group of heads. Those who have been in post for over eleven years were also progressively less likely to have received training. Though the falling-off seems relatively gradual, the implications are more serious than at first appears, as headteachers with longer service should have had more opportunities to undergo training. Several headteachers offered possible explanations:

At that time [18 years ago] it was the norm to go into headship from class teaching — there were no senior teacher posts — and I received no special training or preparation for headship. (School 9: 80 pupils)

New headteachers have better preparation now than I did — there was no training and I moved from an unpromoted post straight into the headship. (School 8: 11 pupils)

Some indicated that a form of informal mentoring had been particularly valuable to them, before they applied for their current posts:

I was lucky to have been placed with a young and able headteacher. I learnt more from her than I did in all my years of training. (School 12: 77 pupils)

Views on the value of available training are mixed. Sixty-seven percent of headteachers believed that management training needs to be adapted for the heads of small schools. Three-quarters (75%) of the respondents to a validation questionnaire, which we sent to two headteachers in each Education Authority to validate our analysis, were dissatisfied with the induction training and development provided for newly appointed heads, either because it was non-existent, or because it did not take small schools into account. In interview, some headteachers explained why they thought training should acknowledge the particular needs of headteachers in small schools:

I've completed the 'Principles of Management' Scottish Office training, but [in that module]... there is a team-wide gap 'them and us' attitude between heads in larger schools and their staff. This is untenable in a small school setting. (School 11: 18 pupils)

[Talking about a recent course] I just wonder if [tutors] are aware of the situation in small rural schools where there is the wide range of all the ages and ability levels. (School 14: 21 pupils)

Future career plans and mobility

Previous research suggests that headteachers of small schools, once appointed, are more likely to remain in the same post for long periods of time than their counterparts in larger schools. The single largest group of respondents to our survey (281 or 44%) expected to stay on as heads of the schools in which they were currently working for the foreseeable future. In addition, 108 (17%) had no clear plans, and 52 (8%) intended to seek early retirement. Approximately a quarter of the group were considering promotion: 136 (21%) by applying for headship of a larger school, and 19 (3%) seeking other employment within education. In addition, a small group of 18 heads (3%) were thinking of applying for the headship of other small schools. Less than 1% were seeking employment outwith education. Other factors in addition to personal ambition may produce a less mobile workforce in small rural schools. The problems associated with dual-career families become more acute in isolated areas. Small school headteachers may see no advantage in moving to larger schools in the Central Belt, unless both partners can be employed. At its most extreme, 54% of headteachers of island schools wished to remain in their current post. The relative stability of employment of these headteachers, many of whom have 15 or more years before reaching retirement age, has implications for the design of staff training. We suggest there is a need for continuing development schemes if their motivation and level of competence are to be maintained.

The location of schools appears to be a factor in headteachers' career plans. While 41% of the sample described their schools as geographically isolated, headteachers in schools with a roll of below 60 were more likely to report this than their colleagues

in schools of between 61 and 120 pupils (ratio of 5:3 respectively). The responses indicate that feeling isolated is not necessarily associated with physical isolation. Just over half of all headteachers in the survey felt that geographical isolation was a problem. Surprisingly, small schools in ‘mixed’ or urban areas are more likely than schools in rural and island areas to be concerned with geographical isolation. Headteachers of island schools seem to be particularly committed to their current posts, and very much less likely to wish to move on to a larger school, as can be seen from Table 3 below:

Table 3: Career plans of headteachers in different locations

	Remain in current post (%)	Move to larger school (%)	Move to another small school (%)	No clear plans (%)	Early retirement (%)	Other* (%)
Rural	43	23	3	17	9	5
Mixed	45	26	3	15	5	6
Island	54†	6†	5	16	9	10
All	44	21	3	17	8	7

**This category includes those thinking of other employment within or outwith education.*

†These figures indicate substantial differences between headteachers in island schools and others.

Our evidence suggests that those who intend to remain in the same post do so from choice rather than lack of opportunity: only 6% of those taking part agreed with the statement that ‘small school heads never go on to more senior positions in education’. It was obvious from the interviews that many headteachers enjoy their work and have no wish to move. One pointed out that headship of a small school was ‘something I have wanted to do for a long time’ (School 1: 58 pupils), and another that she ‘wouldn’t go back to a city’ (School 14: 21 pupils). However, as we have seen, there is a significant group of ambitious headteachers (136 or 21%) who plan to move on to larger schools. Some acknowledged that their motives for taking up small school headships were strategic, seeing small schools as stepping stones to larger ones. Others felt that they needed a new challenge to avoid ‘stagnation’ (School 6: 18 pupils). Another reflected that:

I love it here at ‘School 7’ but I feel frustrated at times because the fact that I am a teaching headteacher limits what I can do ... so at some time it will be good to have a change and a move. (School 7: 106 pupils)

For some it may be that the difficulty of reconciling teaching and managing pushes them to consider a non-teaching appointment. Some interviewees pointed to this as a major source of stress:

I have to come to terms with whether I am the headteacher or the teacher. The most difficult task is dividing management time and teaching time. (School 6: 18 pupils)

However, although two-thirds (66%) of respondents indicated that they felt more stressed than they used to, this group was equally divided between those who planned to apply for non-teaching headships in larger schools (22% of the group) and those who did not (21% of the group). Those who felt stressed were, however, more likely to wish to leave their current posts: 62% of those under stress indicated that they wished to move on. This is an issue which Education Authorities as employers may wish to explore further.

PERCEIVED CHALLENGES, SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND ATTITUDES TO CHANGE

Resolving teaching and management commitments

What quite clearly distinguishes headteachers of small schools from those of larger schools is the fact that all have a substantial teaching commitment. But the amount of time spent in the classroom varies. Headteachers in one- or two-teacher schools spend almost all of their time in the classroom, usually with half a day per week for management duties. In larger schools, management time rises to one or even two days per week. However, there are exceptions. The headteacher of case-study School 8 (a one-teacher school) appeared to have no 'relief' time at all, while the head of School 4 (a five-teacher school) did not have a class of her own. For most headteachers 'official' management time is very limited, reflected by over half our respondents (52%) who said that they found it difficult to leave the classroom, and a substantial number (44%) indicated that they dealt with paper work 'when and if I can'.

Inevitably, many heads experienced tension between the demands made of them as teachers and as managers – a consequence of the duality of the role. Some experienced this primarily in relation to their teaching role: their commitment to their own class meant that the intrusion of management issues on class time was intensely frustrating. As one explained.

I really, really love teaching and I think it is possibly my love of teaching that is causing this [frustration]. If you have prepared a science lesson on burning... and you have the children more or less eating out of your hand – and the phone rings twice or three times. You have to restart the experiment three times... this induces a lot of stress. (School 2: 28 pupils)

Where this tension is combined with a lack of adequate clerical support, which varies across Education Authorities, headteachers can struggle to meet the demands made on their time. As one remarked: 'I don't have any clerical help and I think it is appalling' (School 2: 28). For some, the difficulty of combining the two roles was pushing them to consider applying for jobs in larger schools, where they would not have to teach.

Low staff numbers

The size of small schools in Scotland ranges from one teacher (i.e. the headteacher) to ten members of staff (including the headteacher, full-time, part-time and peripatetic staff). Sixty-two per cent of heads (430) are in one-, two- or three-teacher schools. For this group, low staff numbers lead to some obvious difficulties in implementing new initiatives. For example, the pool of expertise is more limited:

I think the difficulty in a small school is the fact that when you come to areas like expressive arts, you maybe find that you have three people and two of them are good at art and one's good at music, but what about the PE and the drama? (School: 15 42 pupils)

While a common approach in larger schools is to delegate responsibility to other members of the management team or establish a working party, this is more difficult

in a school with few members of staff. As one headteacher put it: 'you don't have a management team'. There are simply not enough hands to divide up the task in this way, and this implies — in the absence of other strategies — that implementation will take longer.

However, there can be advantages as well as disadvantages in low staff numbers — an example of contextual 'trade off' which may operate in small schools. For example, where everyone is actively involved in planning and implementing all aspects of a new initiative, clearly there is likely to be greater awareness of the issues and greater commitment to decisions taken. As one headteacher explained: 'it took longer to development plan but it was easier to disseminate... or work on it'. The active involvement of the headteacher, both as a planner and decision maker, on the one hand, and as implementer at classroom level, on the other, enhances the head's role as curriculum leader. This is likely to increase the effectiveness of implementation and also prevent the 'de-skilling' of non-teaching headteachers identified by Webb and Vulliamy (1995). 'I lead by example. By that I mean we talk informally about the type of things I do in my own classroom' was how one headteacher described it.

Support from the community

Part of the mythology which surrounds small schools is an assumption that they are well-integrated into their local communities (see Scottish Office, 1995). Our data suggest that the extent to which headteachers of small schools draw on community support for the management of change depends very largely on the headteacher's attitudes towards community relations. We saw earlier that headteachers of small schools are less likely than they may have been in the past to live in the community served by the school. This reflects both a decline in the provision of 'school houses' and headteachers' own desire for privacy and the opportunity to 'leave the job behind' for at least a small part of each day. Some indicated that they needed to encourage parents to 'keep their distance' rather than aim to increase involvement. And one headteacher 'found it quite difficult that parents would phone me up to say, "So-and-so has forgotten his homework"'. The need to achieve a balance between parental involvement and interference may mean that it is harder for headteachers to build community relationships. As one headteacher commented:

I am aware of the need to be careful... because the least little thing and tongues will be wagging. You can't afford that. (School 8: 11 pupils)

Attitudes towards change

Are small school headteachers fundamentally opposed to change? Certainly, the headteachers of small schools in our sample believe that the last decade (1987 to 1996) has been a period of very rapid curricular and managerial change, and feel that these changes have outstripped changes in wider society: almost all respondents (96%) viewed the period as a time of rapid curricular change, and a substantial majority (92%) saw it as a time of rapid management change. In contrast, less than half (40%) felt it had been a time of rapid societal change. Ninety-four per cent of the respondents felt that these changes had resulted in particular pressures for small schools and two-thirds of the group (66%) felt more stressed than they had before. Perceptions of rapid change and of stress may be linked to the rate of implementation of new initiatives. Writers on managing change (e.g. Handy, 1994; Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992) recommend that changes should be 'owned' by those charged with their implementation. This was exemplified by one headteacher who suggests that:

Before I would try and implement change I would have to be at ease with it

myself. I need to spend time for me to be sure I understand exactly what's being asked and whether I can do it and whether I can make it work in my school or not... (Headteacher, school 60-120 pupils)

The largest group of respondents (52%) identified change as problematic because of the pace of change and lack of time in which to achieve it (see Table 4 below). Corresponding information for the implementation of 5-14 in all Scottish primary schools indicates that confidence, or lack of it, affects implementation. As Malcolm and Simpson (1997) point out 'there is little cause from complacency: timescale and coverage [of 5-14] remain problematic' (p15) .

Table 4: Headteachers' perceptions of recent changes

Perceptions of change	Percentage of headteachers agreeing with statements (n=526)
Change is long overdue	11
Change has to be taken on its merits	35
Pace of change is too swift	52
It's change for the sake of change	3

This suggests that the development of underlying support for innovation may have been impeded by the practicalities of implementation. As one headteacher put it:

Although I agree with the philosophy [of 5-14]... there is simply not enough time to cover all the targets. TIME, TIME, TIME – there is not enough hours in the day. (Headteacher, 19 pupil school)

And another one reported:

there has been so much piled on in the last few years that you have to stop at some point and say 'wait the now, we can't take any more'. (Headteacher, 60-120 pupil school).

This pressure is more acute in small schools where heads invariably teach and there are fewer colleagues with whom the implementation may be shared. It is noticeable that most headteachers were not resistant to change, *per se*, (cf. Lawrence, 1969) but to the timescale in which they were asked to respond.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Management theorists (e.g. Peters & Waterman, 1995) suggest that successful management of change requires managers who can undertake a realistic appraisal of their current situation; develop a vision of the future, and plan the first few practical steps of implementation. Many heads in our sample seemed implicitly to understand this. However, in addition to vision, we have also seen that small school management, unlike headship in larger schools, relies heavily on the ability of the headteacher to balance the competing demands of two distinct roles — that of teacher and school manager — to lead by example, with few other colleagues and often no extra resources while at the same time controlling their own stress levels (see in particular Way, 1989 and Evans, 1998, who both identify the disproportionate demands made of headteachers in small schools). The small school is a context in which traditional management theories and training offer little guidance and where even the discourse of management, especially references to 'management teams',

may be perceived to be unhelpful. (See for example McGrogan, 1995, & McHugh & McMullan, 1995) What then helps small school headteachers manage?

Our main aim in this article was to provide 'a snapshot' of small school headteachers, their qualifications, experiences, routes to headship and career aspirations - information which to date has not been provided in the research literature. From these data, we suggest that part of the answer to: 'how do headteachers in small schools, manage?' may lie in two constants shared by many small school heads in our sample which helped them cope effectively with change. First, we heard our respondents articulate a vision of the future firmly based on perceived benefits for pupils and achieved through their own efforts as curriculum leaders. They neither perceived nor referred to themselves as educational managers, and their presence in the classroom ensured that they were up-to-date with the practicalities of curricular innovation. Second, they described managing their schools by drawing on their disparate experiences. These were many and varied. As we see from the 'snapshot' to emerge from this research, proportionately more small school headteachers are female; their route to headship has not been a direct career progression. Many have taken 'time-out', changed direction, gained additional qualifications and been prepared to move vertically and laterally both within and outwith education. These form a unique blend of experiences upon which to base their management style which helped them cope with the tensions of balancing teaching and management, the low staff numbers and their attendant shortage of time.

Small school headteachers perceived themselves to be primarily teachers who had bolted onto their teaching skills a set of specific management activities to meet the particular circumstances in which they operated. This focused vision remained constant while the teacher/head 'juggled' a wide range of competing priorities for which a more conventional career path would not have prepared them adequately. Being a teaching headteacher is a complex activity and those who work in small schools were able to draw on their previous, diverse experiences to meet the specific requirements of the job. Whether this match was achieved by accident or design remains an open question.

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- i In the 1993 school census, there were 2341 primary schools in Scotland, of which 569 had fewer than 60 pupils and another 324 schools had between 60 and 120 pupils. This number has declined as a consequence of school mergers and closure: at the time the research was undertaken, there were, in all, 863 small schools, and the number continues to decline.
 - ii The Authorities with the highest proportion of small schools to the total number of schools in each Authority are Highland, Aberdeenshire, Dumfries and Galloway, Argyll, Perth and Kinross, Scottish Borders, Angus, Orkney, the Comhairle non Eilean Siar and Shetland.
 - iii See The Scottish Office, Statistical Bulletin Edu (G5/19996/2)