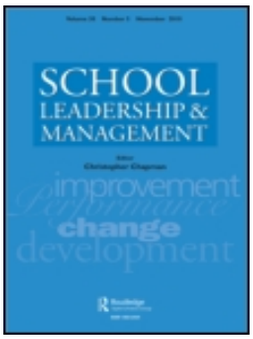

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The Reality of School Development Planning in the Effective Primary School: technicist or guiding plan?

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ABSTRACT *This paper examines the extent to which the technicist-rational approach to school development planning, advocated by OfSTED inspection guidelines, is appropriate for primary schools. The issue is investigated through case studies of nine primary schools, deemed by OfSTED to be educationally effective and efficient. The external pressures on schools to adopt a technicist-rational approach to management have been intensified by application of the OfSTED inspection guidelines. The school development plan and its implementation now form a crucial part of the evidence which inspectors use to judge the management and efficiency of the school. Schools that are deemed educationally effective and efficient by OfSTED inspectors may therefore be expected to show high levels of technicist-rational planning. This was not found to be the case, and a more sophisticated typology of planning approaches, drawing on distinctions between strategic and development planning, and between technicist and guiding plan, is developed to accommodate the findings.*

Introduction

This paper examines the planning process in nine English primary schools deemed by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) to be educationally effective and efficient. OfSTED inspections have to conform to strict guidelines in both their conduct and the judgements that are made. The guidelines (OfSTED 1993; 1995) contain the criteria against which the 'efficiency of the school' is judged. These present an 'ideal type' of technicist-rational planning and decision-making (Levačić & Glover 1997; 1998) against which inspectors are expected to make their judgements. Since a key source of inspectors' information about the efficiency of

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school management is the school development plan, one might anticipate that the school development planning process would proceed on technicist-rational principles, with a high degree of strategic thinking embedded in it. However, this was not the case in the nine primary schools studied. Instead, a wide variety of levels and kinds of strategic thinking was found in the planning that was investigated, and the apparent elision of strategic and development planning by OfSTED (1995) was found to be problematic. It was therefore necessary to explore the relationship between development planning and strategic planning, and to develop a more sophisticated typology of school planning, in order to analyse the data successfully.

The paper therefore begins by explaining and laying out this typology, in order to clarify and extend existing typologies of primary school development plans. It then considers the relationship between types of development plan and the process of their creation, drawing on concepts of organizational culture, before continuing to examine in detail the extent to which the different plans that were examined related to the different kinds of plan that we have identified. Finally, we examine a number of inhibitors to the development of technicist-rational planning practices in the schools we studied.

School Development Planning: how strategic is it?

School development planning in England originated with whole school review focusing on the curriculum and being relatively flexible (MacGilchrist *et al.*, 1995; Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991). Different approaches distinguished between a concentration on a few development priorities (Hargreaves *et al.*, 1989; Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991; DES, 1991) and a comprehensive plan for the management of all aspects of the school (e.g. The LMS Initiative, 1992). These early conceptualisations of the school development plan (SDP) saw it as an internal device for the effective implementation of change (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991; DES, 1991). When the 1992 Education Act placed on the Office for Standards for Education (OfSTED) the requirement to inspect schools' efficiency, the SDP was expected to develop a strong resource management orientation, linking the identification and costing of required resources and the school budget (OfSTED, 1995 and National Audit Office, 1994).In relation to resource management the OfSTED Framework specifies that:

> Inspectors should look for evidence of the school planning ahead … Inspectors should consider how the governing body is fulfilling its *strategic responsibility* (our italics) for planning the use of resources. The key to the judgement will be whether financial planning is based on good current data and sound projections, whether consideration has been given to alternative strategies for managing expenditure and handling contingencies, and whether the school is clear about priorities. Inspectors should also assess the extent to which staff with management responsibility are involved in or informed about financial planning. (OfSTED, 1995, p. 116)

Thus in OfSTED inspections, the SDP came to be used as evidence of the proper discharge of strategic responsibility for the school. However, it is by no means clear what OfSTED means by "strategic", as it is not defined in their inspection guidelines. Certainly there is no consensus in the literature that development planning is necessarily strategic. Fidler (1996a, b) argues that of itself a school development plan does not possess the key characteristics of strategic management, which he sees as questioning aims, taking account of current and future trends in the external environment, and being long-term and holistic. Other writers see school development plans specifically as the medium and short term operationalisation of a strategic plan (Weindling, 1997; Open University, 1998).

Three distinct but interlinked elements can be identified from this discussion: the nature of strategic management or planning; the nature of planning; and the question of timescale. Fidler (1996a, b) and Mintzberg (1994) both identify strategic management as addressing fundamental questions about the aims of the organization in the light of anticipated environmental changes, taking an integrative view of the functional elements of the organization, and looking to the long term. This definition clearly suggests that long-range planning in itself is not necessarily strategic unless it incorporates both the fundamental questioning and holistic, integrative dimensions. Nor does it suggest that strategic management rests on the implementation of predetermined plans. Mintzberg (1994) distinguishes between deliberate and emergent strategy. Deliberate strategy rests on pre-existing plans, whereas emergent strategy is found where organizations steer their direction in response to unfolding events. What, then, is planning?

'Planning' is interpreted both narrowly and broadly. A narrow definition restricts planning to deliberate intentions of future action based on a tight linkage between means and ends in situations of predictability and organisational control (e.g. Bell, 1998). This would appear to be expected in the OfSTED framework quoted above. Planning in this definition is subject to a high level of implementation failure because of its inability to cope with unpredictable events. Strategic planning which is predicated on such a model is likely to be inherently flawed if the organizational environment is anything but stable or predictable. Other writers interpret planning far more widely and distinguish different kinds. For example, some have observed or recommended 'flexible' school development planning (Wallace, 1991; Wong *et al.* 1998)—a concept similar in some ways to Mintzberg's emergent strategy, but which blurs the distinction between planning and strategy.

These two typologies of ' rational planning' are usefully labelled by Scheerens (1997) synoptic and retroactive. Synoptic planning is characterised by high predictability, pro-active statement of goals and objectives, decomposition and sequencing of actions, and monitoring using quantitative data. Retroactive planning is characterised by reacting to unpredicted events with incremental responses which are guided by organizational standards or a vision of a future desired state. It involves cycles of evaluation, feedback, learning and corrective action.

The third element we have identified is the timescale within which management or planning is conceived. Strategic management and strategic planning appears necessarily to look towards the long-term. For this reason, the guiding hand of

organizational standards or the vision of the future are crucial elements. However, if school development plans are short- to medium-term documents, as Weindling (1997), for example, has suggested, then they would have to live within broader strategic plans if their implementation is to be regarded as strategic management. This allows us to see them as existing within an emergent strategic framework, and to be retroactive. Unfortunately, such a view of development planning does not fit well with the OfSTED technicist-rational view of planning and strategic management as expressed in the inspection guidelines (OfSTED, 1995).

It is evident, then, that 'planning' and 'strategy' are not coterminous for schools. Development planning need not be strategic and strategic management need not be planning in the deliberative sense, though it may be emergent. In Figure 1 we summarise the consequences of this. If planning is synoptic and strategic management is practised then we have the full technicist-rational management model, as indicated in the OfSTED inspection guidelines: a 'blueprint' for future action. If there is retroactive planning then strategic management, if present, is emergent and we call the model 'guiding plan'. Where strategic management is absent, both the blueprint and the guiding plan can be classified as 'restricted'. In addition to these four permutations, we can also identify schools where there are only very limited elements of rational planning. The nature of such schools' plans is such that they are unlikely to show any strategic focus: instead they will be characterised by ad hoc responses to changing circumstances with no guiding framework. Insofar as such plans influence the school's management decisions, they are quite likely to be a 'trailing anchor', restricting movement but not providing a steer or sense of direction. Our full proposed typology of school planning is therefore as shown in Table I.

Development Planning and School Cultures

A second question to consider when researching the impact of school development plans is the process by which they are created. The most recent typology which links

TABLE I. A typology of school planning and strategic management

	Strategic management	Lack of strategic management
Synoptic planning	Blueprint (with predetermined strategy)	Restricted blueprint
Retroactive planning	Guiding plan (with emergent strategy)	Restricted guiding plan
Limited or no planning	Not possible	Uncertain and 'ad hoc' coping—a 'trailing anchor'

impact and process is that developed by MacGilchrist *et al.* (1995: chapter 9). This was based upon four factors:

- who "owns" the plan.
- its purpose.
- the degree of involvement of staff and governors in formulation and implementation of the SDP; and
- its impact on classroom practice.

They identify four types of SDP:

- rhetorical: exists but not owned by staff or used to guide practice;
- singular: ownership and control by the headteacher;
- co-operative: partial shared ownership and participation of staff, with some positive impact on pupils;
- corporate: shared ownership and management by all staff with significant positive impact on pupil learning.

MacGilchrist *et al.* (1995) argue that the way a school undertakes its development planning is a reflection of its culture. They state (1995: 120) that the degree of staff ownership and involvement in formulating and implementing the plan is the key to how it is categorised in their framework. A high degree of staff ownership of a consensually agreed school development plan implies a cohesive school culture. Meyerson and Martin (1997) point out that organisational cultures are not necessarily cohesive, and distinguish three types of organisational culture which reflect differences in the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers:

- integrated: where there is consistency, consensus and leader centredness;
- differentiated where there is diversity, inconsistency and lack of consensus;
- ambiguous: where there is complexity, lack of clarity and culture is seen as dynamic and fluid.

We hypothesised, therefore, that corporate planning would be found in schools with integrated cultures, and singular planning in schools with differentiated cultures. Co-operative planning might be found in either. Accordingly, part of the research reported here explored staff perceptions of the culture of their schools, and their sense of how the planning process was undertaken.

MacGilchrist *et al.* (1995) do not distinguish between synoptic and retroactive planning in their research. They assume, almost implicitly, that school development planning is flexible. We therefore argue that the synoptic and retroactive planning categories need to be applied in addition to the MacGilchrist typology, in order to take account of later pressures on schools emanating from OfSTED to be more strategic and more rational in their planning. The analysis that follows of findings from the nine case study schools draws on key elements of both the OfSTED guidelines and the MacGilchrist *et al.* (1995) research to elaborate on our typology and explore the relationship between school culture, the development plan, and the degree and nature of strategic planning within it. In doing so, it becomes clear that in practice schools may combine elements of each form of plan. We should therefore be aware of the

possibility of "hybrid" planning forms, which incorporate elements of either blueprint or guiding plan, and which may be either "full" in the sense of incorporating a strategic dimension, or "restricted" in that strategic planning is absent.

The Study and the Methods of Investigation Employed

In order to explore the extent to which effective and efficient primary schools reflect in their management practice the normative model of OfSTED, and in particular its technicist-rational assumptions (Levačić & Glover 1997; 1998), we drew our sample of schools from those judged to be efficient and effective in their OfSTED inspection reports. Although these reports are produced by a large number of different teams, and therefore are subject to some variation in both the standards of data collected and the basis on which judgements are made, the demands of the guidelines which inspections must follow mean that they still provide what is currently the largest and most consistently produced data base that makes judgements on school efficiency and effectiveness. Further, they provide the raw material for the official and publicly-declared statements of what HMI regard as "good" schools. It should therefore be possible to anticipate that the schools selected would demonstrate a strong emphasis on strategic planning.

An initial content analysis was undertaken of 120 OfSTED reports of primary school inspections between September 1994 and December 1995 (Glover *et al.* 1997). This represented all the primary school inspections in a number of local educational authorities (LEAs) that were chosen to provide both a sample of inner city, urban, semi-rural and rural LEAs and accessibility to the researchers. From this analysis 20 primary schools, which had been judged by inspectors to be both educationally effective and efficiently managed, were identified. From these, nine schools representing a range of differing sizes and socio-economic backgrounds and willing to participate in the research were selected for case studies which were undertaken between June 1997 and February 1998. It was important to select schools judged effective and efficient because of our proposition that management practice in schools deemed to be performing well according to a set of published criteria would reflect the assumptions underpinning those criteria. The details of the schools, with their fictional names, are summarised in Table II.

The researchers made up to four visits to each school, collected a wide range of management documents for each, attended some management meetings and interviewed at least the chair of governors, the headteacher, the deputy head, a main scale member of staff, and a member of the ancillary staff in each school. In most of the schools the major proportion of the teaching staff were interviewed. Culture questionnaires were completed by all teachers (Bennett 1998) and an analysis was made of the resource allocation in the school in the financial year ending April 1997. Case studies of each school's planning and resource management were written according to a common structure to enable comparison of key features, and were submitted to the schools for comment and review. They were then analysed comparatively in relation to school procedures for decision making and the

TABLE II. Summary details of the case-study schools

School	Roll	No of teachers	Location	Percentage pupils eligible for free school meals
Bromwood	90	4.8	sub-urban	12
Clinshall	215	8	Urban	68
Elms	331	12	Urban	10
Markham	243	8.6	sub-urban	2
Padingwick	304	13	Urban	68
Stonvill	170	6.5	Rural	3
Tandbourne	87	4.6	Rural	10
Thackeray	39	2.4	Rural	6.5
Tudor	280	14.5	Urban	58

content of school development plans and budget decisions. From this comparative analysis:

- The schools were first classified according to the MacGilchrist *et al.* (1995) typology of school development plans, and related to the Meyerson and Martin (1997) typology of organisational cultures;
- The models of planning shown in Table I were elaborated by reference to the key management tasks of leadership, strategic planning (deliberate or emergent), budgetary planning and decision-making, resource management, teacher autonomy in curricular and classroom practice, self-evaluation and value for money;
- Conclusions were reached about the approaches to development planning found in these nine schools.

Given limitations on word length, the case studies of each school are not reproduced here, even in summary form. Instead they are drawn from in order to illustrate and support the conclusions reached. Some of the schools are featured more than others because they illustrate particular elements of the approaches to school development planning.

School Development Plans and School Culture

We made our comparison of the nine schools' development planning by using the MacGilchrist *et al.* (1995) aspects of 'process', 'content' and 'impact' of the plans, except that we placed more emphasis on resource management and did not include classroom observation. We did, however, interview a much higher proportion of the teaching staff. Our analysis of the evidence of how the nine schools undertook development planning led us to classify one of the schools as singular, five as co-operative and three as corporate.

On the basis of interview data and responses to the culture questionnaire, which posed ten questions on ideal and actual collegial practice in the nine schools (see Bennett 1998), we classified the schools according to the Meyerson and Martin (1997) categories. As shown in Table III, seven schools were judged to have integrated cultures and two differentiated cultures. All the staff in schools with integrated cultures spoke of everyone working well together, with informal swapping of ideas and discussion. In the smaller schools the headteacher was described as participative or collegial. In the larger schools with senior management teams, integrated cultures were characterised either by no sense of 'them and us' and/or by respect for a highly effective team of senior teachers who consulted widely.

Central to the existence of an integrated culture in these schools was trust. The staff trusted one another and they trusted the headteacher. The absence of trust characterised the two schools that exhibited differentiated cultures. At Tandbourne and Tudor recently-appointed headteachers had replaced long-serving and popular heads, and both were faced with major financial problems which had led to decisions to lose staff, though not through compulsory redundancies. At Tandbourne there were signs that that trust was being rebuilt. Though Tudor had received a favourable OfSTED report, the new headteacher and LEA advisor regarded this as over-generous. The new head and governors were now endeavouring to raise educational standards, while the staff felt that the new head was not buffering them from external pressures as the previous head had done. As shown in Table III, the form of school development planning and the type of culture were related—corporate plans were only found in schools with an integrated culture, while co-operative plans were to be found in both integrated and differentiated cultures. Thus our hypothesized relationship appears to have been borne out.

The degree of staff ownership and involvement in the formulation and implementation of the SDP was the key to how it is classified (see MacGilchrist *et al.* 1995: 120). Tudor school was judged to have a singular SDP because it was produced by the headteacher, after a few months in post with limited staff consultation and consequently poor staff knowledge of the plan. 'We didn't have much say in it' was a typical teacher comment.

TABLE III. Types of school culture and school development plan

School	Head since:	School culture	SDP type
Bromwood	1980	Integrated	Co-operative
Clinshall	1996	Integrated	Co-operative
Elms	1994	Integrated	Corporate
Markham	1997	Integrated	Co-operative
Padingwick	1994	Integrated	Corporate
Stonvill	1978	Integrated	Co-operative
Tandbourne	1996	Differentiated	Co-operative
Thackeray	1994	Integrated	Corporate
Tudor	1997	Differentiated	Singular

Five of the schools had a co-operative approach. In two, Tandbourne and Clinshall, though designated as co-operative, the SDP was very much led by the newly appointed headteachers who had to make considerable changes and encourage staff involvement. At Clinshall the head had been fortunate in joining a staff who saw themselves as 'a bunch of friends'. She was able to build upon the OfSTED action planning process and involved the staff in all elements of the review stage. She then outlined a plan which was discussed with the staff and governors and accepted as the basis for action planning by the curriculum co-ordinators. The three other schools with co-operative plans had a considerable degree of stability both in environment and staffing. They were relatively small, and all relied heavily on close day-to-day contact between staff. In each school the head produced the plan with varying degrees of co-operation from the staff and curriculum reviews were at the heart of any planning.

Padingwick was more difficult to classify. It had many of the features of a corporate plan since there was close interdependence of staff in a school in a socially deprived area where the effect on pupils of the instability in their home lives prompted frequent crisis management. The head was very much a visionary, determined to combat the effects of a high social deprivation on pupils, with the staff willingly co-operating in short term planning. However, there were no long term plans, only annual plans which distinguished between development and maintenance activities, and which included costings, targets and responsibilities. The head resisted external pressures (e.g. OfSTED) for a longer planning time frame. He thought it not worth attempting because of the inability to predict further ahead than a year in a school affected by the instability of its socially deprived community.

Corporate planning was evident at Elms School where the head had been in post for four years and had established an internal management structure and systems for review, contribution and consultation on all main issues. The SDP was seen to be the work of the head but was owned by the staff and wider community who were able to identify that raising standards was at the heart of all the school's work. Though the head 'knows what she wants and is determined to get it', the way in which this was achieved involved all parties.

Planning was also judged to be corporate at Thackeray, a small school of 2.4 teachers. Here the planning process was driven by the head teacher and closely linked the curriculum to its resourcing needs. Given the small staff and the head's highly participative management, the SDP was a working document owned and used by all the staff.

Technicist Blueprints and Guiding Plans in Action

None of the nine schools, given they had been selected on the basis of being deemed effective and efficient by OfSTED, fell into the limited plan category. Neither did any of them fulfil all the requirements of technicist-rational planning, though a few had more technicist elements than others. Most schools could be characterised as tending towards the guiding plan.

Elms school most closely approached the technicist blueprint model. The head was described as a strong leader, who led from the front but was sympathetic to others. She saw herself as listening to staff views and consulting widely but taking the decisions. The senior management team was seen as a group of outstanding classroom practitioners, who debated issues thoroughly and gave staff the chance to discuss them. Staff shared a vision and common goals, and within their clearly defined roles and structures there was a strong sense of mutual support through teamwork and a willingness to share ideas and resources.

The school's environment was stable. It was oversubscribed, and saw itself as open and concerned to keep its parents well-informed. The governors saw themselves as supporting, rather than directing the head, a view which she shared. Governors' sub-committees were active in development planning, but were not active in curriculum decisions, and the head was very influential on the finance committee.

Elms was also one of the schools where strategic planning could be identified. The head had undertaken an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats with the help of a community group and the parents' association, and there was a clear sense of direction—to improve standards further and provide a lively and supportive learning environment for children. The head was a key figure in this: she was seen as 'knowing what she wants for the school.'

The process of school development planning was inclusive but very formal. All staff contributed at an INSET day to a discussion of curriculum priorities, following which the deputy head prepared outline plans. These were firmed up through a process of discussion with curriculum co-ordinators, feedback from weekly staff meetings, and contributions from two nominated 'curriculum' governors.

The resulting SDP was seen as lying at the heart of the school's work. It encapsulated short and long-term aims, identified priorities, and established both one-year and longer-term action plans and evaluation sheets for each. The full plan ran to two volumes, and covered the areas of curriculum, staff development, community relationships, finance, organisation, grounds and buildings, and evaluation and inspection. Action plans were carefully cross-referenced: for example, the curriculum plans were cross-references with resources costs, and staff development with financial proposals.

The SDP was said to be the main driving force behind the budget. Priorities were identified and costed, and the budget allocation was then carried out by the head herself, with assistance from senior management colleagues. Eighty four percent of the budget was allocated to staff; the other broad headings were premises and educational resources. The latter included a delegation of £50 to each class teacher. In a clear statement of synoptic planning, the head believed that 'once a budget is made you should stick to it'. However, the difficulty of establishing the budget far in advance because of pupil intake projections and the problems of local authority budget setting limited the extent of forward planning that was possible.

Even in such a synoptic view of strategy and planning there was some flexibility. For example, a complaint from a parent about bullying led to some work being done on pupil behaviour even though it had previously been thought to be good. Such variations could lead to the head being involved in their implementation: because

the budget hadn't allowed for an additional member of staff, the head undertook to teach a daily hour of maths as part of a pilot project rather than spend the resources they gained from participating on a teacher. She said that she would rather invest in IT equipment.

An important dimension of rational-technicist planning is monitoring and evaluation, seen by OfSTED (1998) as a key weakness of school management. At Elms it was acknowledged that it was difficult, but the head declared that they did try. However, it was clear that they were not sure what they should be trying to evaluate their activities against—general data on pupil performance, or rolling achievement targets related to particular action plan priorities. This was clearly an area of weakness judged against the technicist model.

Interestingly, the other school whose planning process most closely approached the development of a synoptic blueprint was a very small school, Thackeray. The school had responded strategically to the threat of possible closure heralded by the LEA's on-going review of small schools, following local government re-organisation which had cut its education grant. Seizing the opportunity presented by nursery vouchers, Thackeray began to offer nursery provision. It also continued an active campaign of lobbying and self-promotion as a school with a distinctive family atmosphere and good educational standards, which attracted car-owning parents from outside its catchment area. The SDP was very much driven by the teachers' curriculum planning to which resources and staff development were carefully related. In such a small school the SDP was very much the reflection of the headteacher's personal organisational skills and her ability to share her vision for the school with staff and governors. The head had a clear view of how she wished to improve the physical resources of the school and seized every opportunity (e.g. insurance money from water damage) to attain her goals.

Padingwick was an interesting example of guiding plan with largely retroactive responses and emergent strategy. The school's adherence to effective short term planning but eschewal of longer term planning has already been noted. The OfSTED inspectors commented on the absence of a strategic dimension in the SDP—although they accepted that the school offered a good one year plan. This was in part a reflection of the problems of securing stability and involvement of governors but it also showed the governors' support for the head's retroactive planning. In an adverse socio-economic context, with frequent staff changes and turbulence amongst many of the families, the school felt it had to place its energies into ensuring pupils' improved behaviour and learning of basic skills. The school aims were expressed in general not detailed terms and were widely understood and shared. Although there was no written long term plan, the head had a clear view of what needed to be done to improve the school and how this created particular priorities at particular times. He spearheaded a series of improvement initiatives.

The head was seen as the major driving force, but also as amenable to supporting staff's proposals if well thought through. The head wished to avoid hierarchical structures and conducted decision-making through open discussion at whole staff meetings. Key budgetary decisions (e.g. to employ a 'float' teacher, increase the number of teaching assistants) were taken together with the staff. The

school was relatively well resourced. Because of various external projects the school could tap into it was not feasible to set a firm budget at the beginning of the year. Commitments to expenditure on staff, buildings and educational resources were made, as well as provision for various projects, some funded by 'known' funds and others funded if external money became available. The head was ready to fund well argued ideas (on one side of A4 paper) put to him by staff in the course of the year. There was considerable devolution of budgets for educational resources to co-ordinators and class teachers, with the head approving orders. There were moves afoot to tighten financial controls and improve the monitoring of the use of resources.

Pupils' progress was carefully monitored but curriculum monitoring was patchy and depended on individual co-ordinators. Teaching was monitored largely informally through a high degree of collaborative teaching, with the float teacher, teaching assistants in every class, open plan classrooms and a culture of mutual support. The head did much informal monitoring and evaluation by being 'out and about'.

It would appear that Padingwick operated a very rational but non-technicist approach to curriculum and budgetary planning, which rested upon a clearly articulated response to the needs of the children in the school rather to an obligation to meet national requirements.

The examples of Elms and Padingwick show that schools do not lie along a single dimension between technicist and guiding planning. Padingwick can be seen to operate with a high degree of rationality (in the sense of pursuing shared corporate goals as effectively as circumstances allow) and yet without adherence to tight structures and pre-determined plans. The two schools with the strongest elements of synoptic planning (Elms and Thackeray) and Padingwick, characterised by rational-retroactive planning, were classified as having corporate school development plans. This would imply that corporate plans are characterised by a high degree of rationality, but that this may be achieved with retroactive as well as with synoptic planning.

The other schools were all found to be located within the guiding plan approach. Tudor probably lay nearest to limited planning at the time when studied. The new head had consulted staff on the SDP in a meeting which made little impact on staff. Shortly after the SDP was discussed at a staff meeting, the head teacher discovered a serious budget deficit which she had not been aware of at the time of her appointment. In a crisis atmosphere, the loss of two teaching posts was being sought and expenditure on the curriculum suspended. The staff perceived that the SDP could not be implemented, though this was not in fact the case with all elements of it, such as the literacy and numeracy projects. The headteacher's goals for improving pupils' attainment were not yet shared by staff, who preferred the previous head's emphasis on pastoral care. While plans for evaluating the SDP and monitoring teaching and learning were being put into place, they had not yet had time to take effect.

In the remaining schools, whilst the head used the SDP as a guiding tool in the allocation of resources and in the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards

aims and objectives, the staff as a whole did not appear to give more than passing attention to the SDP in the classroom situation. As Osborn and Black (1994) have argued, whilst the SDP is expected to be the driving force in determining action within the school, there is often a gulf between reality and rhetoric. They suggest that because of the complexity of school organisation development planning requires time and negotiation which is not readily available. Comments in three of the smaller schools, suggested that small schools do not need to be controlled by a SDP because of the closeness of daily contact between staff. For example at Bromwood:

> We are a strong team meeting together informally every break and doing so much talking to each other as the term progresses. We have to review the plan from time to time because changes may come about because staff find a better way of doing things, new materials or new approaches which must be supported because they give better use of our resources—the plan is not inviolate! (Deputy Head).

An alternative view was found at Thackeray (2.4 teachers) where the head stated that:

> … everything the school is doing is in the SDP. It is important to have a clear view of where you are going as a school, not to be overwhelmed by new initiatives from the government and the LEA.'

In schools using the guiding plan approach plans were not necessarily adhered to, as at Bromwood. At Stonvill, where staff referred to the SDP as a guide, there was a tension between the intention of the plan and the 'need to be flexible'. Within the SDP's general guidelines it was clear that staff justified and expected to make changes as the year progressed. This might be because objectives change when a subject area is reviewed; when external imperatives change, for example in meeting the needs of design technology, or when new materials become available after the planning phase, e.g. when introducing a new scheme of RE in the school'.

In contrast, at Markham there was a determined effort to work from agreed priorities to clearly defined curriculum applications with resource and staff training needs detailed as part of the plan. In this way staff were becoming aware that other priorities would only intervene in exceptional circumstances.

Overall, the nine schools show a marked tendency to the retroactive, guiding form of school development planning. Our evidence suggests that only four schools (Stonvill, Elms, Markham and Thackeray) actually had a strategic plan based upon a view of future development and consideration of the school's context. At Stonvill, for example, the headteacher and governors had planned an increase in pupil numbers which would provide income for an extra class and the associated building works whilst still preserving the 'rural' character of the school. For most of the other schools their emergent strategy was the outcome of an interaction between the desire to retain or improve the culture of the school, changes in external environment and the school's responses to these.

In the next section we explore the factors that inhibit technicist rational planning in these primary schools, suggesting that these factors are generalisable to other primary schools.

Inhibitors to Technicist-rational Planning

Difficulties with Strategic Planning

Cultural instability due to changing personnel and context inhibited strategic planning. Tudor was a good example of this where the change of head had currently led to a differentiated culture but might in the longer term enable the school to chart a new strategic direction. However, strategic planning is more likely to be effective where staff work collegially and do not resent a changed direction or leadership style (Miller & Inniss, 1992).

Synoptic blueprint planning is inhibited by instability in the financial framework. Four of the case-study schools had recently experienced financial uncertainty arising from the creation of unitary authorities. A further two were in a serious financial situation as a result of previous overspending. In these circumstances few heads and governing bodies appeared able to live beyond the immediate future.

External influences also affect the decision-making framework and the readiness of headteachers to abandon or remodel the school development plan. For example, Stonvill and Bromwood felt that some flexibility in implementation was necessary to meet external pressures, such as introduction of the literacy hour. Some external pressures may be local. Tandbourne, affected by a demographic fall in pupil numbers, had major budget problems which undermined attempts at financial planning. There were also examples of favourable external factors, in particular opportunities to bid for and obtain additional funding for projects (e.g. at Padingwick, Tandbourne and Elms) which had not been initially included in the SDP.

Our evidence suggests that schools in unstable local environments, where the problems of the many socially disadvantaged families spill over into the daily life of the school, find strategic planning inappropriate for their needs. More class teacher and senior management time was spent responding to the daily needs of children and parents at both Tudor and Padingwick than at the other schools. The longer serving headteachers in our sample echoed Mintzberg's (1994) view that there can be too much concern with the future to the detriment of the present.

The Budgetary Framework

A rational approach to development planning is also undermined by a restricted view of the budget framework, noted also in other research. For example, Broadhead *et al.* (1996) found from examining the content of a large sample of school development plans that whilst 99% had curriculum details, only 72% had staffing data. The common picture in the case-study schools was that budgetary decisions which related to the SDP were made on the margins of the budget after deducting the staffing budget which tended to be historic in nature, rather than by having a comprehensive review of the whole budget (e.g. Kennedy 1993).

The smallest school, Thackeray, did begin with an annual reconsideration of the necessary staffing to enable the school to function, and several schools had an annual review of part-time and ancillary staff hours as well as incentive post payments. These were, however, residual amounts of money rather than a fully

costed programme. Sutton (1997) has shown how the amount of money for curriculum maintenance and development is a further residual amount—that left over when the staff and essential building costs have been met. Development planning related to a comparatively small part of the total—only 7.8% of the total expenditure in the case-study schools was related to professional development and educational resource expenditure.

The tightness of the budget also inhibits synoptic budget planning, particularly of those expenditures (e.g. educational resources) which are treated as discretionary. At Tandbourne the head had attempted to move the staff towards zero-budgeting in order to establish accurate data before implementing the priorities as agreed in the SDP:

> Up until now, there has been insufficient money to make this possible: in 1997/8 almost all 'capitation' other than for consumable stock was spent on the resources for the National Literacy Project.

Some of the schools were guided by the SDP but were flexible in purchasing new materials which attracted staff attention during the year, as at Padingwick, Stonvill and Elms. The heads of Stonvill and Bromwood both felt that once the SDP was created, the budgetary framework was 'the art of what is possible'. A drawback to such flexibility can be micro-political pressuring of the head or deputy by staff (Simkins, 1989; Evetts, 1993) unless control systems are in place or the school culture inhibits this, as at Thackeray, where staff expected to use only resources which they had planned into their schemes of work.

The Decision-making Framework

The efficacy of the SDP is also affected by the interaction of a number of factors which influence decision-making. In considering the way in which the SDP is evolved, implemented and evaluated there is a varying input from governors and the local community, who tend to offer a background canvas. Our findings confirm those of MacGilchrist *et al.* (1995), that the nature of the SDP depends crucially on the ability of the headteacher to involve staff, governors and the community. This in turn is a reflection of the head's leadership style (Southworth 1993; Webb & Vulliamy 1996a, b). Leadership style can be seen at three levels—working with individuals, teams and the whole school community (Tuohy & Coghlan 1997). In four of the sample schools the headteacher was seen as leading from within the staff with strong interpersonal relationships. Here, staff interviewees referred to 'teams', 'friends working together' and 'certainty of consultation and support'. In this situation, whilst collegiality may be more readily achieved, any necessity for unpleasant decisions may lead to a feeling of betrayal, as evidenced at Bromwood when governors agreed, against the wish of head and staff, to become a community school in order to attract building grants. In three of the schools (Tandbourne, Markham and Clinshall) the need to achieve change produced a more directive style. This is possibly a feature following change of headship but it may also be related to the management of adverse financial situations, as at Tudor.

In the OfSTED model of good practice the governors are proactive in managing strategy. We found little of this in practice (exceptions were Thackeray and Stonvill, where governors made decisions directly concerned with long term viability). The structures through which the governors worked varied enormously, from taking all decisions in full governing body meetings (Tudor) to four committees—community, premises, lettings, finance—at Elms. Some schools had difficulty recruiting governors. At Clinshall the governing body membership was frequently changing and vacancies were common, possibly reflecting a view within a working class community that governing is a middle class activity. As a result it was difficult to build up the necessary expertise to understand planning, budgeting or evaluation. These roles then reverted to the headteacher because 'she is the school'.

In seven of the schools there is evidence that the 'head is the school' in the sense that not only did all decision-making revolve around the head, but so also did many operational tasks, which in a larger school the head could delegate. In the smaller schools like Thackeray, the head was, perforce, the school, because she was the only person available to undertake all elements of SDP planning, implementation and evaluation. In these primary schools, not only was the leadership of the development planning process the sole responsibility of the headteacher, but also many of the other related activities (e.g. supervising or undertaking data collection, undertaking analysis, monitoring and evaluation, boundary management) fell to the head teacher. One of the inevitable results of the head 'being the school' is the assumption that what cannot be planned for but needs to be done is undertaken by the head as an extra duty, as at Elms. The time demands of primary headship and the wide scope of these demands make synoptic planning difficult to undertake. This reinforces the function of the SDP as a guide rather than as a means of organizational control. It also reflects Steiner's (1979) distinction between formal, explicit processes of strategic planning and situations in small organizations wherein strategic planning, if it exists, is undertaken within the head of one person rather than discussed explicitly among colleagues.

Conclusion

The evidence from this study suggests that although planning structures are in place in the primary sector, they actually influence the resource management for between only 8% and 18% of the budget. Of our nine case study schools, only two see their budget allocation as a totality and commence their annual planning on that basis. To a varying degree all the others seek to preserve the staffing status quo and use a proportion of their budget for a building maintenance programme. Development planning as it affects the budget is concerned largely with books, equipment and staff development. Compared with the case study schools in the secondary sector (Glover *et al.* 1996) these primary schools had a greater affinity to retroactive than to synoptic planning.

Several factors may explain this difference. Primary schools are still professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg 1983) where teachers have their major contact with only one class. The amount of time spent as a class teacher provides opportunities for the

teaching staff to act independently of any published plan. Whilst most class teachers want a say in the planning of the curriculum—within the national framework—and in the resourcing to make teaching interesting and effective, they are not concerned with strategic and developmental whole-school issues, unless their job security is threatened. The existence within some of the 120 OfSTED inspection reports analysed of glowing subject reports alongside critical comment on resource management and development planning shows that many primary teachers do not need synoptic planning for personal success. Further, in most of the case study schools we have found that 'the head is the school' and that major strategic and financial decisions rest with him or her.

Unlike headteachers in the secondary sector, the primary head usually carries not only the managerial responsibility for resources but also the operational activities connected with financial management. Primary deputy heads, where they exist, offer help with stock ordering, checking and educational resource allocation, but the logistical support of senior management teams and bursars is not apparent. Add to this a culture within which primary heads expect to get LEA advice and to follow LEA procedures, and it is possible to understand something of the lack of creativity in development planning in the primary sector. Governor expectations tend towards stability rather innovation, and towards single teacher small classes as an ideal, and this encourages planning to preserve the status quo. Development plans are then written to accord with this. Governors tend to lack expertise and time to fulfil their supposed strategic overview role (which headteachers may not entirely regret) and are very dependent on the headteacher to be proactive in ensuring the Governing Body's responsibilities for the planning oversight of the school are in effect carried out.

From both the case studies and the contents analysis of 120 OfSTED reports, it is clear that many primary schools use the SDP as a guide rather than a blueprint because they feel the need to be able to respond flexibly. 'A year is a long time in the life of a primary school' was the view of one chair of governors. Whilst we would argue that all the schools investigated are rational in that decisions are based upon aims, there is a clear leaning towards retroactive rather than synoptic planning.

There is also little in the way of strategic planning, for which we offer an explanation. We would propose a continuum of environmental states within which schools exist as organisations, from the highly placid to the highly turbulent (Hoy & Miskel 1987). At the placid end, the unchanging circumstances can be confidently predicted, and so strategic planning is unnecessary. At the turbulent end of the continuum, it is impossible to predict the environment in which the school must operate, and management is so taken up with day-to-day responses to events as they occur that resources for strategic planning—which is more difficult in these circumstances—are unlikely to be available. In between these two extremes, there is a range of environments in which strategic planning might be both feasible and practical.

It appeared to us that staff in the primary schools we studied remain unconvinced that technicist-rational planning is a key either to implementing change successfully or to school improvement. Whether circumstances have changed that state of affairs would be an interesting subject to explore. We believe that develop-

ments since we conducted the study have caused the current situation facing primary schools to be more akin to a highly turbulent than a highly placid environment. Changes brought about by government policy requirements are creating turbulent waters, and many small primary schools are being buffeted about. This in its turn creates a further set of problems that must be addressed on a short-term, immediate basis. After all, as Bate (1994) pointed out, the captain and crew of a small boat caught in a storm far out to sea are likely to be more concerned with just staying afloat than with plotting a course to steer.

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