

A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOLS AND TRUSTS

Leading *to Flourish*

Character, knowledge and action: the leadership behaviours that help children, colleagues and communities flourish, in every role and at every level.

VERSION 1.0 · 2026 · MAPPED TO THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

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ABOUT THIS FRAMEWORK

This framework describes the leadership that schools and trusts can expect of everyone who works in them: the character leaders bring, the knowledge they apply and the actions they take, shown in observable behaviours at every level. It is written for every colleague, teaching and support staff alike, and for those who govern, because leadership is not a title. It is how people conduct themselves and how they enable others, whatever their role, so that children flourish.

It is designed to be used, not filed: in how schools recruit and appoint, in the conversations they have about practice and growth, in the programmes through which they develop leaders, in how governors and trustees are inducted, and in the evidence they give families, inspectors and the public that a school is well led. Any school or trust may adopt it as it stands or make it their own; page 39 shows how.

National Leadership Framework®

ALIGNED TO THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

This framework is mapped, dimension by dimension and competency by competency, to the National Leadership Framework (NLF), a comprehensive, research- and evidence-informed standard for leadership developed from a comparative review of leadership frameworks across sectors and more than a thousand academic and practitioner sources. The NLF encourages organisations to translate its concepts into their own language, values and context while preserving their integrity. That is what this framework does for schools and trusts. The NLF's framework, wording and logo are the intellectual property of National Leadership Framework CIC; the alignment annex on page 37 shows the mapping in full.

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How to read the behaviours. Every behaviour in this framework begins with an active verb and describes conduct another person could observe. Where safeguarding duties, statutory guidance, policies, data, budgets or authority appear, the behaviour is always what the leader does as a person in that context: explains, role-models, reports, thanks, trusts, steps in. The processes themselves belong to policy; the leadership belongs to the people.

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FOREWORD

Leadership matters because children matter

Every child deserves to be taught, supported and cared for by adults who believe in them. That belief is not an abstraction. It lives in the teacher who refuses to lower expectations, in the teaching assistant who notices a child has gone quiet, in the office colleague who greets an anxious parent with patience, in the site manager who holds the door in the rain. Education changes lives because people change lives, and leadership is how schools make sure they can.

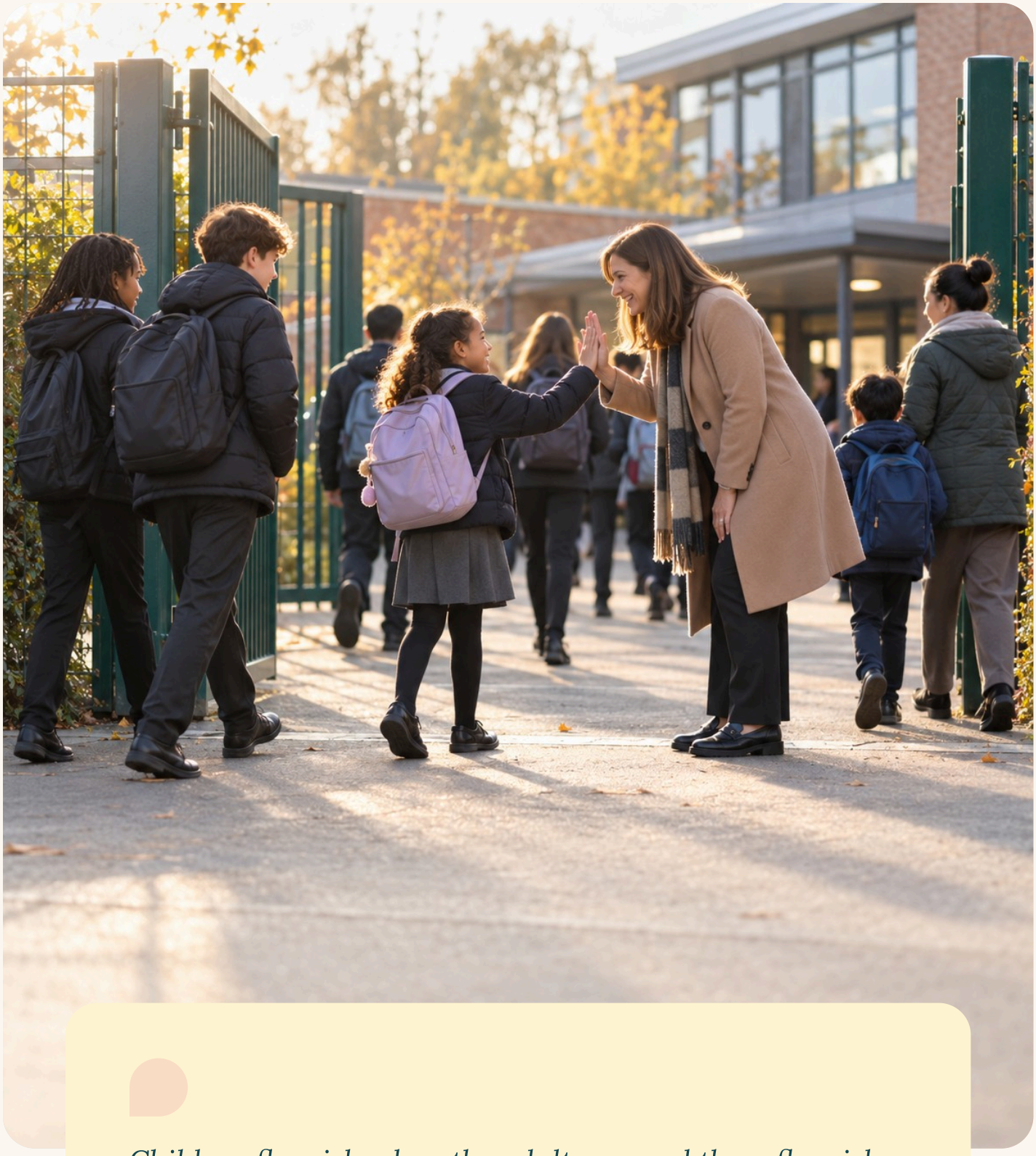
Leadership in a school is not defined by title or status. It is defined by influence: the daily actions, decisions and behaviours that shape lives, strengthen communities and create the conditions for others to succeed. The late Sir Tim Brighouse spoke of a butterfly effect, how a single conversation or moment of belief can trigger change far beyond what anyone can see. That is the leadership this framework describes, at every level and in every role.

It is called Leading to Flourish because that is its purpose. Children flourish when the adults around them flourish; adults flourish in schools where leadership is steady, fair, kind and clear. The framework sets out, in plain words, the character leaders bring, the knowledge they apply and the actions they take, as behaviours anyone can see, practise and develop. It is mapped to the National Leadership Framework, one of the most rigorous and evidence-informed standards for leadership available, and translated into the language of schools so that it reads as what it is: the profession's own.

Above all, leadership is an act of service. It asks for integrity, humility, compassion and an unwavering commitment to the life chances of children and young people. In a profession built on hope, there is no greater responsibility, and no greater privilege, than helping others learn, grow and flourish. Every colleague is invited to read this framework, to find themselves in it, and to hold every leader, at every level, to it.

A school or trust adopting this framework may replace this foreword with its own.

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Children flourish when the adults around them flourish. Leadership is how schools make sure they can: the teacher who refuses to lower expectations, the colleague who notices, the leader who chooses courage over comfort.

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1.0 Purpose of the Framework

This framework gives every colleague in a school or trust a shared language and a clear standard for leadership. It rests on the belief that exceptional leadership is fundamental to improving the life chances of children and young people, and that leadership exists at every level of an organisation, in classrooms, offices, kitchens, playgrounds and boardrooms.

The framework has been shaped by leadership research, by the professional standards and statutory expectations schools work to, and by the lived experience of leaders in schools serving every kind of community. It recognises that leadership in education is a lifelong journey, asking for adaptability, reflection and continuous learning. Each stage brings different demands, shaped by role, by the school and by an ever-changing landscape. No two leadership journeys are the same, and much of what is described here will already be familiar: leadership begins long before anyone is given a team.

At its core, the framework exists to strengthen leadership practice by making clear the values, knowledge and behaviours that enable individuals and teams to lead well. It establishes a shared understanding of what good leadership looks like in a school, and a consistent approach to developing it at every stage of a career, for teaching and support staff alike.

At the individual level, it supports growth through reflection, feedback, coaching and mentoring. It helps leaders at every stage recognise their strengths, identify areas to develop and strengthen their practice over time.

At the organisational level, it gives a school or trust a deeper understanding of its leadership culture. By identifying strengths, patterns and gaps across the workforce, leaders can target development where it is needed, understand readiness for change, and show families, governors, inspectors and the public how leadership serves children.

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THE FRAMEWORK IS INTENDED TO GIVE A SCHOOL OR TRUST

1 **Shared understanding**
of effective leadership across every school, phase, team and function

2 **Common values**
and expectations, in the same words everywhere, so that culture is strengthened

3 **Reflection and growth**
through self-assessment, coaching and feedback at every career stage

4 **Recruitment to succession**
informing how schools appoint, appraise, develop and plan for the future

5 **Clarity**
about the behaviours expected of leaders, and the behaviours that undermine leadership

6 **Safeguarding, inclusion and wellbeing**
shown as leadership conduct, not only as policy

7 **Purpose**
keeping leadership development aligned to children who flourish

8 **Evidence**
for governors, trustees and inspectors of leadership, in the language of schools

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1.1 Why Leadership Matters in Education

Schools exist so that children flourish: so that they learn, grow in confidence, feel they belong, and leave ready for lives they have chosen. Nothing in a school does more to decide whether that happens than the quality of its leadership, at every level.

The evidence is consistent. Leadership shapes the culture of a school, and culture shapes everything else: how adults treat children, how colleagues treat one another, whether people speak up, whether they stay, whether they get better at what they do. The most powerful leadership in the system does not take place in offices. It takes place in classrooms, corridors and conversations, in the hundreds of small decisions adults make every day about what to notice, what to say and what to expect.

Children flourish when the adults around them flourish. A colleague who is trusted, developed, listened to and treated with kindness brings those same things to the children in their care. A colleague who is micromanaged, blamed or ignored cannot, however hard they try. That is why this framework attends as carefully to how adults lead each other as to how they lead children, and why it names the behaviours that undermine leadership as plainly as those that build it.

Leadership in education is also a civic responsibility. Schools are anchors in their communities, often the most trusted public institution a family deals with. Leading well means leading beyond the school gate: with families, with other schools, with health and social care, with the community itself. The flourishing a school works for is not only the child's. It is the community's, and the school's own.

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1.2 Leadership and the Standards Schools Work To

Schools are held to high public standards because what they do matters to children and to the country. Every one of those standards is, at root, an expectation about the conduct of adults. This framework is how schools meet them through people.

Policies, procedures and statutory duties are essential. They are the architecture of a safe and well-run school. But architecture does not act. People act. A safeguarding policy is only as good as the colleague who notices and the leader who makes reporting normal. A behaviour policy is only as good as the adults who apply it with consistency and warmth. A workload charter is only as good as the leader who removes the task nobody needed.

That is why this framework keeps leadership and management distinct. Running a process is management. Explaining why it exists, modelling it, thanking the colleague who raised a concern, deferring to the SENCO's expertise, owning the outcome when something goes wrong: that is leadership, and it is what turns a sound policy into a safe and flourishing school. The standards below are the ones most schools in England work to; page 36 shows, competency by competency, how the behaviours in this framework support them.

Safeguarding
Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children: every adult notices, reports and acts, and leaders make that the culture.

Professional standards
The Teachers' Standards, especially Part Two on personal and professional conduct; the Headteachers' Standards 2020 and their ethics section; the codes that apply to support staff.

Development
The Early Career Framework and the National Professional Qualifications, which describe expert, evidence-informed practice and sustained development.

Inclusion and equality
The Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty and the SEND Code of Practice: fair treatment, reasonable adjustment and high ambition for every child.

Inspection
Ofsted's education inspection framework, in what it says about leadership, governance, inclusion, safeguarding and the experience of staff.

Governance and stewardship
The Academy Trust Handbook, the Department for Education's governance guides and the seven principles of public life: sound stewardship of public money and honest accountability.

Wellbeing and workload
The Education Staff Wellbeing Charter and the Department's workload commitments: leaders protect wellbeing and remove unnecessary work.

Ethical leadership
The Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education: trust, wisdom, kindness, justice, service, courage and optimism, which anchor the Character domain.

Across the United Kingdom. This framework is written for England's policy context. Schools in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland should read their own professional standards for teaching and leadership in place of those named here; the leadership behaviours are the same.

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1.3 What Leadership Is, and Is Not

Leadership, management and formal authority are three different functions. Most leaders perform all three, often at the same time, and they support one another. But they are not the same thing, and confusing them is how frameworks lose their way.

Leadership

Influencing people, shaping culture, developing individuals and teams, creating purpose and direction, building commitment and enabling performance. Leadership is shared across the school; leading is the part each person plays.

Management

Planning, organising, coordinating, monitoring and controlling resources and activities. Timetables, budgets, data, policies, rotas and records. Essential, and not what this framework describes.

Authority

The legitimate power to decide and the accountability that comes with it: the headteacher's decision, the governing board's duty, the trust's scheme of delegation. A context in which leadership happens, not a substitute for it.

The rule applied to every line. Management processes and authority are contexts in which leadership happens. The leadership is the behaviour of the person in them: how they model their character, and how they influence and enable others, while doing these things. So this framework never says "monitors compliance" or "allocates resources". It says "explains why a duty exists", "uses positional authority responsibly", "reports openly and thanks those who do the same".

Everyone can lead. Leadership is a function of the whole school, uniting people around a common purpose. It does not depend on formal authority. The teaching assistant who raises a concern about a child is leading. The early career teacher who asks the question nobody else will is leading. The site manager who sets the tone of the building every morning is leading. Excellent followership, contributing to the team's leadership from within it, is itself a form of leadership this framework names and values.

Leadership is grounded in values and shown in behaviour. It can be seen, discussed, coached and developed. That is why the framework is written as observable behaviours rather than traits, and why development is lifelong and goes well beyond training.

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2.0 The Definition and the Framework



A DEFINITION OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the combination of a leader's character, knowledge and action, shown through everyday behaviours, that inspires children, colleagues and communities to flourish and succeed.

The definition draws on the National Leadership Framework's definition, itself adapted from one proven across the most demanding environments: leadership as the combination of character, knowledge and action that inspires others to succeed. It keeps the three parts and the insistence that leadership is displayed through behaviours, and it names the people leadership in a school serves and what is wanted for them: children, colleagues and communities who flourish.

The three domains are deliberately few. Character is what leaders are: the values they live, the standards they uphold and the example they set. Knowledge is what leaders know: themselves, their people and their profession. Action is what leaders do: developing people, building teams and achieving outcomes that matter. Three domains were chosen because more would overlap; adding domains for management, systems or operations would blur the line between personal disposition, professional competence and behaviour.

Each domain has three dimensions, nine in all. Beneath them sit 35 competencies and 335 observable behaviours. At the centre of the model is the purpose of all of it: to inspire others to flourish and succeed.

EIGHT PRINCIPLES THAT UNDERPIN THE FRAMEWORK

1. Leadership, management and authority are separate, mutually supporting functions.
2. Leadership is shared across the school; leading is individual.
3. Everyone can contribute to leadership, at every level, whatever their authority.
4. Leader development is lifelong, grown through experience, relationships and reflection.
5. Development goes beyond training: it needs practice, feedback and a culture that supports learning.
6. Leadership practice is informed by evidence, evaluation and proportionate assurance.
7. Effective leadership is grounded in values, which guide judgement, behaviour and relationships.
8. Leadership involves character, knowledge and action, expressed through observable behaviours.



WHY FLOURISHING

Flourishing is the word the education profession uses for what it is for: children who learn, belong, grow in confidence and leave ready for lives they have chosen. It is the golden thread of this framework. Children flourish when the adults around them flourish; adults flourish in schools where leadership is steady, fair, kind and clear. Each level of leadership in section 6 describes what flourishing looks like in its sphere, from a colleague's own practice to a whole system.

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Three domains. Nine dimensions. One purpose.



A Leader's Character

What leaders are. The values they live, the standards they uphold and the example they set. The values people can rely on.

A Leader's Knowledge

What leaders know. Themselves, their people and their profession. The understanding behind wise judgement.

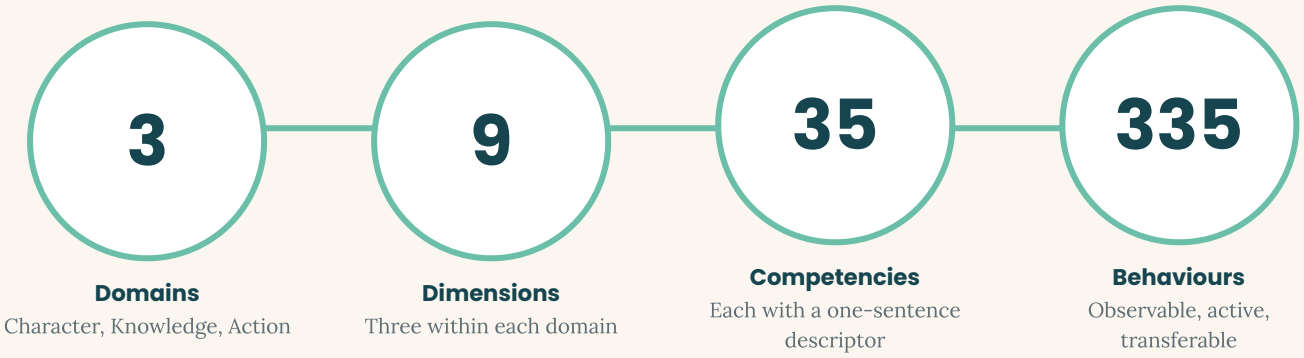
A Leader's Actions

What leaders do. Developing people, building teams and achieving outcomes that matter. How people, teams and outcomes flourish.

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2.1 Using the Framework

The framework is a developmental tool, not a checklist or a compliance instrument. It supports reflection, feedback, coaching, professional dialogue and leadership development over time. Leadership development is not linear: every leader will show different strengths across different dimensions depending on role, experience and context.



Mutually reinforcing. Each behaviour sits where it is most strongly evidenced, but behaviours are not meant to be read or applied in isolation. Reflection strengthens decisions, relationships strengthen influence, expertise strengthens credibility. Empathy sits in Character and underpins the whole framework; communication is a competency in its own right and runs through every other. Duplication has been kept to a minimum so the framework stays readable.

Levels. The domains stay constant; their application shifts with responsibility, risk and complexity. Section 6 shows how leadership changes across four levels, from leading yourself to leading across the system. Not every behaviour carries equal weight at every level, and misjudging behaviour against context is one of the ways leadership climates turn toxic.

Everyone. The framework applies to every colleague and to those who govern. Everyone shapes the culture, the experience and the outcomes of children through the influence they have on others every day.

Alongside it. The framework is accompanied by practical tools: self-review prompts, multi-source feedback, coaching guides, development pathways and recruitment questions, so that it is used in the everyday life of the school rather than read once and shelved.

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The behaviours that undermine leadership

This framework describes the leadership schools want to see. It also recognises the behaviours that undermine it, and expects every colleague and every governor to recognise and challenge them. Naming them helps everyone spot the early signs of a toxic climate in any classroom, team, school or boardroom.

- Narcissistic
- Authoritarian
- Abusive
- Manipulative
- Arrogance
- Unpredictable
- Intimidating
- Self-serving
- Incompetence (refusing to delegate or learn)
- Micromanagement
- Bullying
- Paranoia
- Favouritism
- Deceitfulness
- Lack of accountability
- Resistance to change
- Lack of empathy
- Isolationism

Every competency in this framework works against at least two of these behaviours, and each competency card shows which. Three are built to counter the patterns that most often damage schools: **Makes It Safe to Speak and Learn** against intimidation and bullying; **Empowers Others Within Clear Freedoms** against micromanagement and the instinct to centralise after a difficult inspection or incident; and **Shows Loyalty Through Honest Challenge** against favouritism, silence and blind loyalty.

How schools use it. In recruitment and appointment, in appraisal and professional dialogue, in the design of leadership programmes, in staff surveys and culture reviews, in the induction of governors and trustees, in the alignment of people, learning, safeguarding and governance policies, and in the evidence given to families, inspectors and the public. Section 7 sets out these practical uses and the policy statement that sits behind them.

A note on judgement. Not every behaviour is needed in equal measure in every situation. A leader in the middle of a safeguarding incident needs composure and clear decisions more than a development conversation; a leader on a quiet Tuesday should be having that conversation. Reading the moment is itself part of the framework.

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3.0 · WHAT LEADERS ARE

A Leader's Character

the values people can rely on

Character is the foundation of leadership. It shapes how leaders think, behave, decide and treat people, most of all when they are under pressure or unsure. In a school, leadership is judged not only by results but by the values, integrity and professionalism through which those results are pursued, because children learn from who the adults are long before they learn from what the adults say.

Children flourish when the adults around them are steady, fair and kind. A Leader's Character describes the values leaders live, the standards they uphold and the example they set, so that every child, family and colleague knows what they can rely on.

Lives the Values

Courage, integrity, respect, loyalty, service and kindness: the values that guide what leaders do when it is hard.

Upholds the Highest Standards

Lawful, appropriate and professional conduct: the non-negotiables that keep children safe and keep leaders worthy of trust.

Sets the Example

Humility, ownership, influence and selflessness: character made visible, so that others have something to follow.

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3.1 Where Values Sit

The Character domain is anchored on the values the education profession has already chosen for itself. Where a school or trust has its own values, they sit here too, and the table shows how.

THE FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

The Ethical Leadership Commission (2019) named seven virtues that leaders in education should hold, alongside the seven principles of public life. Each maps directly onto competencies in the Character and Knowledge domains.

Trust	Acts with Integrity (02), Owns Decisions and Outcomes (11)
Wisdom	Thinks About Their Own Thinking (16), Makes Wise and Timely Decisions (34)
Kindness	Leads with Kindness (06), Puts Others First (13)
Justice	Respects Every Person (03), Acts Appropriately in Every Setting (08)
Service	Serves a Purpose Bigger Than Themselves (05), Builds Partnerships Beyond the School (35)
Courage	Shows Moral Courage (01), Shows Loyalty Through Honest Challenge (04)
Optimism	Influences by Example (12), Stays Steady Under Pressure (15)

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

The Nolan Principles apply to everyone who serves the public, and the Headteachers' Standards require headteachers to uphold them. They are carried throughout Lives the Values, Upholds the Highest Standards and Sets the Example.

Selflessness · Integrity · Objectivity · Accountability · Openness · Honesty · Leadership

Selflessness is carried by Serves a Purpose Bigger Than Themselves and Puts Others First; integrity and honesty by Acts with Integrity; objectivity by Acts Professionally and Makes Wise and Timely Decisions; accountability by Owns Decisions and Outcomes; openness by Listens and Communicates Clearly; and leadership by the framework as a whole.

WHERE YOUR SCHOOL OR TRUST HAS ITS OWN VALUES, THEY SIT HERE

Most schools and trusts hold three to six values of their own. They do not need a separate framework; each maps onto the competencies that make it observable. Write each value in a box below with the competencies that carry it, so that colleagues see the connection every time they use the framework. Two worked examples are shown.

Example: Kindness
Leads with Kindness (06), Puts Others First (13), Makes It Safe to Speak and Learn (28)

Example: Ambition
Sustains Excellence Together (31), Unlocks Potential in Others (27), Sets Direction and Shared Purpose (32)

Your value
Competencies that carry it

Your value
Competencies that carry it

Your value
Competencies that carry it

Your value
Competencies that carry it

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Lives the Values

3.2 · A LEADER'S CHARACTER · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION VALUES-DRIVEN

Values are the moral basis of how leaders lead. They anchor choices in principles a leader could explain to a child, and they hold when it would be easier to let them slip. Values-led leadership gives colleagues and families consistency of character, and from that comes trust.

> *In education these values are the ones the Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education names: trust, wisdom, kindness, justice, service, courage and optimism, alongside the seven principles of public life.*

01

NLF: Moral Courage

Shows Moral Courage

Does what is right for children and colleagues, and says so, even when it is unpopular, uncomfortable or carries personal risk.

- Exercises sound moral judgement and chooses the ethically grounded course of action
- Makes difficult, principled decisions for children even when they are unpopular with adults
- Resists pressure, temptation or rationalisation when facing an ethical dilemma
- Challenges unethical, unfair or unjust behaviour in others, whatever their seniority
- Speaks up early when something is not right for a child, naming the concern to the person who can act on it
- Amplifies the voices of children, families and colleagues who face injustice or unfair treatment
- Challenges practices and systems that hold some children back or treat some people unfairly
- Acts despite personal fear when ethical action carries personal risk
- Encourages and enables moral courage in others through support and personal example

Works against: deceitfulness, self-serving, intimidating

02

NLF: Integrity

Acts with Integrity

Is honest and consistent, so that what they say, what they do and what they expect of others are the same thing.

- Deals truthfully and honestly in every interaction with children, families, colleagues and partners
- Does what is right even when no one is watching
- Holds themselves to the same expectations they set for children and colleagues
- Honours commitments and follows through on promises made to children, families and colleagues
- Communicates decisions openly, explaining the rationale with clarity and transparency
- Aligns personal conduct with the school's values and professional standards
- Upholds personal integrity when faced with competing interests or pressures
- Rejects blind or misguided loyalty that would compromise integrity or standards
- Reinforces a culture of honesty through clear expectations and personal example

Works against: deceitfulness, manipulative, lack of accountability

03

NLF: Respect for Others

Respects Every Person

Treats every child, family and colleague with dignity and fairness, and makes sure every voice has a place.

- Treats every child, family and colleague with respect and courtesy
- Acts reasonably and judiciously, assuming good intent in others
- Applies fairness, impartiality and transparency in decisions that affect people, including workload, opportunity and recognition
- Ensures equitable access to development, opportunity and advancement for teaching and support staff alike
- Promotes voice, participation and belonging for children, families and colleagues across every group
- Values individuality and diversity of perspective, background and experience
- Addresses behaviour that belittles, dismisses, marginalises or undermines others
- Cultivates inclusive and respectful conduct within their sphere of influence

Works against: favouritism, bullying, lack of empathy

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Lives the Values continued

04

NLF: Loyalty

Shows Loyalty Through Honest Challenge

Stands by people and purpose, offering constructive challenge to colleagues and leaders rather than silent agreement or blind loyalty.

- Displays consistent commitment to the school's purpose, values and people
- Advocates for colleagues' interests and wellbeing, including when they are not in the room
- Supports colleagues' ideas and contributions appropriately in wider forums
- Offers constructive and responsible challenge to colleagues and senior leaders when necessary, putting children first
- Balances loyalty to individuals with duty to children, the school and the public
- Reconciles competing loyalties by putting the collective purpose first
- Represents the views and interests of others fairly when speaking for them
- Commits fully to a decision once it is properly made, even when they argued for another course

Works against: deceitfulness, paranoia, isolationism

05

NLF: Service

Serves a Purpose Bigger Than Themselves

Puts children, the community and the long-term good of the school before personal status or convenience, stewarding public money and resources with care.

- Prioritises the collective purpose above personal status, benefit, convenience or short-term self-interest
- Stewards public money, resources and people responsibly, balancing effectiveness with restraint and long-term sustainability
- Protects the school's interests and integrity against competing or misaligned agendas
- Enhances the school's reputation through ethical, values-driven conduct in every external setting
- Promotes sustainable practices that preserve social, environmental and institutional resources for future children
- Invests in others' development to strengthen the school's long-term capacity and resilience
- Supports initiatives that contribute positively to the local community and to society
- Acts as a civic leader, working with the community so that the school is a source of support beyond the school day
- Privileges long-term benefit for children and the public over short-term gain or expediency

Works against: self-serving, narcissistic

06

NLF: Humanity and Compassion

Leads with Kindness

Notices how people are, responds with empathy and patience, and creates a climate of care in which adults and children feel safe to be themselves.

- Listens attentively and responds with empathy to others' feelings, needs and perspectives
- Shows kindness and appreciation beyond formal courtesy or role obligation
- Offers support proactively when a child, family or colleague is experiencing difficulty or strain
- Recognises signs of distress or vulnerability in children and adults, and responds with care and sensitivity
- Communicates in language and tone that is warm, constructive and encouraging
- Shows patience and tolerance toward differing experiences, views and emotional responses
- Responds to honest mistakes with understanding, focusing on learning rather than blame
- Fosters a climate of care, compassion and warmth within their sphere of influence

Works against: lack of empathy, abusive, bullying

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Upholds the Highest Standards

3.3 · A LEADER'S CHARACTER · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION UPHOLDS THE HIGHEST STANDARDS

Leaders are custodians of standards that are not theirs to lower. They keep children safe, act within the law and statutory guidance, behave as the setting requires and uphold the professional standards of their roles. Living these standards, and helping others own them, is what gives leadership its legitimacy.

> *Keeping Children Safe in Education, the Teachers' Standards and the Headteachers' Standards all describe conduct, and conduct is leadership: it is what children and colleagues see adults do.*

07

NLF: Lawfulness

Acts Lawfully and Keeps Children Safe

Acts within the law, statutory guidance and safeguarding duties, and helps others understand and own those duties rather than merely comply.

- Acts within legal, statutory and safeguarding requirements, making the expectations clear to others
- Uses positional authority responsibly, ensuring their own decisions are lawful, proportionate and accountable
- Explains why a safeguarding, statutory or policy requirement exists, so colleagues understand and own it rather than merely comply
- Promotes respect for legal obligations and statutory guidance through personal example
- Challenges unlawful or non-compliant behaviour through appropriate and proportionate channels
- Reports and records safeguarding concerns promptly and openly, and thanks colleagues who do the same
- Promotes safeguarding, equality, inclusion and special educational needs obligations as matters of conduct, not only policy
- Models accurate, transparent and diligent record-keeping, so others can trust decisions and follow lawful practice

Works against: deceitfulness, lack of accountability, self-serving

08

NLF: Appropriateness

Acts Appropriately in Every Setting

Judges what conduct, language and boundaries each setting calls for, with children, families, colleagues and online, and steps in when others fall short.

- Adjusts personal conduct to suit the context, audience and setting, in the classroom, the staffroom, the community and online
- Considers the impact of personal conduct on the school, its children and its colleagues
- Refrains from undue assumptions, judgement or criticism of others
- Challenges inappropriate and unacceptable language and behaviour
- Intervenes to prevent or stop the mistreatment of others
- Uses position and voice to include marginalised or underrepresented views
- Protects the confidentiality of children, families and colleagues in every conversation and channel

Works against: abusive, intimidating, unpredictable

09

NLF: Professionalism

Acts Professionally

Upholds the professional standards of their role, keeps proper boundaries, acts without favouritism and represents the school with credit.

- Aligns decisions and conduct with professional expectations and the school's values
- Consistently upholds the professional standards and codes of conduct that apply to their role
- Maintains personal and professional boundaries with children, families and colleagues, avoiding over-familiarity and conflicts of interest
- Ensures impartial decisions, free from bias, favouritism or improper influence
- Models a professional demeanour in tone, conduct, communication and personal bearing
- Represents the school responsibly, safeguarding its public reputation and credibility
- Promotes and encourages adherence to professional expectations and standards in others

Works against: arrogance, favouritism, unpredictable

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Sets the Example

3.4 · A LEADER'S CHARACTER · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION MODELS EXEMPLARY BEHAVIOURS

Leaders are judged by what they do as much as by what they say. Setting the example means admitting what they do not know, owning their decisions and the outcomes, earning commitment through credibility rather than status, and putting others first. It is how character becomes visible, and how it becomes something others want to emulate.

> *Every teacher is told from their first day that children copy what adults do. The same is true of every colleague who watches a leader.*

10

NLF: Humility

Leads with Humility

Admits what they do not know, seeks feedback, gives credit and makes room for others, so that learning is visibly normal.

- Openly acknowledges their own limitations and mistakes, building trust and rapport
- Conscientiously seeks feedback and applies it to learn and improve
- Listens and engages attentively, valuing others' ideas, perspectives and experience
- Willingly seeks and accepts assistance, harnessing the strengths of others
- Offers authentic gratitude and appreciation for the support of others
- Creates space for others' voices, encouraging input, challenge and participation
- Remains modest, avoiding self-promotion, arrogance or ego-driven behaviour

Works against: narcissistic, arrogance, incompetence (refusing to learn)

11

NLF: Accountability

Owns Decisions and Outcomes

Takes responsibility for their choices and their team's results, shares successes and failures openly and learns from both.

- Accepts responsibility for their own decisions and actions
- Takes accountability for team decisions and outcomes, including outcomes for children
- Delivers on agreed decisions and commitments
- Owns and addresses mistakes, failures and consequences, capturing the lessons
- Communicates outcomes transparently, owning successes as much as failures
- Fosters a positive culture of accountability and ownership in others
- Clarifies responsibilities and accountability expectations for others

Works against: lack of accountability, manipulative

12

NLF: Influence

Influences by Example

Earns commitment through credibility, calm confidence and optimism rather than status, winning people over by involving them.

- Projects confidence and conviction through calm, clear and reassuring communication
- Inspires confidence through assertive and decisive action, with measured self-assurance
- Persuades others ethically, building consensus around shared goals
- Inspires optimism, reframing setbacks as opportunities for growth and improvement
- Achieves buy-in by involving others in shaping decisions
- Engages families, governors and partners, building trust through collaboration
- Builds support for ideas and initiatives through relationships and networks

Works against: authoritarian, manipulative, intimidating

13

NLF: Selflessness

Puts Others First

Gives time, shares burdens and redirects praise to others, while looking after themselves well enough to keep doing so.

- Offers time generously and proactively to support others, without expecting a return
- Willingly shares burdens to reduce pressure on others, accepting the impact on themselves
- Protects the efforts and wellbeing of others, even at personal cost
- Balances support for others with sustainable self-care, avoiding harmful self-sacrifice
- Models looking after their own wellbeing, so that others feel able to do the same
- Places collective success above self-recognition, redirecting praise to others
- Shares credit publicly, highlighting the contributions of others
- Steps back in success to let others' efforts shine

Works against: self-serving, narcissistic

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4.0 · WHAT LEADERS KNOW

A Leader's Knowledge

the understanding behind wise judgement

Leading a class, a team, a school or a trust takes more than expertise alone. It takes the self-awareness to know how one lands on others, the insight to understand the people and relationships around oneself, and the professional knowledge to make wise decisions in a complex and changing landscape.

Knowledge is developmental, not fixed. It grows through learning, reflection, feedback, professional dialogue and experience. When leaders deepen their understanding of themselves, of their people and of their profession, they lead with greater credibility, insight and purpose, and they make the judgements on which children's flourishing depends.

Knows Themselves

Self-awareness, steadiness under pressure and clear thinking: the inner work that makes everything else possible.

Knows Their People

Reading people, understanding teams, repairing trust and respecting difference: the insight behind strong relationships.

Knows Their Profession

Craft and evidence, community and context, the national picture, and how the school and trust work: professional knowledge put to use.

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Knows Themselves

4.1 · A LEADER'S KNOWLEDGE · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION KNOWS THEMSELF

Leadership begins with understanding how one's own values, emotions, habits and biases shape how one decides and how one treats people. Leaders learn to recognise their triggers and regulate their responses, to recover from setbacks, and to think about their own thinking so that their judgement improves over time.

> *School life asks a great deal of composure: a difficult parent at the gate, an incident at break, an inspection call. Self-knowledge is what lets a leader stay steady and kind when it counts.*

14

NLF: Self-Awareness

Knows Their Strengths, Limits and Impact

Understands their own values, triggers and blind spots, and how their behaviour lands on children and colleagues, using feedback to see themselves clearly.

- Identifies the personal values, ambitions, motivators and demotivators that shape their behaviour and decisions
- Analyses their strengths and limitations against the expectations of their role and their aspirations
- Evaluates their stress patterns, triggers, unhelpful habits and the effect of their emotional responses on others
- Recognises their own feelings, emotions and biases as they influence judgement and self-talk in the moment
- Seeks, integrates and reflects on feedback to evaluate the impact of their leadership on others
- Identifies blind spots in their leadership to prioritise areas for development
- Reflects on past experiences and interactions, drawing lessons to adjust future practice
- Distinguishes the impact they intended from the impact they actually had
- Uses assessment tools and multi-source feedback to build objective self-knowledge

Works against: arrogance, unpredictable, narcissistic

15

NLF: Self-Management and Resilience

Stays Steady Under Pressure

Regulates their emotions in the moment, recovers from setbacks and keeps going with composure and good humour through the demands of school life.

- Thinks before responding, regulating impulses to avoid emotionally reactive or destructive behaviour
- Anticipates how stress escalates from triggers, regulating their response to minimise the impact on children and colleagues
- Reframes their own mistakes, setbacks and self-criticism as opportunities to learn, recover and grow
- Practises self-compassion to sustain confidence, self-efficacy and a positive self-narrative
- Moves forward constructively and with determination amid uncertainty, ambiguity or incomplete information
- Adapts their thinking and behaviour flexibly to new, changing or unexpected demands
- Sustains effort with optimism, humour and perseverance through challenge and adversity
- Seeks support from relationships and networks when demands exceed their emotional capacity

Works against: unpredictable, abusive, intimidating

16

NLF: Metacognition and Reflective Thinking

Thinks About Their Own Thinking

Tests their assumptions, questions their biases, weighs evidence against intuition and learns deliberately from experience.

- Identifies the cognitive processes and systematic biases shaping their reactions and the quality of their reasoning
- Monitors how changing context influences their assumptions, problem-framing and judgement
- Sustains attention and focus under pressure through deliberate cognitive control
- Distinguishes material factors from noise when analysing complex information
- Interrogates data and evidence to challenge assumptions and inform reasoning
- Critically reviews decisions and their underlying logic to improve future judgement
- Judges when to rely on intuition, stable assumptions or analysis of data, and calibrates accordingly
- Evaluates others' ideas critically, deliberately integrating challenge and diverse perspectives
- Synthesises information from multiple sources into coherent understanding and conclusions
- Redirects unproductive rumination toward constructive analysis of next steps

Works against: arrogance, incompetence, paranoia

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Knows Their People

4.2 · A LEADER'S KNOWLEDGE · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION KNOWS OTHERS

A leader's people are children, families and colleagues. Knowing them means noticing what they feel and what they leave unsaid, understanding what motivates and constrains each member of a team, recognising when trust is wearing thin, and appreciating how background, identity and culture shape the way people see the school.

> *Schools serve whole communities. The leader who understands the families, faiths, languages and generations around the school leads with far more insight than one who does not.*

17

NLF: Social Awareness

Reads People and the Room

Notices what children, families and colleagues are feeling from what they say and do not say, and senses when the mood of a group has shifted.

- Distinguishes others' emotions from verbal and non-verbal cues, adjusting their own response
- Interprets observed social cues and anticipates their effect on team dynamics and climate
- Detects misalignment between words, tone and body language
- Notices silence, hesitation or withdrawal as potential signs of withheld views or discomfort, in children as well as adults
- Recognises when the collective mood changes across a class, a team or a staffroom, affecting interactions or performance
- Identifies informal patterns of influence that shape decision-making and participation
- Identifies whose contributions are ignored or marginalised, detecting missing perspectives
- Infers underlying concerns from recurring emotional patterns and tensions
- Considers others' perspectives before forming judgements in emotionally charged situations

Works against: lack of empathy, isolationism

18

NLF: Team Dynamics

Understands Their Team

Understands each person's strengths, motivations and pressures, and how the team's norms and interactions help or hinder its work for children.

- Identifies individual strengths, weaknesses and potential within the team
- Identifies individual motivators, demotivators and biases affecting contribution and engagement
- Identifies how different colleagues respond to different stresses and pressures, including the rhythm of the school year
- Assesses role demands against individual strengths to align fit and contribution
- Identifies patterns of constructive and unproductive interaction affecting team effectiveness
- Identifies the team norms that shape challenge, accountability and information sharing
- Analyses how roles interact to identify gaps, overlaps and collective blind spots
- Recognises individual workload or wellbeing factors constraining the team's performance
- Evaluates team climate, participation and cohesion to diagnose barriers to performance
- Identifies how differences in perspective shape participation, challenge and decision quality

Works against: favouritism, micromanagement

19

NLF: Relationship Management

Understands Relationships and Trust

Recognises the sources of tension and lost trust in working relationships, and knows how to rebuild rapport and common ground.

- Identifies areas of task, relationship or process conflict to manage tensions proactively
- Explores sources of tension affecting perceptions of fairness, equality and mutual respect
- Identifies tensions between individual needs and collective team objectives
- Identifies early warning signs of trust erosion and explores effective remedies
- Identifies individual biases that could affect trust, respect and relationship quality
- Listens attentively and without judgement to concerns raised in interpersonal exchanges
- Identifies and builds on common ground to strengthen rapport and alignment
- Communicates with tact and diplomacy, promoting reciprocity and mutual respect
- Applies emotional and social awareness to strengthen empathy, rapport and relational trust

Works against: paranoia, manipulative, isolationism

20

NLF: Cultural Awareness

Understands Culture, Community and Difference

Understands how background, identity, generation and culture shape how people see the school, and adapts how they communicate without losing their own authenticity.

- Identifies how societal, community, organisational and team cultures shape team dynamics and performance
- Analyses differences in inter-generational needs and expectations among colleagues and families
- Identifies verbal and non-verbal differences and adapts their communication accordingly
- Identifies how cultural norms influence emotional expression and interpretation
- Reviews assumptions and suspends judgement when working across cultural differences
- Adapts interaction norms to align with the cultural expectations of the families and community the school serves
- Seeks to deepen knowledge of the communities, faiths, languages and cultures represented in the school
- Anticipates cultural tensions and evaluates their impact on inclusion, dynamics and performance
- Analyses how diverse cultural perspectives enhance problem-solving and organisational learning
- Demonstrates confidence, composure and humility in culturally diverse interactions

Works against: lack of empathy, arrogance

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Knows Their Profession

4.3 · A LEADER'S KNOWLEDGE · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION KNOWS THEIR PROFESSION

Trust and credibility are built on professional competence. Leaders bring real expertise to their roles, whether in the classroom, the office or the site, and they keep it current. They understand the community and context the school serves, read the national picture for what it means locally, and understand how the school and trust work well enough to improve them.

> *Evidence-informed practice, pupil and parent voice, inspection findings, funding and demographic change, and the rise of artificial intelligence all shape what a school needs its leaders to know.*

21

NLF: Professional and Technical Expertise

Knows Their Craft and the Evidence

Brings real expertise to their role, whether in the classroom, the office or the site, keeps it current and uses evidence, research and data to judge what works for children.

- Demonstrates the breadth and depth of expertise their role demands, to underpin professional credibility
- Applies professional expertise with sound judgement in complex or high-stakes situations
- Maintains professional currency through continuous learning and awareness of emerging research, methods and technologies
- Synthesises research evidence, learning science and peer expertise to inform judgement and contribute to best practice
- Distinguishes reliable from unreliable evidence, recognising bias and limitation before acting on it
- Aligns professional decisions with the school's standards, goals and ethical expectations
- Evaluates how statutory, policy and curriculum requirements must be integrated into plans for their area
- Interprets performance and outcome data to inform evidence-based improvement
- Anticipates the implications of policy and regulatory change for practice and provision
- Sustains professional credibility through consistent, competent and ethical conduct

Works against: incompetence, arrogance

22

NLF: External Context and Stakeholders

Understands the Community and Context

Understands the families, community, partners, local priorities and inspection and assurance findings that shape what the school needs, including what pupils and parents are saying.

- Evaluates legal and regulatory governance requirements, including inspection, audit and assurance findings
- Assesses local and regional policy shifts and priorities to align the school's work
- Assesses community and stakeholder needs and expectations, influencing the school's priorities
- Listens to pupil, parent and community voice and weighs what they say in judgements about provision
- Assesses the activity of other schools, sector leaders and trends to identify threats and opportunities
- Assesses alignment with sector-specific regulatory and governance models
- Assesses volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity in the environment to inform adaptive judgement and risk awareness
- Evaluates partnerships and operational dependencies, including with other agencies, shaping collaboration and provision
- Assesses staffing, funding and supply constraints affecting resilience and continuity
- Monitors environmental and sustainability obligations shaping the school's practice

Works against: isolationism, resistance to change

23

NLF: Strategic and National Perspective

Sees the Bigger Picture

Reads national policy, funding, demographic and technological trends, including AI, for what they mean for the school over the long term, and tests plans against what might happen.

- Evaluates political, economic and funding developments shaping long-term priorities
- Scans demographic, societal and technological trends, including falling rolls and artificial intelligence, for strategic implications and opportunities
- Analyses power, authority and influence across key stakeholders, institutions and partnerships
- Evaluates the networks of schools, trusts, local authorities and agencies that shape the national system
- Evaluates alignment with national priorities, regulatory expectations and public-value commitments
- Applies strategic frameworks and concepts to evaluate the school's choices and trade-offs
- Integrates historical lessons and comparative cases into strategic judgement
- Evaluates emerging technologies, data and innovation for strategic disruption, opportunity and risk
- Assesses the school's strategic narrative and sources of reputational risk
- Stress-tests the resilience of strategy and plans against plausible future scenarios

Works against: resistance to change, isolationism, arrogance

24

NLF: Organisational Systems and Processes

Understands How the School and Trust Work

Understands the structures, systems, governance and routines of the school and trust, how they shape workload and coherence, and where they could work better.

- Evaluates the school's structures and interdependencies that enhance or constrain provision
- Analyses formal and informal decision-making processes shaping outcomes
- Evaluates how governance, assurance and accountability systems sustain trust and accountability
- Evaluates the school's risk frameworks, strengthening the capacity to anticipate and mitigate disruption
- Evaluates how resource and budget allocation processes influence sustainability and efficiency
- Interprets performance indicators and measures of effectiveness to identify systemic improvement
- Critiques internal processes to identify inefficiencies, unnecessary workload and operating constraints
- Evaluates the level of stakeholder influence and support affecting the school's ecosystem
- Assesses how policy and procedural requirements shape operating effectiveness
- Evaluates the learning and feedback loops embedded in systems to support continuous improvement

Works against: incompetence, micromanagement

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5.0 · WHAT LEADERS DO

A Leader's Actions

how people, teams and outcomes flourish

The most visible part of leadership is what leaders do: the actions, decisions and behaviours that shape the experience of those they lead. A leader's actions set the culture of a classroom, a team and a school, and they are what others observe, learn from and copy.

Drawing on action-centred leadership, leaders hold three needs in balance: the individual, the team and the task. They develop people so that they grow in confidence and capability; they build teams in which people feel safe, heard and committed; and they achieve outcomes that matter for children, their families and the community. Sustainable improvement comes from attending to all three, not from pursuing one at the expense of the others.

Develops People

A leader's own growth, support with challenge, and belief in others' potential: leaders who build other leaders.

Builds Teams

Safety to speak and learn, shared leadership, and listening before telling: the conditions in which a team of adults does its best work for children.

Achieves Outcomes That Matter

Sustained excellence, shared purpose, real empowerment, wise decisions and partnership: turning intent into results that change children's lives.

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Develops People

5.1 · A LEADER'S ACTIONS · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION DEVELOPS INDIVIDUALS

Leaders build other leaders, and they never stop building themselves. Through deliberate practice, feedback, coaching and balanced support and challenge, they help every colleague grow in confidence, skill and judgement, and they model the curiosity and humility that make learning a lifelong habit.

> *From early career teachers to experienced support staff, development in schools works best when someone believes in you, shows you what good looks like and lets you practise.*

25

NLF: Developing Themselves

Keeps Learning and Growing

Takes ownership of their own development through deliberate practice, feedback and reflection, and looks after the habits that sustain their wellbeing and energy.

- Sets specific development goals linked to personal growth and leadership impact
- Diagnoses the priority knowledge and skill gaps affecting their effectiveness
- Creates purposeful development plans and routines to sustain personal learning
- Takes ownership of their development through self-motivation and accountability for continuous growth
- Applies new learning deliberately to improve day-to-day practice
- Practises specific aspects of their craft deliberately and repeatedly until they become fluent
- Seeks targeted coaching, mentoring and peer support to guide ongoing development
- Seeks multi-source feedback on their impact and integrates the insights
- Reflects critically on conduct, feedback and experience to identify areas for improvement
- Transfers learning across contexts, adapting behaviour after success, failure or change
- Maintains physical, mental and emotional routines for sustained health, wellbeing and performance
- Balances ambition with reality to sustain focus, energy and performance over time

Works against: incompetence (refusing to learn), arrogance, resistance to change

26

NLF: Providing Support and Challenge

Supports and Challenges

Gives steady support and honest, timely feedback, coaches people through difficulty and sets stretch that helps them improve.

- Guides colleagues to translate needs and aspirations into actionable goals, plans and learning priorities
- Provides reassurance and steadiness during uncertainty, sustaining confidence and focus
- Provides timely, constructive feedback that reinforces strengths and promotes learning and growth
- Sets stretch objectives that link personal growth to collective goals
- Facilitates reflection on past experience to enhance learning and improvement
- Models effective practice, making their thinking, decisions and expectations explicit so others can learn from it
- Breaks complex practice into components that can be taught, practised and refined
- Explores collaboratively how best to support others' growth and development
- Guides recovery and learning after a setback or failure, rebuilding confidence and adaptive performance
- Guides problem-solving to overcome obstacles and sustain performance under pressure
- Promotes physical, mental and emotional wellbeing to sustain energy and resilience
- Recognises others' effort, contribution and impact, strengthening confidence, motivation and self-efficacy
- Reviews development progress continually, adjusting the balance of guidance, support and challenge
- Balances time on their own tasks with visible presence in support of others

Works against: micromanagement, lack of empathy, bullying

27

NLF: Inspiring and Enabling Others

Unlocks Potential in Others

Shows belief in people, gives them progressive responsibility and fair access to development, and helps them see a future they had not imagined for themselves.

- Expresses belief in others' abilities and potential through sustained trust, time and encouragement
- Provides progressive responsibility and exposure that develops confidence and decision-making
- Provides mentoring and guidance that builds autonomy, independent confidence and professional judgement
- Creates meaningful opportunities for others to learn, broaden their skills and progress
- Aligns emerging talent with opportunities to maximise growth and contribution
- Identifies emerging strengths and development needs to inform long-term growth planning
- Develops others' habits of self-reflection to sustain independent, continuous learning
- Addresses under-performance through constructive dialogue and structured development planning
- Affirms growth and progress positively, clarifying next steps and opportunities to build self-belief
- Ensures equitable access to mentoring, coaching and development across roles, schools and backgrounds
- Encourages strategic, bigger-picture thinking to broaden understanding, perspective and ambition

Works against: favouritism, micromanagement, self-serving

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Builds Teams

5.2 · A LEADER'S ACTIONS · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION BUILDS TEAMS

Leaders build cohesive, inclusive teams in which people feel safe to raise concerns, try things and learn from mistakes. Leadership in a team is shared: leaders invite colleagues to lead within their expertise, defer to them when that serves children, and listen before they speak. High intellectual friction and low social friction is the mark of a team that is flourishing.

> *A teaching team, a year group, an office or a site team is where the culture of a school is actually made. What happens to the last person who spoke up tells everyone whether it is safe to do so.*

28

NLF: Creating Psychological Safety

Makes It Safe to Speak and Learn

Creates a climate in which people can raise concerns, ask questions, try things and admit mistakes without fear.

- Establishes clear and respectful norms that prevent belittlement, ridicule and exclusion
- Invites informed, constructive challenge of ideas and assumptions, reducing fear of consequences
- Responds with composure and tolerance when mistakes, risks or unwelcome information are raised
- Thanks and visibly protects colleagues who raise a concern, so that speaking up is seen to be rewarded
- Invites candid discussion and shared learning once assumptions, freedoms and constraints are understood
- Examines ideas critically and respectfully, keeping debate on issues rather than individuals
- Gives fair, reasoned and courteous explanations when disagreeing or declining a suggestion
- Encourages inquisitive questioning to identify gaps in knowledge and build shared understanding
- Facilitates curiosity-led dialogue that supports creativity, critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving
- Creates a safe-to-fail environment that enables purposeful experimentation and learning in the classroom and the team
- Actively seeks underrepresented perspectives and incorporates them into discussion
- Ensures decisions reflect reasoned contributions from collective participation before moving forward

Works against: intimidating, bullying, authoritarian, paranoia

29

NLF: Cultivating Teamship

Shares Leadership Across the Team

Treats leadership as something the whole team does, inviting people to lead within their expertise, deferring to them when it serves children, and securing commitment once decisions are made.

- Affirms leadership as a shared endeavour with interdependent roles and responsibilities
- Clarifies decision authority and accountability to set role expectations and reduce ambiguity
- Enables colleagues' agency, autonomy and influence in addressing shared leadership challenges
- Invites constructive dissent, feedback and independent, critical thought
- Willingly defers to others when their expertise best serves children and the team
- Balances authority with openness, encouraging participation and challenge before decisions are taken
- Builds consensus, commitment and shared ownership around collectively agreed decisions
- Recognises and celebrates cooperation and co-creation that contributes to collective success
- Creates opportunities for others, including support staff, to lead within their areas of expertise
- Encourages peer-to-peer accountability for upholding shared values and standards
- Facilitates collective reflection to strengthen leader and follower effectiveness over time
- Secures commitment once decisions are made, distinguishing destructive dissent from constructive criticism

Works against: authoritarian, micromanagement, narcissistic

30

NLF: Communicating Effectively

Listens and Communicates Clearly

Listens first, asks good questions and then communicates with clarity, warmth and honesty, in the way each audience needs.

- Listens actively and attentively to understand perspectives before responding or deciding
- Uses effective questioning to confirm and deepen understanding
- Confirms the intent of a communication and the needs of the audience before delivering key messages
- Uses clear, concise and unambiguous language, free of jargon, to convey key messages
- Adapts language, tone and style to suit children, families, colleagues and governors
- Provides relevant context to aid understanding and alignment with the school's objectives
- Explains decisions and rationale honestly and transparently, including unwelcome ones
- Invites questions and feedback to confirm and reinforce shared understanding
- Integrates verbal and non-verbal cues to reinforce meaning and authenticity
- Chooses delivery method and timing to match audience, message complexity and sensitivity
- Communicates with positivity, passion and optimism to inspire collective support

Works against: manipulative, deceitfulness, isolationism

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Achieves Outcomes That Matter

5.3 · A LEADER'S ACTIONS · CARRIES NLF DIMENSION ACHIEVES OUTCOMES

Leaders turn intent into purposeful, coordinated action and enduring results. They set direction and connect everyday work to it, sustain excellence through clear expectations and belonging, empower people within clear freedoms, decide wisely and in good time, and work in partnership beyond the school so that children get more than any one organisation can give them.

> *Outcomes that matter include attainment and progress, but also attendance, behaviour, inclusion, wellbeing, a balanced budget, a safe site and a community that trusts its school.*

31

NLF: Building and Sustaining High Performance

Sustains Excellence Together

Builds a team with clear expectations, shared standards, healthy challenge and a strong sense of belonging, so that high performance lasts.

- Clarifies roles, responsibilities and expectations in line with knowledge, skill, experience and specialism
- Defines and agrees shared values and standards of behaviour with the team to promote collective accountability
- Establishes a healthy, competitive team spirit that stretches capability and sustains high standards
- Builds collective identity, belonging and community grounded in mutual respect and shared values
- Builds cohesion and shared belief through collaborative problem-solving and celebrating success
- Agrees consistent routines with the team that sustain performance, focus and momentum, reviewing them together as needs change
- Facilitates high intellectual friction through respectful challenge and evidence-informed debate
- Reduces social friction by focusing on the problem, not the person
- Draws on collective insight to identify opportunities to improve effectiveness
- Encourages bold but disciplined risk-taking and innovation to drive improvement
- Adapts their leadership approach dynamically to sustain performance through challenge or change
- Energises teams under pressure by reinforcing shared purpose, resilience and mutual support

Works against: micromanagement, favouritism, authoritarian

32

NLF: Defining and Aligning Purpose

Sets Direction and Shared Purpose

Articulates a compelling purpose for children, turns it into clear priorities and connects everyday work back to it.

- Articulates a compelling vision for children from which a shared purpose can be established
- Communicates intent, objectives and priorities to clarify individual and collective focus
- Integrates ends, ways and means to keep strategy coherent and effort aligned
- Translates intent into achievable objectives and measurable outcomes that sustain motivation and momentum
- Engages others in co-creating goals and outcomes, strengthening shared ownership and accountability
- Reinforces the vision regularly by connecting everyday work to the children it serves
- Reconciles routine choices and decisions with real progress toward the collective vision
- Frames barriers and challenges accurately, discerning their causes and their effects on outcomes
- Balances ambition with reality when prioritising under constraint or uncertainty
- Reviews and adjusts priorities as context shifts to keep purpose relevant and achievable

Works against: unpredictable, self-serving

33

NLF: Empowering Others

Empowers Others Within Clear Freedoms

Delegates real responsibility with clear boundaries, trusts people's judgement, intervenes only when it matters and credits good decisions.

- Clarifies delegated freedoms, operating constraints, decision rights and risk tolerance
- Confirms understanding of intent, tasks and outcomes, giving room for clarifying questions
- Delegates meaningful responsibility matched to individual competence and context
- Determines which decisions can be delegated, shared or retained, and explains why
- Entrusts delegated responsibilities with clear ownership and accountability for outcomes
- Provides the information and context needed for effective independent decision-making
- Demonstrates faith in others' judgement through proportionate oversight and support
- Intervenes only when deviation threatens children, shared purpose, standards or the school's integrity
- Promotes bold, innovative and resourceful initiative within agreed freedoms and boundaries
- Credits sound judgement exercised within delegated authority, reinforcing confidence and trust
- Recalibrates delegated authority as competence, confidence and context evolve

Works against: micromanagement, authoritarian, paranoia

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Achieves Outcomes That Matter continued

34

NLF: Making Effective Decisions

Makes Wise and Timely Decisions

Frames problems with others, weighs evidence, risk and intuition, decides in good time and adapts as things change.

- Frames problems collaboratively, integrating diverse sources of information, experience and feedback
- Distils complexity and ambiguity into clear, intent-aligned options
- Identifies areas of uncertainty, assumptions and information gaps that could undermine the analysis
- Balances data and evidence with intuition and experience when forming judgements
- Evaluates the feasibility, proportionality, risk and resource implications of options, including the impact on workload
- Generates and evaluates alternative courses of action, weighing trade-offs and consequences
- Tests reasoning and assumptions independently to reduce bias and groupthink
- Applies creative and analytical thinking to design adaptive and innovative solutions
- Makes timely, reasoned and proportionate decisions, avoiding emotional or ego-driven reactions
- Monitors evolving situations, adapting decisions as conditions, information and risk change
- Reviews progress and emerging outcomes to confirm the decision remains valid
- Integrates feedback from diverse sources to improve future judgement and decisions

Works against: unpredictable, arrogance, authoritarian

35

NLF: Cultivating Collaboration and Partnerships

Builds Partnerships Beyond the School

Works openly and fairly with other schools, agencies, families and the community so that children get more than any one organisation can give them.

- Aligns purpose, priorities and values across schools, agencies and partner organisations to achieve shared outcomes for children
- Anticipates risks and system interdependencies to align joint planning and problem-solving
- Co-designs governance, roles and decision rights to enable coordinated delivery
- Creates cross-boundary psychological safety so partners raise concerns early
- Builds trusted networks across schools, agencies and the community through honesty, reciprocity and consistency
- Ensures fairness, equity and transparency in shared decisions and the allocation of resources
- Shares timely, accurate and relevant information to enable collective understanding and alignment
- Resolves partnership conflicts constructively while safeguarding shared principles
- Acknowledges partner contributions and shares credit for collective achievements
- Leverages diversity across organisations to generate innovation and shared learning
- Reviews partnership outcomes and adapts agreements as conditions evolve

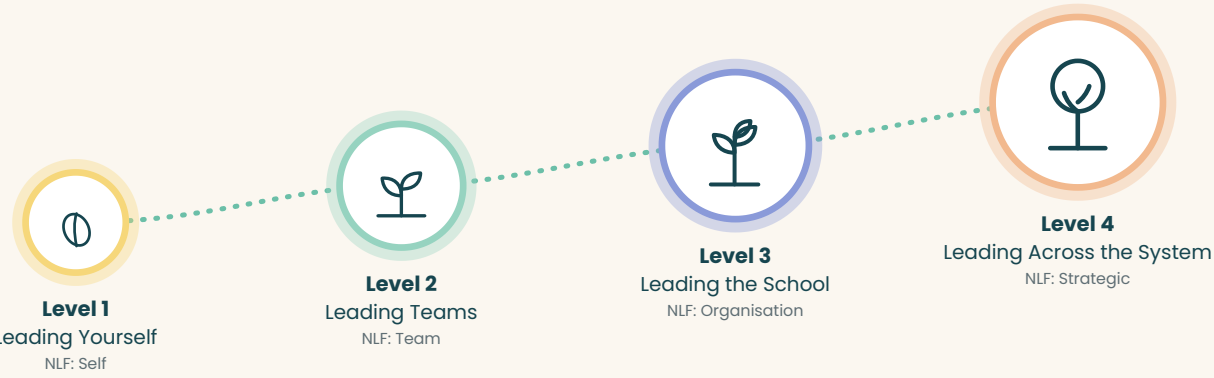
Works against: isolationism, self-serving, paranoia

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6.0 Levels of Leadership

Leadership grows as responsibility, risk and complexity grow. The domains stay the same; what changes is how they are applied. The four levels show the expanding sphere of a leader's influence, from personal conduct to shaping the wider system. Titles are a guide, not a gate.



LEVEL 1 · PERSONAL IMPACT

Leading Yourself

Every colleague: early career and experienced teachers, teaching assistants, office, site, catering and pastoral staff, and governors new in role

Your own conduct, practice and relationships with children, families and colleagues

LEVEL 2 · TEAM IMPACT

Leading Teams

Subject, phase and key stage leads, heads of year and department, SENCOs, pastoral leads, mentors of early career teachers, office and site managers, support staff team leaders

Creating the conditions in which a team of adults can do its best work for children

LEVEL 3 · SCHOOL IMPACT

Leading the School

Headteachers and heads of school, deputy and assistant headteachers, school business leaders, heads of trust central functions, local governing bodies

A team of teams: culture, alignment and standards across a whole school or function

LEVEL 4 · SYSTEM IMPACT

Leading Across the System

Executive headteachers, chief executives and trust executive teams, directors of education, trustees and members, system and partnership roles

Purpose, legitimacy and long-range judgement across schools, partners and the wider system

The levels are not a hierarchy of worth. Leading yourself well is the foundation on which every other level stands, and the most senior leaders continue to model it. With each level comes a wider sphere of influence, greater complexity and heavier consequences, and therefore the need for more sophisticated judgement, strategic thinking and accountability for outcomes. Leadership is fluid: a colleague may lead mainly at one level in their daily habits while leading at others when they mentor, run a project or speak for the school in the community.

Governance is leadership too. Trustees and members lead mainly at Leading Across the System, and local governors at Leading the School. They model Lives the Values and Upholds the Highest Standards, apply Sees the Bigger Picture and Understands the Community and Context, and support and challenge executive leaders through loyal challenge, moral courage and wise decisions. Governor and trustee induction and codes of conduct should draw on the same behaviours.

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6.1 Leading Yourself

TYPICAL ROLES
Every colleague: early career and experienced teachers, teaching assistants, office, site, catering and pastoral staff, and governors new in role

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
Your own conduct, practice and relationships with children, families and colleagues

PRIMARY IMPACT
Personal impact

Leading yourself is the foundation on which every other level stands. It is shown in self-awareness, integrity, personal accountability and a commitment to keep improving. Leaders at this level build credibility through their daily actions and relationships, and every colleague in the school leads here, whatever their role. The most senior leaders never stop.

KEY PILLARS

Integrity
Acting consistently with the school's values and professional expectations, so that colleagues and children can take you at your word.

Moral courage
Doing what is right for children even when it is difficult, and speaking up when something is not right.

Personal accountability
Owning your actions, decisions, practice and growth, and the small daily choices that add up to a culture.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

CHARACTER
- Lives the school's values in everyday conduct with children, families and colleagues
- Keeps children safe, keeps proper boundaries and behaves as each setting requires
- Owns mistakes and learns from them in the open

KNOWLEDGE
- Builds self-awareness: knows their triggers, their biases and their impact on others
- Learns the children, families and colleagues around them
- Knows the duties, standards and routines of their role

ACTION
- Practises their craft deliberately and seeks feedback
- Contributes to the team: listens, helps, speaks up, follows well
- Owns their tasks and looks for ways to do them better

COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

02 Acts with Integrity · **01** Shows Moral Courage · **07** Acts Lawfully and Keeps Children Safe · **14** Knows Their Strengths, Limits and Impact · **15** Stays Steady Under Pressure · **25** Keeps Learning and Growing · **29** Shares Leadership Across the Team

HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Induction and the Early Career Framework for teachers; role-specific training and qualifications for support staff; mentoring; feedback and deliberate practice; reflective journals; and the simplest development of all, watching good leaders closely and asking them why.

FLOURISHING AT THIS LEVEL You are growing in your craft, you feel you belong, you can say what you think, and the children and colleagues around you can rely on you.

PROGRESSION As expertise, confidence and credibility grow, influence extends beyond personal practice to colleagues and teams. The move to Leading Teams is a change of focus, not a promotion out of leading yourself.

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6.2 Leading Teams



TYPICAL ROLES
Subject, phase and key stage leads, heads of year and department, SENCOs, pastoral leads, mentors of early career teachers, office and site managers, support staff team leaders

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
Creating the conditions in which a team of adults can do its best work for children

PRIMARY IMPACT
Team impact

Leading teams means creating the conditions in which individuals and teams can thrive. Leaders at this level build trust, foster collaboration, make it safe to speak and learn, clarify what the team is for and share the leadership of it. Their influence runs through relationships and team culture, and through the small routines that make a team cohesive.

KEY PILLARS

Safety to speak and learn
A climate in which people raise concerns, ask questions, try things and admit mistakes without fear.

Shared leadership
Treating leadership as something the whole team does, and inviting people to lead within their expertise.

Clarity and listening
Listening first, then giving the direction, feedback and context that lets people do their best work.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

CHARACTER
- Builds trust through fairness, consistency and kindness
- Advocates for the team and offers loyal challenge upward
- Sets the example of humility and ownership the team will copy

KNOWLEDGE
- Reads the team: strengths, motivations, pressures and the mood of the room
- Understands how relationships and trust break and mend
- Knows how the team's work fits the school's purpose and systems

ACTION
- Supports and challenges every colleague, including early career staff
- Makes it safe to speak up and shares leadership across the team
- Agrees expectations and routines that sustain excellence

COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

28 Makes It Safe to Speak and Learn
29 Shares Leadership Across the Team
30 Listens and Communicates Clearly
26 Supports and Challenges
18 Understands Their Team
31 Sustains Excellence Together
06 Leads with Kindness

HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Middle leadership programmes and the National Professional Qualifications for leading teaching, behaviour and culture, literacy or SEND; coaching and mentoring colleagues; leading a project or improvement priority; cross-team working; and honest feedback from the team itself.

FLOURISHING AT THIS LEVEL The team feels safe, trusted and clear about what it is for; people are getting better at their work and enjoying it; children feel the difference.

PROGRESSION As influence widens beyond a single team, leaders begin to shape the culture, systems and alignment of a whole school or function, and to develop other leaders rather than only colleagues.

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6.3 Leading the School

TYPICAL ROLES
Headteachers and heads of school, deputy and assistant headteachers, school business leaders, heads of trust central functions, local governing bodies

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE
A team of teams: culture, alignment and standards across a whole school or function

PRIMARY IMPACT
School impact

Leading the school means shaping culture, setting direction and creating the conditions for sustained improvement across a team of teams. Leaders at this level work through others, aligning people, systems and resources around a shared purpose for children, reinforcing standards through the way policy is explained and lived, and developing the next generation of leaders.

KEY PILLARS

Purpose and alignment
A clear, compelling purpose for children, and the coherence that connects everyday work to it.

Empowerment and decisions
Real delegation within clear freedoms, and wise, timely decisions that people understand.

Culture and standards
A school in which the highest standards are explained, owned and modelled rather than merely enforced.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

CHARACTER
- Shapes culture through visible commitment to values and to children
- Makes safeguarding, inclusion and standards something people believe in
- Stays steady and kind through inspection, incidents and change

KNOWLEDGE
- Understands the community, context and inspection and assurance findings
- Understands how the school and trust work, and where workload can be reduced
- Reads the school as a system of teams, relationships and sub-cultures

ACTION
- Develops leaders across the school and plans succession
- Empowers within clear freedoms and resists the pull to centralise
- Sets direction, decides wisely and sustains excellence across the school

COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

32 Sets Direction and Shared Purpose
33 Empowers Others Within Clear Freedoms
34 Makes Wise and Timely Decisions
07 Acts Lawfully and Keeps Children Safe
24 Understands How the School and Trust Work
27 Unlocks Potential in Others
22 Understands the Community and Context

HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Senior leadership programmes and the National Professional Qualifications for senior leadership and headship; executive coaching; leading whole-school improvement and change; governance, finance and workforce responsibilities; and leadership across schools within a trust or partnership.

FLOURISHING AT THIS LEVEL The school is a place where adults want to work and children want to be; standards are owned rather than enforced; leaders are growing and workload is sane.

PROGRESSION As influence extends beyond a single school, leaders begin to shape partnerships, contribute to the wider system and take responsibility for the long-term legitimacy and sustainability of the organisation.

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6.4 Leading Across the System



TYPICAL ROLES

Executive headteachers, chief executives and trust executive teams, directors of education, trustees and members, system and partnership roles

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Purpose, legitimacy and long-range judgement across schools, partners and the wider system

PRIMARY IMPACT

System impact

Leading across the system means shaping the future through influence, partnership and long-range thinking. Leaders at this level work beyond the boundaries of a single school, aligning diverse partners around shared goals for children, stewarding public money and reputation, reading the national picture, and making judicious decisions under uncertainty whose consequences last for years.

KEY PILLARS

Strategic perspective

Reading policy, funding, demographic and technological change for what it means over the long term, and testing plans against it.

Partnership and civic leadership

Working across schools, agencies and communities so that children get more than any one organisation can give.

Stewardship and legitimacy

Protecting the public trust, resources and reputation on which the organisation's future depends.

LEADERSHIP PRIORITIES AT THIS LEVEL

CHARACTER

- Serves a purpose bigger than themselves and stewards public money with care
- Models loyal challenge in executive and board forums, and invites it
- Represents the organisation with integrity in public

KNOWLEDGE

- Sees the bigger picture: national policy, funding, demographics and AI
- Understands the networks, institutions and politics of the system
- Understands how the organisation works across many schools and functions

ACTION

- Builds partnerships beyond the school and the trust
- Sets a coherent purpose across the organisation and keeps it relevant
- Develops leadership capacity and succession across the system

COMPETENCIES MOST IN FOCUS AT THIS LEVEL

23 Sees the Bigger Picture · **35** Builds Partnerships Beyond the School · **05** Serves a Purpose Bigger Than Themselves · **04** Shows Loyalty Through Honest Challenge · **32** Sets Direction and Shared Purpose · **34** Makes Wise and Timely Decisions · **12** Influences by Example

HOW LEADERS DEVELOP AT THIS LEVEL

Executive and chief executive leadership programmes and the National Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership; system leadership networks; board-level and trustee responsibilities; regional and national improvement roles; research and policy engagement; and executive coaching.

FLOURISHING AT THIS LEVEL Schools, partners and the community are stronger together than apart; public money and trust are well stewarded; the organisation will still be flourishing long after its current leaders have moved on.

CONTINUING This is the widest sphere of the framework. Leaders here keep modelling the foundations of every earlier level, and their most lasting contribution is the leadership they leave behind in others.

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7.0 Leadership in Practice

A framework is only as good as its use. These are the places where this one is designed to do its work, so that a school's policies, programmes and everyday conversations all reinforce the same behaviours in the same words.

Recruitment and selection

Values-based interview questions and tasks drawn from the behaviours, so that schools appoint for character and leadership as well as for skill.

Appraisal and professional dialogue

Prompts for reflection and feedback conversations, used developmentally rather than as a checklist, across teaching and support roles.

Leadership development

Pathways and programmes at every level, from induction to executive leadership, built around the competencies and the four levels.

Coaching, mentoring and self-review

Self-assessment, multi-source feedback and coaching guides that help colleagues see their strengths and choose what to work on.

Culture and climate

Staff surveys and climate reviews that ask about the behaviours the school wants to see and the ones it does not, so that leaders can act early.

Governance and policy

Induction and codes of conduct for governors and trustees, and the review of people, learning, safeguarding and governance policies so that they reinforce the same behaviours.

A MODEL LEADERSHIP POLICY STATEMENT

The school defines leadership as the combination of a leader's character, knowledge and action, shown through everyday behaviours, that inspires children, colleagues and communities to flourish and succeed. Leadership is a shared function of the whole school, distinct from management and from formal authority, and everyone can contribute to it, whatever their role. Leaders at every level are expected to live the school's values, to uphold the highest standards and to set the example. The school will review its people, learning, safeguarding and governance policies so that they reinforce this framework, and will develop leaders at every level through practice, feedback and reflection, not training alone.

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7.1 How Leadership Supports the Standards Schools Work To

Inspectors, governors, families and the public expect certain things of a school's culture. None of them is delivered by a policy alone. This page shows which leadership competencies most directly support each expectation, so that a designated safeguarding lead, a SENCO, a chair of governors or an inspector can see the linkage at a glance. The behaviours remain leadership behaviours: attitudes, role-modelling and the way leaders approach their duties, not the duties themselves, which belong to policy.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF SCHOOLS	WHAT IT RESTS ON	COMPETENCIES THAT MOST DIRECTLY SUPPORT IT
A culture of safeguarding	Keeping Children Safe in Education and Working Together to Safeguard Children expect every adult to notice, report and act, and leaders to make that the norm rather than the exception.	07 Acts Lawfully and Keeps Children Safe 01 Shows Moral Courage 17 Reads People and the Room 28 Makes It Safe to Speak and Learn 08 Acts Appropriately in Every Setting
Personal and professional conduct	Part Two of the Teachers' Standards, the Headteachers' Standards and the codes that apply to support staff describe relationships rooted in mutual respect, proper boundaries and the standards of the profession.	09 Acts Professionally 08 Acts Appropriately in Every Setting 02 Acts with Integrity 03 Respects Every Person 10 Leads with Humility
Ethical leadership and public life	The Headteachers' Standards embed the seven principles of public life; the Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education adds trust, wisdom, kindness, justice, service, courage and optimism.	01 Shows Moral Courage 02 Acts with Integrity 05 Serves a Purpose Bigger Than Themselves 11 Owns Decisions and Outcomes 04 Shows Loyalty Through Honest Challenge
Inclusion, equality and special educational needs	The Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty and the SEND Code of Practice expect fair treatment, reasonable adjustment and high ambition for every child.	03 Respects Every Person 20 Understands Culture, Community and Difference 27 Unlocks Potential in Others 22 Understands the Community and Context 33 Empowers Others Within Clear Freedoms
Staff wellbeing and workload	The Education Staff Wellbeing Charter and the Department for Education's workload commitments expect leaders to protect wellbeing and remove unnecessary work.	13 Puts Others First 26 Supports and Challenges 24 Understands How the School and Trust Work 34 Makes Wise and Timely Decisions 06 Leads with Kindness
Quality of education and professional development	The Teachers' Standards, the Early Career Framework and the National Professional Qualifications expect expert, evidence-informed practice and sustained development for every colleague.	21 Knows Their Craft and the Evidence 25 Keeps Learning and Growing 26 Supports and Challenges 27 Unlocks Potential in Others 31 Sustains Excellence Together
Leadership, governance and accountability	Ofsted's education inspection framework, the Academy Trust Handbook and the governance guides expect clear vision, effective governance, sound stewardship of public money and honest self-evaluation.	32 Sets Direction and Shared Purpose 05 Serves a Purpose Bigger Than Themselves 11 Owns Decisions and Outcomes 24 Understands How the School and Trust Work 34 Makes Wise and Timely Decisions
Partnership, parents and community	Working with families, other schools, local authorities, health and social care is expected by statutory guidance and is how a school becomes a civic anchor for its community.	35 Builds Partnerships Beyond the School 22 Understands the Community and Context 30 Listens and Communicates Clearly 12 Influences by Example 05 Serves a Purpose Bigger Than Themselves

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7.2 Alignment to the National Leadership Framework

The National Leadership Framework (NLF) sets out three domains, nine dimensions, 35 competencies and 323 observable behaviours, applied across four levels of leadership (Self, Team, Organisation, Strategic). This framework carries every NLF dimension and every NLF competency, one to one, in the language of schools, with the NLF's behaviours considered and translated and 13 behaviours added for education. Its four levels map directly to the NLF's four. This table is the mapping an NLF award assessor would use.

DOMAIN	NLF DIMENSION	THIS FRAMEWORK	COMPETENCIES (NLF COMPETENCY CARRIED)
CHARACTER	Values-Driven	**Lives the Values**	01 Shows Moral Courage (Moral Courage) 02 Acts with Integrity (Integrity) 03 Respects Every Person (Respect for Others) 04 Shows Loyalty Through Honest Challenge (Loyalty) 05 Serves a Purpose Bigger Than Themselves (Service) 06 Leads with Kindness (Humanity and Compassion)
CHARACTER	Upholds the Highest Standards	**Upholds the Highest Standards**	07 Acts Lawfully and Keeps Children Safe (Lawfulness) 08 Acts Appropriately in Every Setting (Appropriateness) 09 Acts Professionally (Professionalism)
CHARACTER	Models Exemplary Behaviours	**Sets the Example**	10 Leads with Humility (Humility) 11 Owns Decisions and Outcomes (Accountability) 12 Influences by Example (Influence) 13 Puts Others First (Selflessness)
KNOWLEDGE	Knows Themself	**Knows Themselves**	14 Knows Their Strengths, Limits and Impact (Self-Awareness) 15 Stays Steady Under Pressure (Self-Management and Resilience) 16 Thinks About Their Own Thinking (Metacognition and Reflective Thinking)
KNOWLEDGE	Knows Others	**Knows Their People**	17 Reads People and the Room (Social Awareness) 18 Understands Their Team (Team Dynamics) 19 Understands Relationships and Trust (Relationship Management) 20 Understands Culture, Community and Difference (Cultural Awareness)
KNOWLEDGE	Knows Their Profession	**Knows Their Profession**	21 Knows Their Craft and the Evidence (Professional and Technical Expertise) 22 Understands the Community and Context (External Context and Stakeholders) 23 Sees the Bigger Picture (Strategic and National Perspective) 24 Understands How the School and Trust Work (Organisational Systems and Processes)
ACTION	Develops Individuals	**Develops People**	25 Keeps Learning and Growing (Developing Themselves) 26 Supports and Challenges (Providing Support and Challenge) 27 Unlocks Potential in Others (Inspiring and Enabling Others)
ACTION	Builds Teams	**Builds Teams**	28 Makes It Safe to Speak and Learn (Creating Psychological Safety) 29 Shares Leadership Across the Team (Cultivating Teamship) 30 Listens and Communicates Clearly (Communicating Effectively)
ACTION	Achieves Outcomes	**Achieves Outcomes That Matter**	31 Sustains Excellence Together (Building and Sustaining High Performance) 32 Sets Direction and Shared Purpose (Defining and Aligning Purpose) 33 Empowers Others Within Clear Freedoms (Empowering Others) 34 Makes Wise and Timely Decisions (Making Effective Decisions) 35 Builds Partnerships Beyond the School (Cultivating Collaboration and Partnerships)

Levels. Leading Yourself = Self · Leading Teams = Team · Leading the School = Organisation · Leading Across the System = Strategic.

Coverage. Nine of nine dimensions and 35 of 35 competencies fully carried; 322 NLF behaviours carried as their own line and one carried in concept within the same competency; no gaps identified. "Rejects blind or misguided loyalty" is carried under Acts with Integrity (02) rather than under Loyalty.

Acknowledgement. The National Leadership Framework, its wording and its logo are the intellectual property of National Leadership Framework CIC and are used with acknowledgement. This framework is NLF-informed work in the voice of schools; where NLF concepts are carried they are translated under the NLF's encouragement to adapt emphasis and language to context while preserving the integrity of its core concepts.

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8.0 Sources and Acknowledgements

This framework is informed by the research base of the National Leadership Framework, by the professional standards and statutory guidance that schools in England work to, and by the leadership frameworks of school trusts that have already translated the NLF for education. The sources below are those that most directly shaped it.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This framework was developed by National Leadership Framework CIC for the education sector, drawing on the Exceed Leadership Framework (Exceed Learning Partnership) and the Inspire Partnership's Inclusive Education Leadership Framework, two trust frameworks that showed how the NLF can be translated with warmth and rigour for schools, and on the generosity of the school leaders, support staff, governors and trustees whose candour about what leadership looks like in practice shaped every page. Any school or trust may adopt it, adapt it and make it their own; page 39 shows how.

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9.0 Making This Framework Your Own

This framework is written so that any school or trust can pick it up and use it. It is not branded to any institution, and it is deliberately yours to adapt. Six steps make it your own without losing the alignment that gives it its rigour.

1 **Add your name, vision and voice**
Name your school or trust on the cover, add your own foreword and vision statement, and, if you wish, rewrite the framework in the first person ("we", "our") so that it reads as your own. The structure and the behaviours stay the same.

2 **Place your values**
Use the table on page 16 to show how each of your values is carried by the competencies. Keep the competencies as they are; your values become the lens through which colleagues read them.

3 **Translate the roles**
The typical roles at each level are a guide. Replace them with your own job titles and structures, including your governance arrangements, so that every colleague can find themselves in a level.

4 **Adopt the policy statement**
Take the leadership policy statement on page 35 to your board, adopt it, and review your people, learning, safeguarding and governance policies against the eight principles, keeping a record of what you found and changed.

5 **Build the tools**
Turn the behaviours into recruitment questions, appraisal prompts, self-review and multi-source feedback, coaching guides and development pathways at each level. Use them developmentally, never as a checklist.

6 **Keep what gives it rigour**
Keep the three domains, nine dimensions and 35 competencies, keep the behaviours observable, and keep the acknowledgement that the framework is mapped to the National Leadership Framework. Everything else, from photographs to colours to the words on the cover, is yours to change.

National Leadership Framework

FROM FRAMEWORK TO PRACTICE

A framework alone does not make good leaders. People do.

This document describes the leadership a school or trust can ask of its people. What turns it into leadership that children feel is the way an organisation brings it to life through its people processes: how it recruits and inducts, how it has conversations about practice, how it develops and coaches, how it recognises, how it governs and how it learns from what goes wrong. That work belongs to the organisation. Supporting, guiding and assuring it is what the National Leadership Framework exists to do.

The NLF is an independent, not-for-profit standards body. It helps organisations review their leadership policy and framework against the NLF's principles, align their people processes so that they reinforce the same behaviours, and evidence the result. The NLF Awards, at Bronze, Silver and Gold, give organisations an independent, third-party assurance that their leadership framework and its implementation are sound, and a recognised mark of that commitment.

Interested in an NLF Award, or in adopting this framework?
Speak to the NLF: **www.nlf.org.uk**

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Leading *to Flourish*

A LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FOR SCHOOLS AND TRUSTS · VERSION 1.0 · 2026

Leadership is the combination of a leader's character, knowledge and action, shown through everyday behaviours, that inspires children, colleagues and communities to flourish and succeed.

National Leadership Framework

Mapped to the National Leadership Framework
www.nlf.org.uk

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