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EDUCATION MANAGERS

Schools will hire private sector 'chief executives'

By Jon Boone,
Education Correspondent

State schools will be run by "chief executives" chosen for their management ability rather than any formal knowledge of teaching, education experts have predicted.

As schools become more like complex business organisations, competing with each other in league tables and school inspections, so school managers have been looking to the private sector for inspiration.

The Association of School and College Leaders has even called for someone without qualified teacher status to be eligible to become a school's "chief executive", particularly as institutions are encouraged by the government to branch out into a variety of non-education services for their local communities.

John Dunford, general secretary, said the days of "the autocratic hero-head are gone". He added: "Radical changes are occurring in school leadership, with teams of people from varied backgrounds now carrying out the immense range of responsibilities which is beyond the capacity of any

single individual."

In the union's view, which it has submitted to the government's review of school leadership, overall control of a school could be in the hands of any member of the senior management team, including bursars and building managers.

Steve Mumby, head of the National College for School Leadership, has called for a wide range of possible "system leaders", including an executive head in charge of more than one school, leaders of federations of schools and a consultant leader of a network of schools.

While Mr Dunford insists that "we are very definitely not saying that business leaders can be parachuted in to lead schools", others believe that private sector management could do much to raise standards in schools.

It is an idea being pioneered by David Triggs, principal of Greensward College in Essex as well as executive principal of Thamesbridge College in Reading. As an education entrepreneur who works with several schools in challenging circumstances he makes a point of visiting leading companies, such as Cisco and Hewlett-Packard, to pick

up management tips that he can apply to the group of schools he helps to run.

Those include a relentless focus on performance data to keep track of where the school is succeeding and failing both academically and financially, and a hard-nosed approach to IT, much of which is outsourced to a private provider.

By focusing on management, he says, his staff can concentrate on education: "Just because someone is a successful teacher doesn't mean they will transfer easily into being a successful leader. We should award experienced teachers with a higher pay scale and develop people who really focus on leadership."

For Sir Cyril Taylor, one of the government's main education advisers, the growing tendency of schools to run themselves along business principles is simply a response to government policy since the 1980s when "market discipline" was first imposed on state schools.

"Business techniques can be applied to not-for-profit organisations and they force management to get the wrong people off the bus and the right people on the bus.

Business sponsors of specialist schools and academies are greatly helping to bring management ethos and objectives into our schools."

The growing influence of businesses on their local schools is a factor that many headhunters say is helping to open up the maintained secondary school market to executive search companies, not least as boards of governors become more dominated by people comfortable with private sector values and using headhunters to recruit senior staff.

City institutions actively encourage their staff, many of whom will not have children or even a particular interest in a school, to sign up as a governor as part of the company's corporate social responsibility agenda.

The rise of headhunters, as well as the professionalisation of school management, has been given added impetus by a national shortage of candidates willing to become heads.

Fatima Koumbarji of Veredus, an executive recruitment organisation, said: "There is a dearth of high-performing headteachers... that means they are extremely picky about where they want to go. Headhunt-

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ers are much more effective than a job advert because they can have that conversation about what challenges a particular school might offer and approach people who weren't thinking about leaving."

FORMER CIVIL ENGINEER IS TYPICAL OF THOSE BEING GROOMED FOR LEADERSHIP ROLES

Mike Cargill, an assistant head at South Hunsley School in Melton, east Yorkshire, who left a career in industry to join the teaching profession, is typical of the type being groomed to become a school leader, writes Jon Boone.

Mr Cargill has been rapidly promoted through the ranks since he left his career as a civil engineer, where he was a site manager with Biwater Construction on a number of public health projects.

"You have to be moved fast

up the ladder because, with three children, you need money to switch into teaching and the school wants to make use of your management experience and transferable skills," he says.

Although he trained as a teacher, he believes that running a school is more of a management job. "The very name 'headteacher' ought to change really because it simply doesn't reflect the sort of job they have to do these days," he says.

The government has been

keen to encourage more career-changers to move into teaching, with advertising campaigns and subsidies for schools that take people who have switched career path, particularly from the financial services industry.

An added incentive is that the government allows people to be trained on the job, rather than requiring a post-graduate course in teaching.

Another scheme to produce high-quality headteachers includes Future Leaders, which is run by

the National College for School Leadership, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust and Absolute Return for Kids, a charity founded by Arpad Busson, the hedge fund manager.

Currently at the pilot stage, participants receive intensive training from both the education and business sectors to prepare them to become senior leaders within 12 months and a headteacher within four years.

According to Russell Hobby at the Hay Group, there will be more headteachers in the future who are like Mr Cargill.

"People will have to be found earlier on in their careers and coached to take on some of our hardest schools," he says.

But Mr Hobby warns that the lessons from business can only go so far.

"The demands of parents, pupils and staff, as well as outside agencies like Ofsted, actually make it a much broader task than anything a chief executive has to deal with."