



# **Realising your potential Women's leadership in controlled schools**

Sara McCracken  
Head of Marketing, Research and Communication  
Email: [sara.mccracken@csscni.org.uk](mailto:sara.mccracken@csscni.org.uk)  
Tel: 028 9531 3036

April 2018

## Contents

Introduction .....	3
Aims of the event.....	4
Outcomes for event .....	4
Attendees.....	4
Format of the event .....	4
Panel discussion .....	4
Structured discussion.....	5
Realising your potential worksheet .....	7
Recommendations .....	9
Appendix 1 – agenda for women’s leadership workshop .....	11
Appendix 2 - Realising your potential bingo .....	12
Appendix 3 – realising your potential worksheet.....	13

## **Introduction**

A series of engagement events were carried out by the Controlled Schools' Support Council (CSSC) in March 2017.

During these events, female participants outlined their concerns at the lack of support they received in terms of applying for leadership positions and also once they had progressed in their career. They articulated that they felt isolated with no or limited resources available to them for advice and encouragement.

In order to explore these issues and provide leadership support and guidance, the CSSC decided to hold an event to look at and discuss issues, challenges and solutions facing women in leadership positions in education.

A steering group was set up to inform the event, which comprised:

- Maria Quinn, Abbey Community College
- Michelle Rainey, Ballyclare High School
- Heather Murray, Millington Primary School
- Grace Trimble, Kilkeel Nursery School
- Gillian Dunlop, Largymore Primary School
- Jill Brown, CSSC School Support Officer
- Tracey Woods, CSSC School Support Officer

CSSC would like to thank the controlled school principals for giving their time so generously to ensure the success of the event.

### **Aims of the event**

Under the theme of 'realising your potential', a number of aims were identified. They were to:

- spark interest in women's events / networks
- help provide encouragement for women in middle and senior leadership roles in controlled schools
- help create peer groups for women in the controlled schools' sector
- identify the potential use of mentoring to help encourage women in the sector
- identify challenges / issues being faced by women educators and to give confidence to overcome them.

### **Outcomes for event**

Outcomes included:

- creation of networks amongst women educators
- identification of support networks
- creation of peer support networks by participants which would develop organically
- encouraging women to pursue leadership positions in schools.

### **Attendees**

The event was attended by over 20 school leaders plus 10 CSSC staff. A further 11 sent apologies and wish to hear about further work connected with this initiative. In addition, a principal from the North West wrote on behalf of colleagues to ask if a similar event will be held in their area.

### **Format of the event**

The event was held on International Women's Day on Thursday 8 March 2018 in the Armagh City Hotel.

The event comprised:

- An introduction from CSSC's Head of Marketing, Research and Communication Sara McCracken
- A panel discussion featuring the steering group principals
- A structured discussion, led by Michelle Rainey of the issues / challenges / solutions facing women in leadership positions in education

A game of network bingo was played to enable participants to meet and speak with each other and Chief Executive Barry Mulholland closed the event.

See Appendix 1 and 2 for more detail on the agenda and network bingo.

### **Panel discussion**

The panellists were invited to introduce themselves and share their career path to date.

They outlined the support they had had from, for example, supportive principals and mentors. Challenges such as bullying, lack of support and work / life balance were discussed

with the audience. The panel was keen to highlight that they 'did not have all the answers' but by working together, many solutions could be found; 'there is room for all of us'.

### **Structured discussion**

Participants were seated at round tables and each table was facilitated by a steering group principal.

The first task was to brainstorm "the current challenges for you as a female leader in education". Each table then articulated their issues to the group as a whole, following which each group discussed potential solutions.

Key themes regarding challenges arising from the structure discussion included

- Ability to leave things in the workplace
- Attitudes towards women
- Communication
- Confidence issue – self questioning
- Control? Do we give ourselves more work? Letting go
- CPD opportunities needed
- Delegation – learning to trust others – hurry up chip
- Delegation powers need strengthened (traditional role of doing everything)
- Emotional detachment
- Feel personally responsible for things outside our control – eg finance
- Finding time – it is a luxury
- Identifying if a problem is a school problem or if it's to do with home / health (pupils / families)
- Know when to say 'no' – there's only so much you can do
- Lack of mentoring
- Lack of money / time
- Lack of self confidence in own abilities
- Legacy issues
- Letting things go – guilt
- Male = leader / even if female applicants are very competent / qualified
- women (there is room for all of us)
- Parental attitudes – some may feel they can treat / address a female leader differently vs a male
- Perceptions of others eg BoG interview panels, perception of a woman as a leader
- Relationships – with staff and parents
- Resilience – acquired over time
- Roles that women may be more inclined to undertake e.g. pastoral / discipline
- Roles to fulfil – in school, at home
- Sense of responsibility / ability to get school out of your system
- Setting priorities – what needs achieved first
- Sexism – old fashioned sexism
- Time – to be better able to listen
- Time / role management and juggling school / family, everything – what you take on
- Time issues – juggling career and domestic responsibilities
- Trust
- Very emotionally tied into the job
- Women and men make best depts mixed
- Women held to higher standards – have to prove themselves
- Work / life balance

Key themes were then discussed by the wider group, before more detailed conversations within groups.

The four main themes looked at by the groups were:

- emotional detachment
- delegation
- perceptions of others
- time management

The discussions covered potential solutions as follows:

### **Emotional detachment**

- Sharing
- Being realistic
- Sense of perspective
- Not being available 24/7
- Wellness / mindfulness
- Have a sense of humour / optimism

### **Delegation**

- Evaluate and improve
- Time
- System support – where is it?
- Resources
- Mentoring – gain confidence in team – open to thinking outside the box – empower
- Trust
- Communication – agreement on how and what
- Relationships – addressing historic culture and building new
- Team work – need for different skill sets, common vision / ethos
- Realistic expectations and accountability
- Consistent procedures – agreed processes

### **Perceptions of others**

- Redacted CV / app forms for short listing
- Be approachable but assertive with parents
- Gender balanced shortlists and interview panel
- Explicitly address male v female issues in pupils / lessons

### **Time management**

- Prioritise
- Let go
- Revisit job descriptions and roles and responsibilities
- Creative use of Baker / staff development days / holidays
- Start early, leave early Friday

- Budget – release / train staff
- Share the load – eat elephant a bite at a time
- Stability in staff cohort

### **Realising your potential worksheet**

As a final activity to the workshop, participants were asked to reflect on what they had discussed during the course of the afternoon, consider what is working well within their workplace setting and identify what they could do to empower themselves. Feedback was also sought on what CSSC could do. See Appendix 3.

Feedback from these worksheets was as follows:

#### **One thing I will do to realise my potential is:**

- stop over analysing everything
- read the book 'Lean In'
- take a risk – apply for something I'm maybe not 100% fulfilling criteria
- I am good at what I do
- be more confident in my own abilities
- support younger teachers in school – encourage to develop leadership roles
- self-care
- have more confidence in myself and my ability
- believe in myself
- take more exercise
- share concerns / issues more readily with other professional, delegate more
- build emotional resilience
- learn to say 'no'
- stay positive despite setbacks
- make contact with female principals more often

#### **The key 'take home message' I received today is:**

- everyone is in same boat
- we all have the same challenges
- women need to underestimate themselves less, delegate more
- other women in leadership roles are experiencing and feeling similar challenges to myself
- strong supportive network of female colleagues exist to help / offer advice
- delegate and be aware of perceptions
- we can all be leaders
- manage time effectively and learn to delegate – what can be passed on to another member of staff? Do I really need to do everything?
- time is important , and delegation giving / trusting others to complete jobs / activities
- I can't do it all and need to delegate
- we are all in this together
- we all face the same issues
- sharing helps greatly

- build networks
- take time to talk

**One piece of good practice for women’s leadership that happens in my school is:**

- mentoring of middle leaders
- distributed leadership
- encouragement for development
- celebrations of reflections from courses attended and good practice shared for all
- CIENA project – leadership course for young girls
- we never criticise other members of staff behind their back
- celebrations of birthdays / nights out
- very supportive Principal gave me the encouragement to apply for more senior posts within my own school
- understanding the importance of home / school life and the importance of family
- encouraging staff to have a healthy work / life balance
- equality across the board – everyone encouraged to develop regardless of age / gender
- maintaining a sense of humour and perspective
- there are no stereotypical roles: we use drills
- support from colleagues and leaders
- females for leadership

**I will empower myself to progress after today by:**

- trusting my own ability
- joining a women’s steering group
- looking at what I can do, not what I can’t
- identifying how and what I need to do / achieve / to follow my dream of leadership
- reading the Lean In book
- having more confidence in what I do
- joining a Lean In group (Reading Cheryl’s book)
- delegating more
- developing a cluster group for F.S., teachers – “idea of Lean in groups”, helping / supporting each other – sharing good practice
- prioritising each day what I can realistically achieve
- leaving issues in school – better work / life balance
- try to leave emotional issues in school
- leaving problems at the school door
- take time for reflection
- take time to talk to others

**CSSC could help me by:**

- facilitating further mentoring of middle leaders
- keep advocating
- developing skills, cluster groups, liaison with a teacher as required (email)
- identifying the differing directions of leadership in schools post SMT. PQH onward journey. Lean In groups – County Down. Special schools



- leadership toolkit specific to female leaders
- providing support for teachers in small schools – who co-ordinate 2 / 3 subjects without any additional pay
- a support network of SLT and Principals
- providing sessions on dealing with difficult staff / parents.
- resilience training would be useful
- suggest ideas how / easiest way to set up within area
- organising a spa day
- further sessions like today
- arranging further sessions to firm up practical solutions
- directory of services we can access to well-being / time management support
- session on shaping good practice on detachment

### **Recommendations**

Given the constructive engagement with delegates on the day and positive feedback, even from those who could not attend, on the need for such an event, it is recommended that CSSC develops a programme of events for women leaders in education. This is in addition to a conference or event on International Women's Day in 2019.

It is recommended that this becomes part of CSSC's programme of work for 2018/19 as follows.

### **Target / action**

Based on the outcomes of the women's leadership event in March 2018, plan a series of events to develop the leadership capacity of female school leaders in controlled schools.

### **Planned activity**

Plan and organise four CPD events targeted at female school leaders.

### **Key success**

Events organised

### **Resource required**

Associates to deliver the training and officer time.

### **Impact**

Increased confidence of female school leaders to provide effective leadership in schools.

### **Suggested themes to cover**

- Personal branding
- Relationship building
- Leadership
- Letting go

Instead of a short session on each of the themes, I suggest one session (half day) covers two themes, but that each session is delivered twice in different areas e.g. North West, South East. = 4 events in total

Costs would be venue hire and catering.

Event 1 to cover relationship building and personal branding

Event 2 to cover leadership and work life balance

### **Actions**

- CSSC will seek support for this programme of events through its programme of work.
- Attendees plus female school leaders who were unable to attend the event will be consulted on this report so that the proposed events meet their needs.
- Female leaders in controlled schools will be encourage to develop their own peer support networks

## Appendix 1 – agenda for women’s leadership workshop



### Realising your potential

**Thursday 8 March 2018, 2pm  
Armagh City Hotel**

#### Agenda

1. Introduction and welcome  
Heather Murray, CSSC Director and Principal of Millington Primary School
2. Context and background  
Sara McCracken, CSSC Head of Marketing, Research and Communications
3. Panel discussion including:
  - Maria Quinn, Abbey Community College
  - Heather Murray, Millington Primary School
  - Michelle Rainey, Ballyclare High School
  - Gillian Dunlop, Largymore Primary School
  - Grace Trimble, Killeel Nursery School
4. A discussion of the issues / challenges / solutions facing women in leadership positions in education, facilitated by Michelle Rainey
5. Next steps  
Sara McCracken, CSSC Head of Marketing, Research and Communications
6. Thank you and close  
Barry Mulholland, CSSC Chief Executive

Appendix 2 - Realising your potential bingo



## Realising your potential bingo!

Loves to travel	Made a New Year's resolution and kept it	Is left handed	Is wearing red
Has played a sport competitively	Has been skydiving	Has twins or is a twin	Has met a celebrity
Likes spicy food	Has a dog	Enjoys parkruns	Can speak a foreign language
Is a vegetarian	Can play the piano	Likes cats	Was born in March
Loves their job	Has climbed a mountain	Doesn't drink coffee	Keeps bees

Appendix 3 – realising your potential worksheet



**Realise your potential!**



International Women's Day

One thing I will do to realise my potential is:

The key 'take home message' I received today is:

One piece of good practice for women's leadership that happens in my school is:

I will empower myself to progress after today by:

CSSC could help me by: