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Abstract

Research to date about the English government's policy to make schools independent of local authorities (LAs) has looked at the 'macro' level of national policy and at the 'micro' level of the institution. The study of which this paper is a part, explores changes at the 'meso' level - the locality. The paper analyses interviews in three LAs with 15 school headteachers whose schools were well positioned locally. We sought to understand how and why they responded to the changing policy environment. We applied Bourdieu's concepts of forms of capital to model the relationships between schools and to ground explanations of their responses as positioning themselves in the local field. The paper develops this general approach by identifying the varieties of capital available and actually possessed. The most important was categorisation as a result of the inspection process. Many of the headteachers felt impelled to lead their schools into various associations with other schools. Some individuals were becoming notably more powerful in their competition arenas. The power of these elite schools to further accumulate advantage and the withdrawal of the LA role as an arbiter of conflict between schools in the interests of the whole community are discussed.

Introduction

In May 2010, a Conservative/Liberal Democratic Coalition Government was elected in England. A significant policy of the Coalition is to encourage, and in some cases require, schools to become academies (DfEE, 2010)[i]. These are schools that are independent of local authorities and funded directly by central government. While their vision of a system of 'independent state schools' is more radical and extensive than anything that has gone before, it is in line with a policy trend of successive governments (Stevenson, 2011). Implementation has been rapid. In May 2010 there were, out of some 25,000 primary and secondary schools, only 203 academies and by September 2013 there were 3,304. The majority of secondary schools are now academies. Schools still operate within a high stakes accountability environment of inspection and performance targets and a level of parental choice intended to create a quasi-market.

The project of which this paper is a part seeks to analyse the effects of this radical policy in order to understand what new order might be emerging at the local level and the factors affecting it. Much research to date around the consequences of the changing policy framework has looked at the 'macro' level of national policy (e.g. Ball 2008, 2009; Gunter and Forrester, 2008) and at the 'micro' level of the institution (e.g. NCSL, 2011). In contrast,

our study, explores changes at the 'meso' level - that of the locality. To do this we have sought information and perspectives on local developments in three local authority (LA) areas chosen to provide a variety of geographical, historical and policy contexts: a large metropolitan authority (A), a large rural authority with a dispersed population (B), and a smaller authority centred on a town (C).

Within each of these areas we sought to interview people likely to have an LA-wide perspective[ii]. This included headteachers actively engaged in processes relevant to restructuring such as collaborations, federations, or the creation of academies or teaching schools. In 2011-2012 academic year we conducted 15 semi-structured interviews with headteachers across the 3 LAs. None of their schools was a member of a large national chain of schools.

This paper focuses on these headteachers' responses to the opportunities and threats offered by the changing policy environment. Given the selection criteria for the purposes of the wider project it was likely, although not the primary intention, that the schools and headteachers would be well positioned in relation to other schools, that they would be relatively advantaged with reference to some key variables. This was the case. For example, in their last inspection all but one of the schools were judged *Good* (6) or *Outstanding* (8) and the one exception had been graded as *Good with outstanding features* but was reinspected just before we conducted the interview and was graded as *Satisfactory.* Also, they had intakes that tended to be socially advantaged - ten were below, three above and two at the national average of pupils on free school meals. However each school had a complex array of characteristics and varied significantly in the advantages and disadvantages it possessed, including marks of prestige for the school or headteacher, and further details are given in Appendix 1.

The focus on headteachers, and moreover a particular group of them, needs explanation and justification. All headteachers have a strong professional responsibility and personal interest in identifying future challenges and in leading governors and others to address foreseeable dangers. They therefore play a key part in the way schools respond to changes and, in turn, on the configuration of the local school field. The opportunities and challenges they now face are complex and fateful. A headteacher's continued employment and their school's reputation and, in the last resort, its survival, are dependent on periodic assessments of performance made by inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED). Headteachers and their schools judged to be successful have options to become an academy, or teaching school or to become a leader of a federation. As key decision makers in their schools and as members of a local elite of schools, how these headteachers perceive

and respond to these new opportunities is a key factor in how things develop at the local level. In this paper we seek to answer the questions, *How have they responded and why*?

Data and analysis: theorising responses

Opportunities and dangers come in the form of promotions and demotions of various kinds in relation to other schools in what Woods *et al* (1998) called 'local competitive arenas', Lauder and Hughes (1999) 'lived markets' and Maroy and van Zanten (2009) 'competitive interdependencies'. Bourdieu helps us analyse these relations. His most pertinent insight for the purposes of our present analysis is that the logic of a social action can be (re)constructed by characterizing it as the response of a participant (i.e. stakeholder) in a social field aimed at maintaining or enhancing their position in that field in relation to others (Bourdieu 1980; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; van Zanten 2009). We take it that a participant or stakeholder may be an individual or an institution.

Each participant has to do this with the resources available to them. But, stakeholders within a field have different sets of resources with which to compete – they have to play the game with the cards they are dealt. Bourdieu conceptualizes these resources as different forms of capital (Bourdieu 1986; 1991). In addition to economic capital (material wealth) he identified social, cultural and symbolic capital.

Social capital is the benefit that accrues as a result of acquaintance or congeniality – for example the support and intelligence passed on through informal and formal networks and associations of headteachers. Cultural capital is the reservoir of knowledge and understanding of the field gained from experience (for example the knowledge an experienced headteacher has of procedures, rules, regulations and ways of proceeding successfully) and the possession of attributes conferring power and prestige within the field (for example educational qualifications, or being appointed formally to represent headteachers locally or nationally). Symbolic capital is strongly associated with the kinds of categorical distinctions made in the field (for example, the grading of schools by Ofsted and the conferment of prestige through such titles as National Leader of Education [NLE] and Local Leader of Education [LLE])[iii].

The obverse of the conferment of symbolic capital is symbolic violence where a stakeholder is allocated to a category not only subordinate but explicitly lacking in worth according to the criteria operative in the field. Social violence is systemic and, in so far as it is wielded by and in the interests of dominant groups, a form of, and a means to maintain, that dominance.

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In addition Bourdieu's concept of habitus offers a way of capturing that aspect of action that is influenced by our absorption of a way of seeing the world. Crucially this includes an implicit acknowledgement of one's objective position in a range of fields and of appropriate responses to that positioning as necessary. Although originally an attribute of persons it is also applicable to conceptualise important aspects of institutions including schools (van Zanten 2009). Habitus bequeaths a cognitive frame and affective palette that disposes people similarly positioned to think, feel and act in distinctive ways. In this way Bourdieu avoids portraying social action and practice as only rational. Habitus offers an explanation as to how an individual or institution becomes fitted to the objective condition of their position. A person's habitus is acquired in the process of becoming, and continuing to participate as, a member of an integrated and persisting social group or institution such as a family, a close knit neighbourhood, a primary school or a secondary school. Institutional habitus is acquired analogously as a participant in a field of schools. The kind of habitus developed is appropriate and necessary for continued membership of, or advancement in, a stakeholder group within a field. If the group one belongs to is dominant within the field the habitus acquired helps maintain advantage (it is a valuable resource), but if one's group holds a sub-ordinate position it will be a disadvantage for upward mobility within the field.

These concepts have been deployed previously in analyses of the responses of schools and headteachers. Notably, Maroy and van Zanten (2009) take as crucial the differential capital held by players in the field respectively to understand schools' logics of action and Tomlinson *et al* (2013) identify implicit threats posed by central government through the manipulation of headteachers' prestige.

Consistent with the notion of institutional habitus, we class schools as actors in that they too possess capitals distinct from, but closely related to, those of the headteacher. In addition, reflecting the commonplace understanding that people rarely make decisions with an eye to only one way in which their actions may be judged, we conceive individuals as participating simultaneously in many different fields (Bourdieu 1991 ch. 11). This means that the response of an individual headteacher will be understandable (meaningful) only as part of nested practices (Schatzki 1996 and 2002) and that these practices make available plural forms of identity and agency. To help to take account of this plurality and of the school as an actor we distinguish heuristically between – the School, the Person-as-headteacher, and the Headteacher-as-person – each intended to highlight a different conjunction of position, agency and identity. We elaborate on what we mean by these terms in the following paragraphs.

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The School is subject to the judgement of others – parents, the Local Authority, inspectors, national government departments, the local press. It is formally and informally categorized, that is it has identities and reputations, and although these are various, some are more influential than others. Categorization by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) is particularly powerful. English schools are inspected at regular intervals by Ofsted. The School is classified as either *Outstanding; Good; Requires Improvement;* or *Inadequate.* These categorizations substantially affect the capital a School possesses, its position in the local and national arena, and are directly linked to opportunities and threats. For example, an *Outstanding* grade is likely to consolidate the informal hierarchy of reputation with parents. It also places the School and the headteacher towards the top of the hierarchy that current school improvement policy has explicitly established.

Formally putting schools in a hierarchical relation to each other is a key practice of policy. For example, only *Outstanding* schools can apply to become a teaching school; where a school is graded as *Requiring Improvement* or *Inadequate* inspectors are also required to make a judgement as to whether the school should be categorised as requiring a *Notice to Improve* or, at the extreme, put into *Special Measures.* In both cases these official categorizations activate explicit duties of the Local Authority to intervene. To be categorised positively leads to high public regard and a light bureaucratic touch, whereas to be negatively categorised leads to extensive and intrusive 'challenge and support'. The Ofsted category, measured performance, league tables, intake and parental preference interact in a complex way to locate a particular school in the local, regional and national school fields.

The Person-as-headteacher is responsible for protecting the school by accruing more capital of all kinds relative to other schools. This term emphasizes the responsibility to represent the school. The Person-as-headteacher can also accrue capital (Tomlinson et al 2013) in the form of recognition as a highly successful professional. But, their personal capital and professional fate is systematically tied to the success of the school for which they have main responsibility. Only headteachers of *Outstanding* schools can apply to be National Leaders of Education (NLE) and only headteachers of *Good* or *Outstanding* schools can apply to be Local Leaders (LLE). In addition, only leaders of *Outstanding* or *Good* schools are considered able to provide appropriate guidance or take executive control of schools *Requiring Improvement* or that are *Inadequate*.

The term Headteacher-as-person is intended to emphasise the fact that individuals are participants in many practices together with their (sometimes contradictory) criteria of worth. They are therefore attentive to their position and identity in fields and areas of life other than

that for which they are explicitly held accountable as headteacher. Some of these will be tangential to their practice as headteachers but some may be directly relevant such as membership of professional associations (e.g. those focused on curriculum matters such as the United Kingdom Literacy Association; or trade unions such as the National Association of Head Teachers). There is a subtle and complex influence exerted through still other identities such as being a member of a religious community, or a political party as well as more personal identities as a result of life history. Participation in a variety of intersecting practices, and adoption of the identities they make available, is the way in which people are located, and to some extent actively locate themselves, in social space. Each struggles to achieve a tolerable level of personal and public consistency between these sometimes contradictory identities, practices and values.

In light of these theoretical considerations, to better understand what well-positioned headteachers do, and why, is to gain insight into how those with relatively more power are participating in shaping the new local order. A fuller understanding would be gained by analyzing the responses of those less well positioned but we do not currently have those data. In the subsequent analysis we attempt to understand our headteachers' various responses in terms of the different capitals held by the School, the Person-as-headteacher and Headteacher-as-person.

Taking charge of their own destiny

A strong theme for our interviewees in relation to the academisation programme was protecting the school and themselves by taking charge of their own destiny, conveyed in such phrases as: *'Going first rather than having it done to you'(Primary Head C4); 'You want to think your destiny's in your own hands'(Secondary Head A4)*.

Some reported that academy status gave extra freedoms citing greater flexibility, or speed in deploying resources, or ridding them of LA policy constraints[iv].

> *It opened up opportunities to be that bit more creative and to be able to personalise things for your children. And I think probably there would have been ways around it through other routes but it just… It lets things move quicker because you have got that freedom. (Primary C4)*

The opportunity to apply for academy status depended on their Ofsted Grade and therefore the room for manoeuvre that each headteacher had was a consequence of the level of symbolic capital they possessed which in turn was closely associated with the capital the

school possessed in the form of performance, intake, financial resources, local reputation and popularity.

A key factor was access to information. All of the headteachers we interviewed stressed the sense that things were changing so quickly and radically around them that there was difficulty in knowing what was going on.

> *I think it's very much like a large bomb's been set off underneath a big bag of rice and you've got the pieces everywhere, but they haven't landed in many cases. I would say it's extremely tough to know what's going on because there's too much information; and I'm probably in a really good position to know what's going on... (Primary A6)*

In a chaotic competitive environment full of threats, access to good information is critical and unequal access to information creates more and less advantaged players. Consistent with our selection criteria our interviewees were very well informed because they had considerable social capital[v]. Many were chairs of official or ad hoc groups of local headteachers. One was a member of a review body at the DfE. Others were National or Local School Leaders who were exceptionally well networked nationally and locally by being briefed, managed and supported by the National College for School Leadership[vi]. In addition those who had gone through the process of becoming a teaching school or an academy had direct contact with the senior DfE managers of that process and gleaned information about the thinking and intentions of national policy makers.

There was evidence of the rise of powerful individuals. Some headteachers, both primary and secondary, were chairs of local forums of headteachers, or executives of federations, and given the reduced role of the Local Authority, were beginning to exert considerable local influence as a result. The opportunity to be promoted to these positions was dependent on the school and headteacher possessing high prestige. As one of our interviewees put it:

> *If you're an outstanding school the options are plentiful and if you know what you're doing... and a lot of heads don't because it's an emerging landscape as we said before, but if you know what you're doing and you're quite politically savvy I think you could become a very powerful local person and we're seeing that with some individuals. (Primary A6)*

Some interviewees were conscious of the advantages they held and that these advantages were cumulative and partly the effect of segregated schooling as much as their own leadership qualities. They could see that schools that already possessed high capital would tend to gain access to greater prestige, more information and greater resources giving further capacity to engage effectively with, and to negotiate their way through, the changing landscape. Those headteachers in schools with less advantaged intakes and more challenging day to day concerns already have less capacity to look outwards and make useful networks (Thrupp 1999; Lupton 2004). Their likely lower levels of performance lead to fewer opportunities to gain those positions (such as NLE or LLE that are dependent on school performance) where information is available and social and other forms of capital can be accrued[vii].

> *…ultimately I think what is going to happen…is that the stronger are going to get stronger and the weaker are going to get weaker. Strong schools will get stronger and weaker schools potentially could get weaker and get…further removed. (Primary A5)*

These headteachers recognised that positioning of schools, and hence headteachers, is correlated with school characteristics. But, two explanations of poor performance vied with each other. This was illustrated in the space of one interview where the lack of engagement by some fellow headteachers and the low performance of their school was first characterised sympathetically as a result of external factors - they were good professionals doing a challenging job that left little time for involvement:

> *I think we've got some exceptional leaders of schools in challenging circumstances…They will never be, in the new framework of Ofsted, Outstanding. I mean I've got some colleagues who are absolutely stunning at the job they do and they'd be the people I go to first, but they are feeling under immense pressure because their school is so close to floor target and, you know, one child, two children can tip them into one list or not…I've got some colleagues and friends who choose to work in schools like that and who are making a huge, huge difference, but the powers that be down in the glass buildings in London don't think that the difference is enough and I don't think that's right. (Primary A5)*

Later in the interview the causes of low performance were individualised as a lack of leadership qualities as compared to other headteachers' clarity of vision, talent and drive. *'Strong visionary heads who see where the landscape is going* [and who] *have already made the landscape their own'* were contrasted with others who:

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don't understand the educational climate. I think, sadly, some people don't understand the urgency about improving outcomes for children. Some colleagues don't understand, I think, the role that leadership is now…sadly, …some colleagues are good managers but not necessarily good leaders. (Primary A5)

This same ambivalence is reflected in the national debate.

The precariousness of prestige

The theoretical position of this paper is that the prestige of a headteacher and their school is a product of complex symbolic and material processes that confer various forms of capital. Chief among these are the official categorisations of school quality and the actions that policy deems should follow from such categorisation. As a result the severity of the high stakes policy environment was a key consideration for all our interviewees. Despite their enjoyment of relative independence and autonomy, there was a strong awareness that one poor inspection report or set of results could change their position drastically.

> *…this all depends on that Outstanding badge, and it could all fall flat without it and that's a huge pressure for me to keep all that going, and do that, and do that. And, yet, there's an expectation if I've got the Outstanding that I do all these different things. So there's a risk, isn't there?' (Primary C8)*

> *I think that you have got to be very careful that you don't end up in a situation where your own performance slips as a result of being involved in so many other things externally. (Secondary C5)*

Their fear was of demotion resulting in loss of power to negotiate the changed context and loss of their own and their school's prestige. These responses illustrate a theme that the preservation of the position of their school might be put at risk as a consequence of supporting other schools as policy requires. A condition of achieving academy status for example is that a school will support other schools that are less well placed. However, this is happening only patchily (Academies Commission, 2013) and the fear of loss of performance may be part of the explanation.

The financial incentive to convert

The opportunity to use increased freedom was not the only reason for conversion to academy status. Also important was the additional finance that it provided. Central government provides funding to LAs on the basis of the number of schools directly under LA control. Most of this funding is then passed directly to the schools to manage, but a proportion is retained to fund central services (such as human resource departments, educational psychologists, education welfare officers and building maintenance services) to these schools. When a school becomes an academy it is removed from LA control and the previously retained portion of funding for LA central services is effectively transferred to the school budget. The academy can then use the reallocated funding to replace the services previously provided by the LA. This meant that schools, like the ones led by our well positioned headteachers, that historically used fewer central services, typically those with fewer challenges in terms of social disadvantage, special needs etc., were set to gain financially if they became academies. In one example, school 9 in LA A was reallocated £833,000 of funding from central LA funds of which they only spent an estimated £300,000 to replace services previously provided by the LA.

Added to this was a universally lukewarm assessment of the quality of the services provided by the LA and so we heard stories, about a funding windfall by converting to academy, but also about how they could deploy their resources more economically and in ways that better met their needs.

Tensions within the elite

With the withdrawal of the power of the LA and the reshaping of local power relations, there were tensions between many of our headteachers and other well positioned schools in their locality as they struggled for position, prestige and recognition. Some long established differences of symbolic capital and resources became more salient and surfaced in our interviews. In Local Authority B the headteacher of an *Outstanding* comprehensive school in an otherwise selective system felt the constant need to have the school's worth recognized directly in relation to selective schools.

> *… If you are a comprehensive school in [this county] you'd better be doing better than the national average by a distance across the ability range… it's proving it can be done because people that say we have a selective system because it works, we've got to be able to say "No. Look! Here's the most able 25%. Look at how they're doing alongside, and with, and part of the community…" So it's kind of defending the comprehensive ideal and, you know, I get a bit of a buzz from doing that (Secondary B2)*

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A more widespread and longstanding difference of prestige is between primary and secondary schools. A consequent tension was most evident in Local Authority C (where there was a historic gulf between secondary and primary headteachers) and to a lesser extent in Local Authority A. Space does not allow a full analysis of quite how and why primary and secondary schools and their headteachers differ in prestige. Such an account would give due weight to the fact that the greater size of secondary schools is associated with higher salaries, and a larger senior management team giving a greater capacity for headteachers to engage in external networks and build social capital, and a 'businesslike' set of practices and habitus. It would give an account of how primary schooling is associated with women's work through the fact of a predominantly female staff, a class teacher and generalist pedagogy that valorizes pastoral aspects of professional identity as compared with the subject based identities of secondary school teachers and the subtle differences of prestige associated with teaching younger children as compared with adolescents.

Awareness of these processes of production of prestige and its activation in negotiations is evident in the words of two primary school headteachers where they feel the threat of being patronized, relegated or dominated in the emerging arrangements.

> *… I think that the businessy type people have probably taken more of a leap first, because they are more confident perhaps, and more used to that world. And I just feel now I'm feeling more confident to be able to get out there, because we have got a good story to tell and we've got a lot going on. But … I'm finding it hard, and secondary school mentality is a little bit different ... I just think that primaries should have a voice, and should work very closely with secondaries. And it's not always an open door, and it's always the big boy … (Primary C8)*

> *I am part of, the School Improvement Group… but primary Heads do feel very much uncomfortable with having a secondary school [as a teaching school] directing CPD and training and support for primary schools. I think they would prefer a primary model. I am a strategic partner for [a different] bid for teaching school status… but it is based on the fact that we do feel genuinely that primary schools should not be seen as an appendage of secondary schools, or a route towards secondary schools, but valid in themselves. And have credibility as excellent practitioners in primary education. (Primary C4)*

Secondary colleagues accrue more material and symbolic capital in the fields of remuneration, working practices and pedagogy and these unequal social relations, and the

identities they make available, are reinforced by wider practices of gender differentiation. Together with the effects of size these differences contribute to distinctive habituses and constitute different sets of capital and modes of symbolic violence to position secondary schools more advantageously within the school field. Recognition of and resistance to these forms of domination is evident in the words of the interviewees quoted above.

A third persisting difference was of structure between secondary schools. In LA A there had been a policy in the 1970s to strip schools of their Sixth Forms in favour of a city wide FE provision. But some (typically those with already advantaged intakes) had successfully resisted this policy and retained their post-compulsory provision which was widely seen as a considerable advantage, making the school more popular with prospective staff and parents and conferring a sense of symbolic prestige associated with the teaching of advanced level work. For one of our headteachers in this authority the freedom to establish a sixth form was her main motivation to become an academy.

Establishing alliances: building social capital
The new landscape of schooling in England is giving birth to a wide variety of forms of association between schools (Hill et al, 2012). It was a strong theme of the interviews in all three Local Authorities that the current changes led headteachers to consider making alliances with other schools and decisions about which alliances to make required careful consideration.

> *You know, ultimately you've got to decide which clubs you want to be in because you can only be in so many clubs; and what is the right club for your school and its future development [is a key question]. (Secondary A4)*

Not all our headteachers had chosen to develop links with other schools, but many had done so and were leading their schools into a variety of kinds of association. They recognised that the role of LAs was drastically changing. Although some saw this as negative in some respects, they understood that there were positive aspects to the extra autonomy and flexibility it gave them. The prestige, or level of capital (particularly the Ofsted Grade) of other schools was a key factor in determining with which schools to develop alliances, and different forms of alliance created symmetric or asymmetric relations between schools on the basis of the capital they possessed.

There were homogeneous alliances, or 'fraternities' as one headteacher called them, where all the participating schools were categorized as Good or Outstanding and were more or less

equal in their position within the local hierarchy. They therefore possessed similar levels of capital and their relations were more or less symmetric. These fraternities were *informally constituted* and shared activity was at a moderate level with some joint procurement, and joint teaching to extend the curriculum offered to students. They were managed informally by *ad hoc* leadership groups.

Other clusters of schools were less homogeneous. For some of our headteachers, such groupings were embedded in pre-existing local structures and were either geographically close and/or were schools that shared communities from which they recruited their intake, e.g. feeder primary schools to a secondary school. This emphasised the relationship of the schools jointly to their immediate community. The term 'family of schools' was sometimes used. Proximity and shared community is a natural and therefore common basis for a continuing professional relationship between schools whether encouraged by LA policy or not. Although schools possessed different levels of capital this did not necessarily mean relations were marked by dominance and subordination. These associations were voluntarily entered into.

Building on pre-existing local relationships can be seen as an emergent form of school positioning which prioritises concepts of community and locality. Some of our headteachers were involved in alliances which had been formed as part of the process of school improvement where the headteacher of a *Good* or *Outstanding* school had taken responsibility for a nearby school *Requiring Improvement* or *Inadequate*. Relations were necessarily asymmetric and marked by large differences of capital and prestige. The initiative for such a development can vary. In one of our cases, an *Outstanding* Primary school led by an NLE, was moving towards federation with a less well performing local primary school prior to 2010. The inspection of the weaker school then presented a challenge:

> [The weaker school in the federation] *was inspected in the first week of the new framework and we got Satisfactory[viii] and we were absolutely devastated by that ... We're now sitting on two Satisfactories and there can't be a third ...We would* [opt for academy status] *to further consolidate the relationship that we've got with* [the weaker school in the federation] *which we've worked hard at... because if* [the weaker school] *is on the* [DfE's] *'list' the government could quite easily decide to come in and split the federation and force* [the weaker school in the federation] *into academy with another academy chain and..the community and the staff wouldn't want that. (Primary A5)*

Consequently, both schools became academies with the stronger school sponsoring the weaker one and also another local primary school. This development was encouraged by the LA.

In another case, an *Outstanding* secondary school (also led by an NLE) was encouraged by the LA to take over another secondary school, in another part of the LA area, which was deemed to be at risk. It then moved on, again encouraged by the LA, to work with two of the feeder primary schools in the same part of the city as the second secondary school. All four schools are now moving towards becoming members of a single overarching Trust with the headteacher of the lead school taking overall responsibility. Maintaining a set of local relationships was not the main concern. The headteacher put it like this:

> *It seems to me you don't just grow these things just for the fun of it. There is a really sound reason for doing this and* [the other secondary school] *is always going to be a challenging school. It will become much less so if, within the Trust, all of the feeder primary schools are part of the Trust, all are focused on school improvement, are focused on youngsters making rapid progress through the system supported in a consistent way… So that's the project. (Secondary A9)*

This is clearly a more ambitious project than the primary-led federation described above; the headteacher reported that he has received a range of enquiries and overtures and does not discount further extension of the school grouping.

> *It's my role that's changing. I'm stopping being a headteacher. It's more like a chief exec and then that is about managing the work across a group of schools and it's going to get larger. (Secondary A9)*

These various cases illustrate both the consequences that differences in capital have for the power relationships between schools and also the different ways in which the stronger schools can choose to utilise their power to construct favourable alliances. Headteachers of these schools can determine the kinds of partners with whom they wish to work (homogeneous or heterogeneous groupings) and can significantly influence the underpinning assumptions on which an alliance will be established (will it be grounded in the locality or will it be wider, and, if so, will it stretch beyond the LA) and the governing structure of that alliance. Schools in weaker positions may have choices, but these will be rapidly narrowed if their student outcomes or inspection grades fall. At the extreme, schools may be forced into associations that they would not have chosen. In our examples, the difference in capital in such

associations was significant and it was coupled with an explicit responsibility on the high performing (high capital) school and headteacher to support the low performing (low capital) school. The relationship ranged from offering more or less formalized guidance through to joint governorship, executive leadership and full responsibility.

Personal values as a factor in headteachers' responses
Consistent with the theoretical position of this paper we see values, or criteria of worth, as internal to practices. They inform the actions of those who identify as members of groups or communities who either explicitly or implicitly exemplify the practice and its discourse. As noted earlier, we are each participants in multiple practices and, because some practices overlap and intersect, we seek to act in some particular instances according to plural criteria of worth. We may speak of values being personal in the sense that, because our life history is unique, our membership set is idiosyncratic. We experience it as personal when as individuals we daily craft a tolerable level of consistency between these multiple identities and practices. They are moral resources that, mostly implicitly but sometimes explicitly, provide reasons and justifications for our actions. The fact of overlapping and intersecting practices and the need to manage the contradictions and discomforts of social performance is part of the commonplace, but nevertheless remarkable, process by which practices are critiqued, creatively developed, or dismantled (Holland et al 2001; Schatzki 2002).

Our distinction between Person-as-headteacher and Headteacher-as-person is intended to capture at least part of how this complex process was a factor for our interviewees. There were many references to values that motivated their decisions, or that they thought were threatened, or that they and their schools wished in some way to promote. In these references we see other values and other identities intersecting with and sometimes in contradiction to those imposed by external policies and practices. Consequently, the need to balance principle and pragmatism was never far from the surface as the comments from these headteachers illustrate.

> *… we do monitor things very carefully here against the very different measurements because you have to stay successful and also to survive… But I wouldn't be comfortable making the changes based on how we measured at the expense of what we believe is the right thing to do. (Secondary C5)*

> *I… always maintain my socialist principle, so it doesn't go along with becoming an academy, and be one of the first academies…But I think the two things can go together, and the determination that I had, and my governors had, was about being proactive and going first rather than having it done to you. (Primary C4)*

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> *...I am a great believer in local authorities and local control. So I met with something of a heavy heart... the move towards dis-assembling that with some concern. But with that being said, I had to support... very much had to support the idea of [our school] becoming an academy, and we looked at what was happening, and what was likely to happen over the next number of years. It was the only way forward for the school. So I had to sort of put my philosophical beliefs to one side and rest with the pragmatic as it were. (Secondary C3)*

Of necessity, given how these interviewees were chosen, pragmatism won out over other values, but it is interesting that even here there was discomfort.

The response of one headteacher in LA A illustrates a sophisticated attempt actively to locate her and her school in a respectful relation to neighbouring schools – an attempt to balance values and what was possible. She saw the teaching school option as a way of addressing felt contradictions and the need for a local alternative vision to that which animates current policy but not necessarily in open conflict with it.

> *Do we all become losers in an unequal world? That can't be a good option. It can't be a sensible option. I suppose the only way I square it myself is that if I'm – you know, just because of circumstances – well placed to be a winner here, then I need to share my winnings through the teaching school would be my own personal view. Me not entering the game and not being a winner seems daft... I think it's very difficult for those schools who don't have those options. I think, you know, that's why we do need a kind of benevolent system and that's why we do need that collaboration, and we do need that sort of principled understanding about what education in* [the city] *is for.... (Secondary A4)*

So the local field for these schools and headteachers is complex, with dilemmas and challenges in abundance.

Conclusion

This paper set out to better understand how and why some well positioned headteachers have responded to the changes in the governance of schools in England and what significance this might have for the reconfiguring of local relations between schools. These headteachers were used to operating in a high-stakes performance environment and parental choice in a quasi-market. What is new since 2010 is the radical reduction in the power of the Local Authority

as a result of the fact that many schools, particularly secondary schools, have opted for academy status making them formally independent of Local Authority control.

Most of our headteachers were early adopters of academisation and were playing a key part in the reconfiguration of the local field, aiming for the best possible position for themselves and their schools in their 'local competitive arena' (Glatter et al, 1997; Woods *et al* 1998; Maroy and van Zanten 2009; Ball and Juneman 2012). They tended to take a pragmatic view of how to respond to the changes, a logic of action that could be characterised as aiming to accumulate prestige (capital in all its forms) whilst recognising its precarious nature and maximising their own room for manoeuvre, taking charge of their own destiny as much as they could. They felt inclined to access the additional funding on offer at a time of austerity. They built their social capital by forming a variety of alliances with other schools, or by taking on roles such as NLE or a leading role in *ad hoc* groups which provided support and greater access to information as to what was happening nationally and locally. They were very aware that the symbolic capital conferred on them by being graded by Ofsted as at least *Good* and preferably *Outstanding* was what mattered most. Anything less in future inspections would be a fateful recategorisation; a loss of local and national prestige demoting both school and headteacher. High Ofsted grades are both a cause and an effect of being towards the top of the local hierarchy. Continuing to be so was strategically important because it meant popularity with parents was secure and they were more able to win out against other schools in competition for pupils likely to attain in external examinations. In the competitive local field, these headteachers utilised the relatively high economic, social, cultural and symbolic forms of capital they possessed (Bourdieu, 1986; 1991) to maximise their relative positions in the local hierarchy and to avoid the symbolic violence of poor Ofsted gradings (Tomlinson et al, 2013) and the humiliation of 'challenge and support' that would follow.

The Person-as-headteacher is strongly linked to the school community and its relative success. But personal values also mattered, exercising a subtle and complex influence on decision-making. Given our selection criteria it is not surprising that, where there was a conflict of personal professional values with the interests of the schools in light of national policy, the latter won. But, even these pragmatic early adopters voiced considerable concerns about the effects of their decisions and the policy that provoked them. This is suggestive of significant professional and political discomfort on the part of these professionals with the changes. Had we interviewed headteachers who had considered but rejected the option to become an academy we might have found evidence of even greater discomfort and resistance.

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Further research with headteachers differently positioned in their local fields is needed to gain a sense of the variety of responses and reasons for those responses.

A significant finding of our study is the rise of powerful individuals. That *Good* and *Outstanding* schools and highly successful headteachers are gaining greater influence in local arenas may be claimed as a success by those who advocate the current policy. Putting those who are most successful in raising standards in a position to change the practice of those who are less successful is a key aspect of the strategy for school improvement. Competition between schools is good from this perspective because it reveals those who are better and those that are worse in fulfilling their educational mission. However, we found that capital was accrued and influence gained as a result of attributes not only related to educational excellence, such as the dominant positioning of secondary schools over primary; grammar schools over secondary modern and comprehensives; and, between secondary schools, those with post-16 provision over those without[ix]. The Local Authority used to act as an honest broker between schools to manage these structural inequalities. The drastic reduction of LA power and influence has brought these tensions to the fore. Hierarchical segmentation among schools seems likely to increase as Higham and Earley (2013) argue. On the basis of a national study, they suggest that schools may be conceived as positioning themselves as 'confident', 'cautious', 'concerned and 'constrained' in relation to national policy. Our respondents all fell in the first two of these categories. Further research on how the fractions of the elite schools in a local area – and their leaders - relate to each other, who of the dominant dominate and who is dominated and why, will be of significance for understanding new forms of local governance. There is also the need to explore the degree to which key individuals develop into local versions of 'nodal actors' in networks – the "movers and shakers" identified by Ball and Junemann (2012: 87) at a national level.

There was evidence that the local context – its political and administrative history and its geography - had an effect on the pattern of relationships emerging in the three LAs and therefore on the responses of the headteachers analysed in this paper. A proper analysis of these effects would require a careful presentation of the historical, geographical and political context of each area for which there has not been enough space in this paper. Further analysis of these aspects would be of considerable interest.

The dynamic of competitive arenas is that those with more capital are better placed to retain and enhance their prestige within the field. The notion that competition will eliminate poorly performing schools by either improving or closing them is part of the justification for the marketisation of schools. The headteachers we interviewed thought that it was inevitable that

the weaker would get weaker and the strong stronger. They felt that increasingly competitive local fields are creating *winners and losers*. In the early stages of academisation, to which most of our interviews related, our interviewees tended to attribute these changes to the policy itself and, in some cases, to headteachers' inability to grasp the possibilities available to them. However, as the reconfiguration of local fields continues, there is clearly room for action by schools with high levels of capital to adopt *conquest* and *profiting* strategies (Maroy and van Zanten, 2009) at the expense of less advantaged schools and stakeholders. But it is not at all clear how this will work out and further research into how it is actually operating at the local level would be of interest.

It was clear that, when considering with whom to make an alliance - which club they wanted to belong to - these schools did not restrict themselves to their neighbourhood, nor to schools that served different parts of the same community. They felt free, and had reasons, to look further afield. Some did commit themselves to alliances with the schools serving their local community, but others chose partners that were geographically distant – even in a different city. Respondents reported a tendency for links between secondary schools and their feeder primaries to be weakened, together with the growth of networks that crossed community and local authority boundaries, and the increasingly powerful position of Teaching School Alliances. These mark a move away from "local democratic structures and local consumers and communities" (Hodgson and Spours, 2012:202). If schools opt, or are forced, to become part of one of the national chains of academies this would not be incompatible with, and may enhance, further decoupling. Where a significant proportion of schools belong to such a chain there is likely to be an impact on local relations. Our sample did not enable us to gather any evidence about this and in order comprehensively to chart changes in local governance this will need to be a focus of further research.

Through this research, we have begun to analyse the flows of capital, influence and accountability in emerging local systems within which the headteacher plays a crucial role, and how different solutions are being framed for local contexts. We have attempted to identify a wider range than before of forms of relevant capital and this has enabled us to describe more precisely the factors affecting differential positioning in the local school field and to specify aspects in need of further investigation. As the policy unfolds it is clear that there is more to be learnt as things play out in very different ways in particular local contexts.

The foregoing analyses show that the model of social action as the accumulation of capitals within a competitive field offers a plausible description of how and why the headteachers we interviewed responded to the changing policy context. Further, differences of habitus, as a

result of the complex adaptations and positioning on a variety of dimensions of secondary and primary schools, is a possible explanation of the different responses and experiences of heads of these institutions. They developed dispositions consonant with and in part determined by the positioning of their institution. The school as a primary or secondary school was objectively positioned within the school field and that positioning largely influenced the understandings, sayings and doings of the people who worked there including the headteachers who led them. In this sense we use the term institutional habitus.

But, the disposition of an individual to act in particular ways is not only influenced by institutional habitus or the need for the institution to which they belong to accrue capital in given circumstances. It is also influenced by dispositions and criteria of action associated with the many other identities of each individual – this was the point of our emphasising the headteacher as a person not just as representative of the interests of the school.

Bourdieu offers a model of the logic of practice intended to be applicable to all social action. But it is at the expense of characterising some individuals as acting non-consciously (because of their habitus) against their own interests. If we do not wish to relegate people's motives to a form of false consciousness we need to apply a different theoretical framework. We should be sensitive to where we feel the application feels too forced. For example how far is the capital model applicable to the non-toxic asymmetric relations of a collaborative family of schools based on a community that we found in some of our areas? And how far does it fit the secondary headteacher (A4) quoted above who sought ways of working in the interests of her own school but that were not disrespectful or dominating? As it happens we found that the headteachers we interviewed prioritised, albeit with various levels of (dis)comfort, the prestige of the school on the terms determined by policy makers. Bourdieu's logic of practice as a matter of competitive relations in a field seems to fit these participants well. But in this project we have not gained empirical evidence of the perspective of headteachers of schools with lower capitals. Here it is possible that other logics of action might prevail (for example a principled rejection of some aspects of current policy) and the kind of analysis conducted here might feel more forced.

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Appendix One: Details of Schools

	Age phase	Type of school	Ofsted Grade at time of interview	Intake characteristics	Popularity	Badges of prestige
A3	Sec	Academy	Good	Disadvantaged: High FSM and SEN but becoming less so relative to other local schools	Oversubscribed	
A4	Sec	Maintained (seeking academy status)	Outstanding	Advantaged: largely from professional families	Over-subscribed	Teaching School.
A5	Prim	Maintained (seeking academy status)	Good	Disadvantaged: Relatively high FSM and SEN.	Oversubscribed	Head is NLE and Executive head of a federation
A6	Prim	Community.	Good	Advantaged: Relatively low FSM and SEN	Oversubscribed	Head is chair of LA primary heads group
A7	Sec	Community.	Good	Moderately disadvantaged. Average FSM and SEN	Oversubscribed	Chair is head of LA Schools Forum
A8	Sec	Academy	Satisfactory	Balanced	Oversubscribed	
A9	Sec	Academy.	Outstanding	Advantaged	Oversubscribed	Executive head of federation NLE
B2	Sec	Academy	Outstanding	Advantaged	Undersubscribed	
B3	Prim	Academy	Good	Advantaged	Oversubscribed	
C3	Sec	Academy	Good	Balanced. FSM and SEN about national average.	Oversubscribed	
C4	Prim	Academy	Good	Advantaged. FSM below national average but SEN at 25%.	Oversubscribed	Head is a LLE, and was nominated for a Teaching Award as Outstanding Head
C5	Sec	Academy	Outstanding	Balanced. FSM and SEN about national average.	Oversubscribed	Teaching School. Head is a NLE, Ofsted inspector
C8	Prim	Academy	Outstanding	Balanced. FSM and SEN about national average.	Oversubscribed	Teaching School Head is a LLE
C9	Sec	Academy	Outstanding	Advantaged	Oversubscribed	Teaching School
C10	Sec	Academy	Outstanding	Advantaged	Oversubscribed	

[i] Commonly known as 'converter academies' to contrast them with New Labour's 'sponsored academies'. The government is also enabling groups, including parents, to set up new schools known as 'free schools' and these too must be academies. The number of free schools is currently very small.

[ii] As part of the wider project we also interviewed 7 LA executives and one chair of governors but these are not included in the analysis reported in this paper which focuses only on headteacher responses. They do not add anything significant to the central topic of this paper but they do provide a great deal of information about the LA responses and these are the topic of a separate paper.

[iii] National and Local leaders of Education are titles granted to headteachers of successful schools by the National College for School Leadership in the expectation that they will support the improvement of other schools.

[iv] Academy status releases schools from an obligation to follow the National Curriculum and teachers' national pay and conditions of service and enables them to vary the timing of the school day and year. However, evidence suggests that few schools use these freedoms (Academies Commission, 2013).

[v] Our theoretical model, being essentially relational, implies that they were better informed than less well positioned headteachers. This is a reasonable assumption but we do not have empirical evidence from this study to support that and further research is needed.

[vi] Now the National College for Teaching and Leadership.

[vii] Again this points to the need for an empirical study of poorly positioned schools and headteachers to complete the relational theoretical stance of this paper.

[viii] An Ofsted Grade now defunct.

[ix] This is of course in addition to the extensive evidence about the more significant influence of intake on performance.