

Resource 16: Ethical leadership in education

The purpose of this discussion is to explore our understanding of the issues surrounding the concept of ethical leadership. Ethical leadership is a powerful and compelling notion and the phrase has gained significant currency and approval.

'The moral imperative is concerned with optimising the opportunities for children to achieve their full potential so that their years of compulsory education culminate in the maximum appropriate outcomes. This places an enormous burden of responsibility on teachers and managers in schools to enhance every opportunity for the growth and development of children. This in turn requires that values are at the core of every decision-making process and educational procedure. (West-Burnham (1997, p7)

'[education can only be a] moral enterprise. Its purpose is to develop educated citizens who can function as free people in a free and self-governing society. The moral commitments... - intellectual and personal liberty, equality, due process, and democracy – are more than simply concepts that provide handy vehicles for learning to think about ethical problems ... They are concepts that are central to our vision of ourselves as a free people. Thus they should be central to our view of education in a free society.' (Strike et al 1988, p105)

'A fundamental responsibility of teachers to create and sustain conditions that will promote learning for each and all of their students. They must assume that every student is capable of learning. This is both a pedagogical and a moral imperative.' (Clark 1990, p261)

This discussion seeks to move from exhortation to analysis to try to enhance our awareness of what moral leadership actually involves and how it might be better understood. Moral leadership is increasingly seen as being an important component of any model of leadership for a number of reasons:

- The disproportionate influence that leaders have in creating organisational culture
- The view that education is primarily a moral process and should therefore be led by those who are ethically literate
- The belief that 'form should follow function' – schools should be overtly moral communities
- The need for leaders to have 'moral confidence' to inform their decision-making (every decision in schools has a moral dimension)