

Sustainable School Leadership

Series 1 - Episode 1

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SPEAKERS

Gurpall Badesha, Tom Perry, Mike Collins, Caitlin Donnelly

Mike Collins 00:04

Hello and welcome to the Sustainable School Leadership podcast from the Universities of Nottingham and Warwick, and Research Podcasts. I'm Dr Mike Collins, and in this series, we explore what it means to lead schools in the UK today, as demands and pressures on schools are shifting and at a time when the needs of children and young people are rising. This series of podcasts bring together researchers, policymakers and school leaders from across England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, to reflect on the findings of a three-year study into the sustainability of school leadership. This was a big study funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and had three main strands. We looked at workforce data in all three countries, we did a survey with over 1600 respondents, and we did seven locality case studies talking to over 130 leaders. In this episode, we'll be unpacking how identity shapes school leadership, and with me today is Dr Tom Perry from the research team, and our guests are Gurpall Badesha, who's a deputy head at Crofton school in Hampshire, and she's also currently the Association of School and College Leaders, Vice President

Gurpall Badesha 01:18

In terms of feedback from colleagues, I found some of that quite difficult, because I felt they were asking me to change myself as a person, as opposed to my leadership traits.

Mike Collins 01:29

And Dr Caitlin Donnelly, who's a Reader in Education at Queen's University, Belfast,

Caitlin Donnelly 01:35

The pastoral and the community anchored identity builds the kind of trust, it builds belonging, but at the same time, it increases that emotional weight or emotional responsibility.

Mike Collins 01:49

So Tom, I'll turn to you first. Can you just help us understand why the idea of identity was important in the research and some of the big things that you think came out?

Tom Perry 01:58

Yes, well, we started the research looking at some of the consensus view around leadership, and what you see is a quite general description of good leadership, and what leadership is. You quickly realize, in thinking about identity that there's several things going on. So, we picked out aspects of identity around how people see themselves, their beliefs, their values, their attitudes and kind of who they are as a person. So, this is what Jeff Southworth called the substantial self. But we also see identity as something which is more social, this is often termed situated Identity. Identity is not just something you have yourself. It's something you build; you construct with other people by interacting with them. Through professional socialisation, through working in your community, we also see identity in terms of people's personal characteristics and their histories. And so there are things like people's class, their race, gender, their neurotypicality and so on, which comprises them as a person. So, when we start to unpack it and look at it like that, we see that identity is this big, complicated thing, and it has a huge impact. And if I could just sort of give a couple of concrete examples here of kind of how this turns up. We looked at how we recruit leaders, how we train them, how we retain them, and we're looking across that pipeline. And we looked at how they are looking to lead sustainably, and for their leadership to be sustainable. So, you open up a conversation and say, well how did you get into education? How did you get into leadership? And what comes back in those conversations were just infused with lots of ideas around identity. People say they got into education because their family, because their values, because their culture, their religion, their commitment to the place that they live in. The list goes on and on. They talk about their language, their educational histories, whether they're first to go to university, whether they pass the 11 plus. So, people's reasons for getting to education and getting to leadership are just really bound up with their personal histories and identities. And then, as I say, it just sort of goes through the whole process. When we talk about training, what leads people to aspire to be, what they're trying to develop, every answer we get is full of points about who they are as a person. And then when people make decisions about whether they want to stay in leadership, again, what we hear is a strain on what people imagine themselves to be, and who they see themselves as, and what they're able to realise. That kind of identity strain is a really, really big part we see of whether people hang on to jobs or look to make changes.

Mike Collins 04:31

Brilliant, thanks Tom, that's a really good overview of some of the things that are in the research and the report. So perhaps we can turn to you first Gurrall and ask how have your

own experiences influenced the kind of leader you are today, and the kinds of schools you've chosen to work in?

Gurpall Badesha 04:45

Yeah, I would say picking up on Tom's point about values, that's always been the driving identity that I've brought into my leadership roles. I was one of the first in my family, amongst my siblings, to go to university, so we didn't have the background of parents who had been through the educational system in England. So, for me, it was a really interesting move into leadership, because I wanted to stamp my own identity on what I was doing in schools, but being very conscious that actually when you talk about your community and your different school environments, is really making sure you are moulding yourself to that as well. So, I found some of that a bit of a challenge really, because you have to be willing and able to morph into different types of leaders. And I think when I first started in my leadership roles, I found that very tricky. I was probably more of a fixed mindset leader, but with collaboration around other colleagues and with support from other colleagues and with feedback, I think I morphed very well into understanding my community, understanding the people I work with, and I think that's strengthened me as a leader in my on my journey.

Mike Collins 05:55

Yeah well, that's really interesting. So, you're describing who you became as a leader, has been a bit dependent on where you're actually working in, the school you were working in, and it might have been different, or become something different if you'd worked somewhere else.

Gurpall Badesha 06:11

Yeah, definitely. And I think the bonus of that is that you pick up so many different skills without actually realising it. So, you know, the ability to sit with people at our school, to sit with people in my own school, and to just manage the way that you're dealing with those people. Those leadership skills, I think are so valuable, and I think unrecognised. But I will go back to having really good mentors as well, and I think where I've really developed as a leader is really being confident enough to go to people I trust, people who I know, deliver and keep their authenticity. And that's a word I know people use very often, but it's really important that you are true to yourself. And I'll go back to values then, because actually, your values shouldn't change. They should be constant in working with colleagues.

Mike Collins 07:01

Yeah, I see you nodding away there, Caitlin, any thoughts prompted by that?

Caitlin Donnelly 07:05

Well, yeah. I mean, I think you know, a leader's identity, it's not fixed, but there are core elements to identity for leaders, and they will adapt those in terms of response to their practice.

So I don't think that your identity necessarily changes over time, like your values, but you might adapt it in relation to the context that you find yourself in as a leader.

Tom Perry 07:31

Just picking up on the point about mentors as well, like identity, it might be something we already start with, and it might be something we construct or choose or change, but we have a huge number of stories throughout the research of people looking to the leaders that they've worked with as teachers, or they've looked their kind of immediate superiors or their peers and fed that back to us as a team. And sometimes, I had this head teacher who I just felt was a terrible leader, and I really didn't want to emulate that. And a lot of how I see myself as a leader is now actually in opposition to that other people. It's now I had just such a fantastic mentor, I had a great head teacher I worked with, and I really saw what they did as something I wanted to sort of be myself. And then, of course, there's all the in between of people trying to triangulate out there, there's not just one way of being a leader, or one leadership identity out there. So, people are actively looking for role models and representation of something that they can position themselves as, as well.

Mike Collins 08:33

So, you're touching on there, Tom, some of where we get our ideas of what a leader should be like. One source of that seems to be mentors or people who we see behaving in a way that we want to emulate. So many times, we heard people say things like, I felt like an imposter, that idea of imposter syndrome. And I was interested Gurrall, that you use the words gaining confidence, and one of the things you've mentioned is mentor. I don't know if there are any other ways in which that comes about.

Gurrall Badesha 08:59

Yeah, other people that often work with you do have a fixed mindset about what they want you to be like as a leader, and I think that has its own challenges. So, in my journey, things that other people have picked up about my leadership, I haven't always agreed with, in fact, many times I totally disagreed with them, because they've seen a different style that I've led, which has been equally successful. But there comes a point where you have to sort of reign it back a bit. So, in terms of feedback from colleagues, I found some of that quite difficult, because I felt they were asking me to change myself as a person, as opposed to my leadership traits. And I think they're two different things, and it goes back to think about being authentic to myself. I think in terms of my confidence, I mean, I generally am a confident person, but what I was less mindful of when I started my leadership journey was how other people perceived me. And I mean, the people I work, in a broader sense in any school, that wasn't something that I was really fully aware of. And I think when you start becoming more aware of that, you do start to reflect back and think about, okay, well, perhaps I need to change this or change that. But that was actually quite a difficult, a difficult journey for me.

Mike Collins 10:14

Thanks that Gurpall. And I think what you're reflecting, and Tom you might want to comment on this, is that sense of who you are, and it being challenged in some way is actually one of the things that is really difficult and emotional, and not in a negative way, but something that people have to really work through as they become leaders. So, you're reflecting on your experience. I think it's something that we had a lot of other people talk in those terms.

Tom Perry 10:39

All I'd add is that that just happens at so many levels. There's something about how you want to be perceived, then sort of working their way out. We talked about key relationships. So, you know, the deputy head, they worked really closely with, the person who'd worked with the school for so many years. Some of those key relationships were part of that and moving it out. And especially as you move up leadership, there's a bigger sphere of people around you, and then it's what's the staff think about me. But equally, we had lots of conversations about community and parents and how you're perceived just much more widely. People sometimes spoke really positively about being a visible person who the community sees as being this or being that, or being approachable, or whatever it happens to be. And sometimes they talked about feeling the gaze, you know, the you felt on the show and visible and a little bit out of control about how people were perceiving you, and that was pretty uncomfortable, as well as positive for certain people.

Mike Collins 11:41

Yeah, thanks, Tom. And you raised another point we particularly wanted to ask you, Caitlin actually, was that the research does talk about leaders in Northern Ireland being very community anchored, and they describe themselves often as being strongly pastoral in their leadership. So we got an idea that perhaps head teachers had a slightly different view of their role and themselves in Northern Ireland compared to England and Scotland. And is that something that you recognise from your work?

Caitlin Donnelly 12:10

Yeah, I think it really stood out in the project report, and it really does ring true. I think because I think many schools in Northern Ireland are shaped and defined by an ethos. So, they would lay a claim to particular ethos traditions, and that often comes with long standing community ties, and that, I think, tends to produce a kind of leadership identity that is about relations. So, it's a relational leadership as well as organisational leadership. And so leaders are kind of the custodians of a set of values, and are in charge of the reproduction of those values, for Catholics, for Protestants, and in the integrated sector, which brings Catholic and Protestant children together, you know, the inculcation of values that are aligned to tolerance and respect for difference, not that they're not part of the other school types, but there, I suppose, much

more explicit within the integrated sector. So, we see, then that there's conditions within the schools to create this kind of relationship to the community through the ethos, and that pastoral kind of presence of leaders is recognised very explicitly and I think, legitimised. But picking up then on what Tom said, there's good and bad in that, and there's a nuance to it, because the pastoral and the community anchored identity, it builds a kind of trust, it builds belonging, right? So those are very positive aspects, I think, for leaders. But at the same time, it increases that kind of emotional weight or emotional responsibility of leadership. Leadership, then it has real meaning, but it carries this weight. And I think that that's something that maybe leaders have to struggle with or balance out in their leadership role. And then we have the legacy of the conflict, which brings another dimension to that aspect of relationship with the community. So there's trust, there's inclusion, sensitivity to community histories, all of that is bound up in the leadership in a way that potentially it's not in other jurisdictions of the UK, there's that absolute sensitivity, and that goes for the separate schools, the Catholic, the controlled or Protestant schools, and the integrated sector as well. And it becomes part of the leadership judgment, their understanding of their community is vital as part of their leadership role, I think, and that, again, will emphasise and strengthen, and deepen that pastoral dimension.

Mike Collins 14:55

Wow, that's fascinating. Gurpall, do you recognize any of that that won't be the same, but in England perhaps that leaders have to respond to?

Gurpall Badesha 15:02

Yes, I do, the link to the community which has been referenced is so crucial, I mean, I work in an area which has a lot of service children and lots of service families, so my understanding in terms of my leadership of that is about really getting into understanding the historical and traditional things that happen around my school. In terms of my leadership, that was a learning curve, having been born in London and led in London for a number of years, that would have been relevant. So, I think that, again, the adaptation of understanding community, working with community, and really being the visible person out there that they can connect with is really, really crucial.

Mike Collins 15:39

Great, so one of the points that came up in lots of interviews was people felt that the head as a head teacher, they became very personally identified with the school, or they were seen in that way. So, their individual identity became associated with this sort of collective identity of the school. So, you are always the head teacher wherever you go. I didn't know if you had any reflections on that point.

Caitlin Donnelly 16:02

Yes, I do. I think the locality matters a lot in terms of that notion of visibility. The research shows that in Northern Ireland that shows up really strongly. That idea of the leader is very closely tied to the community, which we talked about, and in very small places, and that would typically maybe be more primary school leadership, but not exclusively. There is a very high personal visibility, and I think that is an asset. It builds up credibility and authority I suppose, so the head teacher is almost not just a leader of a school, but almost seen as a leader of that particular community. People know who you are, what you stand for, and so on, but it has implications for the leader themselves. They carry the school's identity way beyond the school gates, and that can be a burden, I guess. But I think one of the things is as well, is that it can have implications for how change happens, because change will then have to be paced alongside the community, so that you will not want to as a leader upset long standing community relationships, because you're dealing with those you're not working with anonymity. That's where the tension becomes, because you're trying to hold the community together, perhaps whilst also trying to introduce change within the school. And that can make things difficult for you as a leader, makes you open to scrutiny from the community at large, not just the school itself, and maybe that's a bit of a challenge.

Mike Collins 17:48

Yeah, Gurpall I see you nodding away there.

Gurpall Badesha 17:50

Yeah, absolutely agree with everything that's just been said. I think from my reflection, also, it's become more complex post covid, and I think leaders and head teachers have always been part of the community, and really proud about that, but they really had to step up to make sure that we were supporting our young people and families during that time, and I think that legacy has stayed. Those pressures around being part of the community are much higher now without the funding that needs to go with it as well. So, there's that real angst of I do want to help my community, but also you don't have the resources to do that as well.

Mike Collins 18:25

Both of you, I think, at different times, have mentioned the word weight there. There's a sense that both having a particular identity is in itself a kind of weighty, burden something, although it might be very fulfilling as well. But Gurpall you've also, at different points mentioned how challenges to how you see yourself and what other people expect of you is also kind of a challenging, emotional thing. So, I was just going to ask both of you really now to talk about how you see those sorts of things influencing people's career decisions and sustainability really, of being a leader, given those kind of that changing identity and the weight of expectation sometimes on people.

Gurpall Badesha 19:06

Yeah, I mean, it is just immense, and that part of it, the sort of mental work that you have to do, and the weight of that responsibility and accountability, I don't think you can teach people that you almost have to be in it to understand it, but it also can act, for me very much a drive of adrenaline, you know. And I'm not going to let them win. I'm not going to let them grind me into the ground, sort of, you know, mindset. And I think more and more leaders need to have that resilience, but it is really, really difficult in this current climate and the number of things that schools are meant to be leading on and supporting youngsters with and parents with. For me, it's not sustainable for schools to be expected to do that and ASCOLA has done some really interesting work around what are schools actually here for? You know, and covid obviously meant we had to pick up a lot more responsibilities in terms of pastoral care outside of the school gates. But that kind of has stayed with us, that mental resilience is absolutely crucial, and that, for me, is the hardest thing, coming back each day, renewed, energised, but great leaders do it, and they do it every day, and it's a skill you learn on the job, I think.

Caitlin Donnelly 20:19

I think identity can influence, you know, your career, your decision whether to stay or to leave or step back or move on. And I think you know leaders grow into the role, as Gurrall has said, you know they grow in their role through experience, responsibility, you know, feedback from colleagues, all of that and that moral commitment. And I think pressure and workload is well cited as a factor in sustainable leadership. And I think that comes through really clearly, obviously in the report and in other research. But identity is important here, because it shapes then the prism through which leaders will interpret that pressure and workload? Many heads in some of the work we have done show that they step back so they step out of the role of head, not because they've stopped caring, but because they still care and feel they can no longer contribute in the way they think the school deserves. And I think that throws up some interest and points about identity of leadership, because that idea of not wanting to let the school down because they can no longer give what they used to be able to give, or what they think the school deserves, is an ethical decision rooted in identity as leader. And as much as it's maybe driven by overwhelm and stress, and pressure and all of that, it's also, I think, going back to that notion of moral stewardship, you know you are in charge of the morality, you know, you have that kind of sense of morality, and so it's not seen maybe, as failure, it's seen as it's a moral decision, it's an ethical decision to step back. That's one of the reasons, sometimes that sense of identity is important, and it adds a layer of nuance to it.

Mike Collins 22:20

Yeah, thanks Caitlin, that's really fascinating. So, you seem to be saying that we hear people talk about burnout or overload, but you are saying that's not just about workload, it's not just about there being too much to do. There's this strain on the identity or the moral pressure, which is part of that equation as well. It's not just about workload, there's something else going on, that's really interesting. Tom?

Mike Collins 22:41

Thanks Tom. That's been really interesting discussion, and I'm thinking back also Gurpall, to you describing yourself going through some of those processes, but you're still there, and you're saying, but I'm still here. And in some ways, it's the working through that which has given you real energy to carry on. So, we recognise that sometimes the strain is too much, and that's a worry, that's a challenge to sustaining leadership, isn't it? Looking back perhaps people coming through, what sort of support or advice might we give them? Thinking about building a positive identity and helping them sustain themselves.

Tom Perry 22:41

Yeah, directly on this identity and strain point, I'm looking at a couple of voices of leaders here that we have in our reports, and you see the identity infused in this as a dilemma. So, there's one I'm reading here which someone says, I've always been a healthy, high performing person, but then they say, well, but the stress at the times. It just takes such a toll; it's been more stressful. And describing how actually there's this self-image of this high performing, healthy person struggling. And one other example would be that, again, this is a different school leader, this is a primary head from England who says, I would have always described myself as super resilient. And again, there's something in that I'm a resilient person, I can be the person who bears this. And then you see the rest of the comment is about, actually, it's affecting my mental health, this is really bearing down, and people are wrestling with that kind of stuff. And it's kind of Caitlin says there some of that it's about a felt responsibility, and the relationship with the community, that you're the person people need, or people come to, and you end up with school leaders finding what their community needs of them and what they need themselves, sometimes being at odds or just impossible to reconcile. And I think that lies at the heart of it, this kind of who am I and what do people need me to be challenge and the kind of how does what I'm experiencing relate to my identity? It's just across the board of who we are as human beings and as educators. So obvious example of this is a lot of head teachers see themselves very much as a lead educator. They feel where their main expertise lies is in teaching, learning and curriculum. And then we know from the research that actually, while it's important, it's often pushed to the sides of a lot of leadership roles. And then again, here's that strain people say, my real expertise is doing this, it's not managing buildings, and it's not dealing with the politics of whatever, it's in teaching and learning, and I'm feeling that's being marginalised, and that creates a real problem for who they see themselves, what they have to contribute, and what they find themselves doing. And they say the example goes on that if you just flesh out, who are we? What do we offer? What's our expertise? What do we aspire to see? How do we want people to see us? And then leaders finding that the reality is different to that, and that's a really painful process, one which sometimes people can work through, and other times people just can't find a way to get an answer to that, and they find

themselves moving school, and they sometimes find themselves leaving the workforce altogether, partly because of that.

Gurpall Badesha 25:53

Yeah, I think one of the things I would say is, and it is, a real learning curve when you move into leadership, particularly more senior leadership, is that balance between strategy and operation. And I think where I've worked with colleagues who are probably more focused on the operational side of things and the strategy, I think that's when the strain comes in, because at the end of the day, you are the strategist, and you've got to lead the school, and you've got to show that leadership strategically. And if you are spending all of your time doing operational things, and sometimes you have to, you know, because that's, that's the job. But I think that balance there is really difficult to achieve. I would say the other thing is bearing in mind that senior leaders will also be struggling with mental health as well, and some middle leaders will as well. So it's understanding each other's roles in terms of moving schools and improving schools, and it's really about collegiate working and holding people to account in the nicest way that you possibly can, which is, goes back to values. I think, you know, it goes back to being that authentic person with those real core values, who will manage the strategy and manage the operation. But you have to be shown how to do it, you don't just pick things up like that overnight. A lot of it is around the reading, a lot around working with really good other leaders, particularly from outside your own establishments. And I think if I'd say one thing that has really supported my leadership is being much more outgoing and working with people across the whole country. There's no better CPD than that, as far as I'm concerned.

Caitlin Donnelly 27:34

I mean, I think your values obviously will be at the core, as Gurpall has said, in terms of sustaining. In Northern Ireland, and I think we spoke about this earlier, and some of the work I've done as well will show that there's a very strong sense of vocation to the teaching profession, and that's why people enter it. And I think that that can be great in terms of sustainability, it gives people that sense of purpose, beyond the material benefits, if there are any anymore, in being a leader. It's about the relationship, the community connectedness, all of those things sustain leaders. But I think there's a downside to that, because I think that in sustaining leaders in those ways, it can also make it easier for the leaders to absorb the pressure that they're under without questioning that pressure. And so that morality that we've spoken about before, and it's like a call to the teaching profession. We don't hear that so much anymore, but I think it is still there to some extent, and it's a reason to keep going, even when the load is almost unbearable, and it maybe stops leaders acting to challenge the system in a way that they might otherwise do, because they've got these sustaining elements, if that makes sense?

Mike Collins 29:01

Yeah, it does.

Tom Perry 29:02

Just one thing we haven't quite brought out, I think here is that even at the really big picture of the research, when we're looking at the workforce data, we're looking at some of the big trends from the survey, you're seeing some just massive things jump out at you. Essentially, we see huge differences about how leadership is conducted and experienced by age, by gender, by ethnicity. We're seeing some really concerning and long-standing gaps in representation. Full details of the statistics of this in the report, but the message is really, really clear as you move up leadership, representation of women and ethnic minorities falls. It's really, really consistent. There's been small amounts of progress, but really not so much. And this is a kind of long-standing issue. And as I say, sitting around some of these big picture differences, we do notice differences in what people tell us, there are differences about what people say about why they want to go for leadership. Just a quick example of this would be that when you speak to men and women about why they're likely to go for leadership, and I should add, it's not a black and white thing, where all men are this or all women are that, but there is a tendency in there for men to stress having more authority, more progression and the pay, and women to stress the ability to work with teams and collaboration and the educational impact of moving up in leadership. We see differences in who ends up in a leadership role. We had a lot of school leaders who actually didn't plan to be leaders. They found themselves accidental leaders we've called them, where they're in a deputy head position, suddenly, they find themselves the next in line and in the leadership position. And we have others who wanted to be a school leader and they wanted to be a head teacher from day one of their career. And again, there's gender differences within what we see there. We've obviously had a huge number of conversations with leaders from lots of different backgrounds, and they describe some of the challenges, and I think some of the stuff about whose face fits from their perspective, am I a leader? Do I feel like a leader? Do other people see me as a leader? They go right through those differences there, and it's hard to know quite what to pull out of this, but this is a long standing and very stark set of differences that we're seeing in the research here.

Mike Collins 31:25

Yeah, thanks Tom. I'll come to you first Gurrall if I may.

Gurrall Badesha 31:29

I mean fitting in two categories of being a woman and from an ethnic minority group. It's others perception of what good leadership looks like, because if you think about the people that are recruiting or making the decisions for particularly head teachers as an example, many governing bodies will be white people. So, you know, people can only see what they can see. All the research is showing that actually the number of ethnic minority groups signing up to ITT and to teacher training is actually in line with other groups of people, but they are not

progressing once they get to middle leadership, etc. So, it's not a surprise, but it is frustrating. And I think it goes back to that thing about, why do you want to be a leader? Certainly, from my point of view, it's totally in line with the research in terms of, I want education to be better for young people. What impact I can have in my school, through our school, whatever it might be, it's never been about the badge and the title and all the rest of that. So, whether I fit into that mould of women, I may well do, but that's my values, and that's what I believe in,

Caitlin Donnelly 32:38

Quite similar to Gurrall, one of the things that struck me was the lack of leadership from ethnic minority groups in Northern Ireland. I mean, there are so few that probably wouldn't even show up on a you know, statistics, but that is a gap, and it's a problem, because our society is becoming more racially diverse. So, we've talked a lot about Northern Ireland leaders being maybe custodians of their, you know, the values in the community and so on. But what that made me think that evidence of very few ethnic minority groups in leadership positions is who is our community now, you know, in the past in Northern Ireland, our community was the Catholic, the Protestant community. Now it's become so diverse that when we think of leaders being connected to the community, what values are those leaders in charge of? What values are they perpetuating? And I think that there is maybe a danger at the minute in Northern Ireland that we are very conservative, that we are perpetuating a value system that's more akin to what Northern Ireland was like about 25 years ago, and doesn't take account of, yeah, albeit quite small compared to the rest of the UK in terms of diversity. But it's a growing level of diversity in our school system is not really capturing that in terms of the teaching profession in general, but leaders in particular. And I think it is a challenge. It's something that we have to consider.

Mike Collins 34:13

Thank you. So some really meaty questions to continue to think about and work on. I think we've just about come to the end. Tom, do you want to have the last word?

Tom Perry 34:23

Oh, this is too much pressure for the last word, but Caitlin just framed it very well. There's a big discrepancy between our communities, between children, teachers, leaders. When you look across those, we can't claim to have a leadership workforce, which is representative of the communities that they serve. And I think that's, yeah, that's a huge thing for us to be paying attention to, and just not to leave all on problems. If I could add that, there's definitely something around the point of recruitment, but I think there's overconfidence that a blinded approach to recruitment solves things because we see it goes right the way through in terms of people's opportunities to act up and get different forms of experience. It's right through the pipeline that we lose people. So, it really is about people's developing experience of being a leadership and how they interact with themselves as a person. Even if there are critical points

around recruitment that we could pay close attention to which that's where I think we'd be looking to address some of this. If this is a useful closing thought for a identity podcast, just the absolute centrality of who people are, how people are seen, and how that shapes us all the way throughout our careers, and what that ends up looking like when we get to the point of what leaders do we have now and where do we want to go in future.

Mike Collins 35:43

That was a really rich, interesting conversation. Thank you everybody. Gurrall really brought out for us how our identity as a leader can change over a career, and some of the experiences and mentors that have been a support to her. Caitlin really highlighted how the weight and strain of leadership isn't just about workload, thinking about identity really helps us understand why the emotional strain can be so challenging. If you want to read more about what the research says and about those issues, then go to our website, sustainableschoolleadership.uk, we'd really love to hear your views. So if you want to get in touch, you can get in touch with us through the website. This episode was presented by myself, Dr Mike Collins. The producer was Alex Canner, and this has been a Research Podcasts production.