

# School Leadership in the Wake of RTE Act 2009: Mapping Changes and Challenges

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## Abstract

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*With changes on two fronts: the social matrix and developments in the education sector, the present era demands a major transformation in the role of School Leaders. The societal awareness levels, change in inter-personal relationships, influx of crime and anti social activities, rise and fall of financial support, demand for removal of social injustice in education and otherwise, students unrest, violence, sex abuse and drug abuse – all such factors lay impact on the ways schools ought to be managed. Within the education domain, the recent act, The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 legitimising the right of each child to have access to good quality education; new education policies and Programme of Action; curriculum changes, global to local; multi language and multi cultural student population; accountability demands and new generation of teachers; teacher power through associations and unions; need for developing linkages with parallel structures, community, NGOs and civil society call for greater transition on the role of School Principals, especially when they have been following conventional management practices and classroom transaction but with a slight change in the curriculum (National Curriculum Framework, 2005). Managing this transition calls for the need to adapt decentralised approach in education system. The paper asserts that School Leaders are of crucial importance for continued improvement of schools provided onus of taking decisions for schools should lie with them. Empowering our School Leaders who can take school-based decisions (may not include financial autonomy) necessitates vital decisions at the policy level. In this context, the paper will discuss about what policy decisions needs to be taken up in a hierarchical and bureaucratic model and in what areas capacity building exercises will help in sustaining leadership to meet the demands emerging from social and educational scenario.*

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### **Introduction**

India has achieved major milestones in the educational scene and societal expectations for the past 10-15 years. The flagship programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the international level Dakar Declaration on Education For All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and recently Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan became instrumental in creating an array of educational institutions and access of social groups to schools under different managements. The massive social mobilisation drive under the auspices of the National Literacy Mission, consequently led to significantly reshaping education by increasing the demand for education. The impact of societal changes could be on schools through several initiatives like early childhood education, multi language and multi cultural student populations, emphasis upon rights of students, new generation of teachers, teacher power through associations and unions, community in an adversary role, rise and fall of financial support, economic and pragmatic accountability demands, educational technology including computers, audio-videos etc, demand for social justice in education, student unrest, drug abuse. These changes placed larger implications on the role of school Principals who were caught up in making schools receptive to the demands and expectations of more conscious society.

### **The Era of Change: Challenges for School Leaders**

On the recommendations of Education Commission (1964-66), NPE (1968), NPE

(1986) and further revised policy in 1992 supported adoption of Common School System in the country to promote social cohesion and national integration. It was emphasised that efforts should be made to improve the standard of education in general schools. All special schools like public schools should be required to admit students on the basis of merit and also to provide a *prescribed* proportion of free-studentships to prevent segregation of social classes. In the present changing scenario where move to decentralisation has begun in the school sector, still Common System seems to be utopia. In spite of policy decisions, the schools are still governed by the same rules and old conventional styles, without understanding that all schools can not be the same. Several challenges have largely remained unchanged but expectations on School Heads have undergone radical change.

### **Hierarchical Schools and Divisions in Social Groups**

The phenomenal growth of the total number of schools have led to proliferation of a range of schools, which in turn led to widening class distinctions in the country. This segregation is increasing and tending to widen the gulf between the classes and the masses. Reviewing the experiences of SC and ST community children in the school system, Ramachandran (2004: 27) stated, "The process of increased universalisation is accompanied by growing segregation by class, caste and gender".

The elite, middle and higher income groups access exorbitantly high fee charging *quality institutions*. Almost top

ten percent middle class parents *make great sacrifices* to send their children to schools beyond their means. The Heads of these schools face constant pressure of providing higher quality education from other parallel structures emerging as a result of privatisation. The competition forces them to upgrade curriculum to bring their children at par with International Baccalaureate schools.

The middle income groups have access to private-aided and government-aided schools English-Language schools. These schools are mushrooming in several locations but with quality in question. The teachers in most of such schools are under qualified and untrained and facilities of laboratories are limited. Managing curriculum and classroom teaching and processes within the framework of National Curriculum Framework, 2005 of NCERT becomes a major challenge for Leaders including Principals in these schools.

And on the bottom rung is poorly managed local body, government or municipal schools, which cater to children of the poor. The low income groups send their children to these schools but are at risk of constant dropping out without completing full primary school cycle with high incidence of failure and low transition from one stage to another. The incidence of silent exclusion is high among first generation learners, orphans, child-labourers, street children and victims of riots and natural disasters. Bringing such children to school and retaining them through completion of the primary school cycle continues to be the challenge facing School Heads.

### **Quality and Sustainability of Under-resourced Schools**

Small-sized schools with enrolment less than 50 and even 25 managed by a single or two teachers and single classroom schools in multigrade settings are posing threat to quality issues in schools. The challenges for the teachers who are also Head Teachers in these schools are much higher in rural areas where schools become non functional on most of the days in an academic year. To a great extent, an increase in single-room and single-teacher schools which invariably have inadequate physical and academic infrastructures (see Blum and Diwan, 2007) are having serious implications on managerial roles of School Heads, who are mostly found combating with the absence of basic inputs like teaching-learning materials even textbooks, low learning and achievement levels, shabby classrooms, poorly functioning schools, high teacher absenteeism, inadequate funds, limited facilities, and absence of need-based teacher training etc . School Heads are also caught up in situations where management of mid day meals, livelihood and health guarantees to level out the initial disadvantages of the poor in the educational sphere stemming from malnourishment, poverty, and health-related debility. School Heads are confronted with day to day struggle accruing from strong political interferences resulting in teacher transfer and teacher absences. *Poor schools for the Poor* adds to the creation of demotivated human resources, placing Head Teachers in cross roads.

EGS Centres or alternative schools, another form of small-sized schools

function as transitory facilities until they can be replaced by formal government primary schools. The centres are opened in habitations with at least 25 out-of-school children in the 6-14 age group (or the 6-15 age group in case of hilly, desert and tribal hamlets). The guruji or teachers or instructors in such centres are recruited by local self-government bodies and are managed locally. Local politics reigns supreme in such small schools. Teachers, who are themselves products of the poor education system, are often seen as obstacles to educational change rather than as key human resources. The attempt to build ordinary schools into quality institutions puts School Heads on treadmill particularly in rural areas.

#### **Fragmented Policy on Teacher Appointment and Curriculum Transaction**

The appointment of *Shiksha Karmis* as policy in locations where regular teachers are reluctant to go, such as tribal or backward villages and other deprived areas is posing another challenge for School Heads. These para teachers appointed on contract basis tend to be used as low-cost substitutes for non-performing teachers, often managing the entire school on their own. This policy is often supported by regular teachers who, as a result, are more likely to be posted to more attractive areas. This results in deprived children being taught by poorly-qualified, low paid *Shiksha Karmis*, while those from more privileged families are more likely to be taught by a fully qualified teacher (PROBE, 1999). Regular school teachers are not necessarily better than contract

teachers. Problems relating to classroom processes, pedagogic techniques, classroom management and other constraints affect the schools especially when para teachers, the most demotivated class begun to demand confirmation after they put in reasonable period of time. Ramachandran et al (2005) in their study on teacher motivation, for example, found that the teachers are 'forced' to teach children of poor communities and specific social groups who are 'dirty' (which seems to reflect a class/social bias in teachers). A school without adequate numbers of teachers is non-functional, but a school which has an adequate number of teachers who are neither empowered nor motivated with low morale and self-esteem, are likely to do more damage than good to students (Nawani, 2008). The implications on the role of School Heads in such daunting situations are a matter of concern.

Some states have chalked out state curriculum within the framework of NCF 2005 but School Heads are grappling with the issue pertaining to policy decision on appointment of teachers, their preparedness to face the challenge in the absence of need-based professional and capacity building programmes and preparation of text books.

#### **Demand for Right To Education**

The recent *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009* legitimising the right of each child to have access to good quality education is a major breakthrough in school education. The act proposes:

- Special provisions for children not admitted to, or who have not completed elementary education.
- As per norms and standards for a school (Section 19).
  - Grades 1 to V, the schools have been assumed to be having teachers not less than two for different enrolment classifications.
  - Grades VI – VIII at least one teacher per class for each subject – Science and Mathematics, Social Studies and Languages. Provision of at least one teacher for every thirty five students and one full time additional head teacher where admission of children is above hundred.
- Constructing
  - All weather building consisting of one classroom for every teacher and an office-cum-store-cum-Head Teacher's room
  - Barrier-free access
  - Separate toilets for boys and girls
  - Kitchen where mid-day- meal is cooked in the school
  - Playground
  - Boundary wall or fence, for securing the school building.
- Teaching Learning Equipments shall be provided to each class as required.
- Play material, games and sports equipments shall be provided to each class as required.

Clause 19 (2) of this Act talks of the schools established before the commencement of the Act does not fulfill the norms and standards specified in the schedule, it shall take steps to fulfill such norms and standards at its own expenses, *within a period of three years*

*from the date of such commencement.* The implication on centre-state financial share is being worked out with complete details on the requirements of human and physical resources in schools. Implementation will entail greater planning of School Heads as per the requirements and priorities of each school. The exercise eventually is expected to put additional responsibility on the School Head in managing the resources as they will be confronted with new administrative and financial matters. This will call for autonomy and freedom coupled with newer responsibilities and expectations.

The Act mentions about School Development Plans, the ultimate goal with more focus on certain areas of school management like physical facilities, teacher training, inspection of schools, monitoring follow up etc., placing larger implications on school-based decisions for improvement. There will be a need for better equipped School Heads to address challenges on several grounds in the management of schools. The schools need to be recognised as *matter of heart and School Head as the key driver of change.* Empowering School heads will necessarily require support and guidance of key level decision-making authorities.

#### **Addressing Change: Need to Empower School Leaders**

In view of the likely emergence of changes in management systems NPE (1986) strongly recommended decentralisation and the creation of a spirit of autonomy for educational institutions. The proactive manner in which the Government of India has acted

following the adoption of the National Policy on Education 1986 stands out as a landmark innovation in educational policy. The resultant factor came to view with different innovative reforms coming up in the country and decentralised planning being one of them. Adoption of decentralisation in most of the states impels shift from 'state' as a unit of planning to 'districts' as the lowest unit for planning and management for basic education programme. This includes increased community involvement in implementation and monitoring of education programmes; and participation of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local bodies in planning and management of education. There has been also a mention of institutional planning followed to some extent in very few districts but somehow freedom to schools for teacher selection or public examination or financial matters is yet to be seen in Indian schools. Decentralisation and community empowerment continue to be rhetoric to consider the role of the School Head in school management as critical; the ground reality is altogether different. The Indian schools functioning under separate managements share common centrally-dictated core issues like curriculum, structured instruction, and board examinations etc. which are uniform for all schools. There may be few exceptions but on the whole the place of the government School Head is invariably at the lowest rung in the official hierarchy, and commands practically no authority even within the school. An emerging factor that is likely to change social perceptions about School Head in a significant manner is

the move to empower them to take decisions for the betterment of the school they belong to. It has now come to realise that until people who actually belong to the system are involved in decision-making, no improvement can take place. The school-based management in Australia, Canada, Singapore, USA, UK's 'Local Management of Schools' and 'Grant Maintained Schools' on the practices of School-Based Management, Hong Kong's "The School Management Initiative", New Zealand's "Tomorrow's Schools and Charter Schools" have shown that School-based management and initiatives have enhanced accountability and commitment among school practitioners including heads as they begin to own the school and their relentless efforts improve their status within the system. In most of the developing and developed countries where SBM has been adopted in one or the other form, the extent of practice followed *in the real sense* is still not determined. As per the estimation of 14 countries, Meuret and Scheerens (1995) revealed that the proportion of decisions taken at the School Level is Ireland and New Zealand practices greater than 70%, Sweden 48%, Australia, Denmark, Finland and Portugal 38 to 41%; Belgium, France, Germany, Norway, Spain and United States, 25 to 30% and Switzerland 10%. In the Seminar on Management of Schools by Head Teachers at Shanghai, China (2000), an exercise to chalk out modalities for making SBM successful in Asian countries was done. It was brought recommended that success of SBM largely depended on the following factors:

- The characteristics of effective school principals and conditions in which they can play a leadership role.
- The roles and responsibilities of the other members of the school senior staff in an effective school.
- The different tasks of headteachers and the ways in which they and other senior staff reconcile administrative with pedagogic duties.
- The potential of institutional planning to improve school functioning (through school development plans and school self-evaluation programmes).
- Role played by external supervision and support services to improve school management by principals.
- Innovative strategies that have succeeded in mobilising and organising community support.
- The way the headteachers use information and data to improve the management of their school.

The roles and responsibilities of School Heads in contemporary times is quite different from traditionally organised schools. The School Heads have become prime movers in designing and implementing development plans bringing school-based improvement programmes dependent on personal initiatives and strong interpersonal relations with teachers, children, parents, community members, the departmental authorities, civil society, NGOs and private service providers.

#### **Preparation for Newer Responsibilities**

Since the School Head forms an integral part of the system, designing a complete

programme of action for schools within the decentralised framework will help in chalking out a roadmap for adapting the complete package. The entire exercise entails core competencies required to be developed, roles and responsibilities to be redefined and kind of training and capacity building to be identified.

#### **Collection of Base-line data for School Development Plans**

The beginning needs to be made by understanding the individual school by following a set of cardinal steps like diagnosis of problems, identification of particular needs, assessment of the limitations and resources. Based on such an assessment, school-based priorities, goals, standards and even targets can be maintained in the following areas:

- Enrolment, attendance, retention and participation of students in school affairs.
- School environment to make it more child “friendly” and welcoming to their parents.
- Levels of student achievement in internal and external examinations;
- Academic, and infrastructure facilities in the school.
- Student discipline and health status.
- The special needs of disadvantaged, marginal, and hard to reach segments of student population such as girls and children with physical and mental disabilities.

Based on base line assessment, a school’s development plan can be prepared with active participation of School Management Committee under the leadership of School Head in the light of clause 22 (1) and (2) in RTE 2009.

### **Identifying Core Competencies**

Viewing school in a decentralised framework vested with autonomy and freedom to enjoy power with authority, the competencies expected of personnel at every level needs to be revisited and examined from three angles: (i) Changing behavioural orientations. (ii) Restructuring curriculum, instructional practices, classroom transactions, modalities etc. (iii) Assessment, monitoring and evaluation of educational programmes. An illustrative list of such competencies could be as follows:

- Creating an environment in which all policy makers, decision making authorities, Education Officers, BRCs, CRCs, practitioners are able to articulate a vision of their individual schools, describe characteristics of each and cause the conditions that promote each of them.
- Redefining roles and responsibilities of all personnel functioning at every level of school management.
- Goal Setting – Stating explicit goals for quality improvement.
- Exceeding to Clientele needs as per their mental- physical level, living conditions, and facilities at home and within the available resources in the school.
- Locking the schools in the cycle of continuous improvement in instruction and curriculum.
- Use system thinking to continuously improve performance within a school.
- SWOT analysis of all decisions taken at every level.
- Using a standard- based accountability system to drive

curriculum and instruction and measure student progress for creating a sense of belongingness and ownership among staff.

- Leadership beyond Administration.
- Professional Development of Human Resources.
- Promoting research by practitioners.
- Shaping a culture in which norms, values and beliefs that manifest powerful learning.

### **Redefining Roles and Responsibilities**

According to the growing body of implementation research, the major impact of autonomy is that the roles of all educational stakeholders- Decision and policy makers Education Secretaries, Commissioners; State and district level Education Officers, other central office personnel, Block Resource Coordinators and Cluster Resource Coordinators and at the institutional levels, principals, teachers and often parents, community members and students—are profoundly affected.

#### **At Policy Formulation Level**

- Allow greater flexibility in the areas of budget and personnel.
- Offer direction for curriculum and instruction reform.
- Allocate funds for professional development and training at district and institutional levels.
- Invest in building a district-wide computer network.
- Encourage experimentation and innovations.

#### **At the State Level**

- Monitoring and Supervision of schools in ensuring quality for



improving teaching processes and learning achievements.

- Auditing of the school finances.
- Authorising certain allocations of a given amount of money to achieve targeted outputs.
- Supervising and assisting in necessary technical aspects in relation to infrastructure, laboratories etc.

#### **At the district level**

- Teacher transfers.
- Administrative work in the capacity of approving extensions of teachers after 58-60 years of age.
- Dealing with the retirement formalities of teachers or disciplinary scrutiny.

#### **At the block level**

- Teachers salaries.
- Recommendations on extensions of temporary/ para teachers or teachers after retirement.
- Disciplinary inquiry of the schools on the request of District Education Officers and other personnel functioning at the district level.
- Teacher transfers and other administrative tasks for which schools need their help or when approached by district officers for special tasks concerning finances/ accounts related to a particular school.

#### **At the Institution level**

##### **For School Heads**

- Developing vision for the school: crucial role of school Heads in managing an autonomous school.

- Looking autonomous schools in the futuristic perspective.

- To help in playing multi faceted roles as : facilitator, strategic planner, instructional leader, the key player in developing and sustaining school climate, a developer of future school leaders, aligning resources and outcomes.

- Ensuring equality and quality of education.

- Planning, organising, implementing and executing tasks expected of them as per the new policy on school autonomy : academic, personnel and financial.

- Academic functions in the light of admission of students, curriculum planning and management, instructional modalities, organisation of co curricular activities, examination and evaluation etc.

- Personnel functions in the light of personnel records, staff development, staff welfare, dealing with teachers' association/union, job allocation and management, conducting staff meetings, staff selection etc.

- Financial functions in the light of budgeting, Mobilisation of Resources, Resource Utilisation, Maintenance of Accounts, Monitoring etc.

#### **For School Teachers**

- Ensuring commitment and accountability towards teaching profession.

- Assuring quality that could begin from a small dimension of classroom

transaction and move onward for total quality improvement programme.

- Enhance and exhibit creativity.
- Being innovative and develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values.
- Change the pedagogical role and act as a facilitator for students not as a subject specialist but as a counselor on whom children can fall back upon when faced with syndrome arising from emotional disturbances.

### **Training Areas**

Professional development needs to be continuous and school-based. Districts need to present clear guidelines over decentralisation of powers and decision making over budget, staffing and curriculum and school heads simultaneously need to be equipped to be able to lead and share power and responsibility. In order to facilitate them to deliver their tasks in the most efficient manner, the areas that require training, needs to be clearly identified.

### **State and District Personnel**

- Develop a clear design for academic standards and aligned assessments of student performance.
- Sustained investments in strategies for school improvement.
- A public outreach strategy that engages schools, students and community.
- District offices need to get involved with schools to assess personnel needs; at funding not only the allocation but also how those funds are being used; and at instructional

materials and facilities. They need a specialised training in assessment, monitoring and evaluation issues.

- Development of a coherent system of instructional guidance at the state level includes such elements as curriculum framework, instructional materials, professional development activities and assessments. The state personnel need to be equipped in providing concrete tools for teachers, schools and districts to use as resources as they construct their curriculum design, instructional strategies, promote professional development and evaluation progress.
- States and districts need to work collaboratively with high schools and higher education departments to help build a qualified teaching force where teachers find themselves committed to continuing professional development. This needs structural changes to gain control of chaotic learning environment. This requires specialised training for education personnel at state and district levels.
- Local policy makers help to offer training principals acquire skills necessary to support a positive learning environment.
- Partnership and coordination with teacher unions is another component that needs to be taken care of. Strategies can be developed to involve colleges and universities to help create curricula and resource persons at districts levels or from other training institutes.

Districts can use information from teacher union representatives active on the review and intervention teams that evaluate schools and mandate corrective actions to improve teaching and learning in routine schools and not so good functioning schools.

- Developing strong database for providing continuous capacity building is an area where districts can help schools to set stage for change. Schools definitely require extensive help from district staff in interpreting and using assessment data. District personnel need training to help schools pursue data-driven improvements in the framework adopted by successful schools.
- Providing information and training to schools through clear guidelines about the following:
  - the role of school and extent to their authority;
  - content knowledge about student and overall school performance, policies, programmes, budgets, facilities, local and state regulations and other areas in which they will be expected to make or influence decisions; and
  - skill training in-group process, such as problem solving, decision-making, conflict resolutions etc.

### **School Heads**

Capacity building for key areas of decision-making first calls for identification of areas where interventions of school heads are essential for managing autonomy in Schools. This could center around the

Empirical studies on Nicaragua which identifies the following areas:

- Salaries and Incentives.
  - Setting salaries
  - Establishing incentives for teachers
- Maintenance and Infrastructure.
  - Maintaining the school
  - Developing infrastructure projects
- Personnel Planning and Preparing. School Budget.
  - Hiring and Firing Teachers
  - Setting goal for the school
  - Hiring and Firing administrative personnel
- Classroom and Pedagogy.
  - Selecting textbooks
  - Providing textbooks
  - Distributing textbooks
  - Informing community about school activities
  - Determining class size
  - Accrediting new schools
  - Designing the curriculum
  - Defining the educational plans and programmes
  - Relations with teachers' union
  - Pedagogical supervision and evaluation
- Teacher Supervision and Evaluation.
  - Determining school hours
  - Evaluating teachers
  - Setting the school calendar
  - Supervising teachers
- Training Teachers.
- School Administration.
- Training in vision, the leadership and the cohesiveness and working together involving community and parents, developing support with staff, respect for parents. These although seem quite theoretical but

these do not always happen. Special skill based training on behavioural management needs to be incorporated.

- Training for effective utilisation of leisure activities for secondary school children. At this stage, children tend to trap themselves in anti social activity.
- Training for management of finances and funds is a major focus. Decisions about resource mobilisation and allocation require tough choices. Creating a true focus on learning in a school may cost jobs and major shifts in financial resources. Principals need to pay attention to how they allocate staff, budget, material and space. School autonomy require judicious decisions on additional resources on para professionals, rich teaching-learning materials and resource persons to support a school's instructional focus.
- In order to equip schools take over the "consumer approach" looking for ways to improve so that parents and children would find it attractive is a critical area where head needs training to make school move from instruction based on remediation to accelerated learning of all students, developing innovative programs that come from team planning, problem solving based on data and a process of continuous learning through professional development.
- School autonomy requires strategic planning that include setting the direction for the school, formation of partnership agreements, work force

plans and preparation of schools annual operational plan and annual report. The school principal responsibility for staff management and supervision as well as daily functioning of the school needs professional training in this important aspect. It is the school head who can then become instrumental in building communication of learners where principal, teachers and parents become learners along with their students.

#### **Teachers**

- A professional development programme that helps teachers to improve classroom practices and student achievement.
- Teachers' professional development is instrumental in enhancing student performance. This calls for equipping them to assume responsibility as well as power to take initiative in school improvement under school autonomy.
- Sharpening teacher clarity about instructional purpose and method and in the end to increased instructional effectiveness leading to considerable improvement in student performance.
- The process of establishing a common vision can be a capacity building endeavour. This requires specialised skills as it fosters partnership of school with various stakeholders that can serve to increase resources available for the reform efforts. Generating a unifying vision can be an intense learning experience for teachers and others

that form an integral part of the school tasks and has to be emphasised as important themes in all training programmes of the training institute.

- A close examination needs to be done of the experiences of best practicing SBM schools about the capacity building of their staff to target SBM energies towards school restructuring. An example from Canada can be adapted. Some of the best functioning SBM schools offered stories of cross-role training where teachers of similar positions have been trained together, they were sharing information across classrooms and their working as teaching teams. Then on the job training for instructional guidance through focused interactions served as resource to school, providing a direction for school-based change. Such schools had been active in establishing strong ties with organisations and associates outside the school for professional development and information sharing

### **Conclusion**

The efficiency of a school is determined by the strength of a school to meet expectations of people it caters to. On the one hand, elite social class has their

own expectations towards schools and on the other the ignorant in rural settings and unauthorised and slum cluster inhabitants in urban surroundings have their own specific demands. It has become quite challenging for the head of a school to maintain equilibrium between knowledge society and ignorant classes on the one hand and practical problems in implementation of programmes for reform efforts on the other. Many schools placed in similar situations appear to have tackled these problems effectively by galvanising the single instrument in hand, that is gearing the internal management of school by empowering School Head to take decisions for their schools. Now since the country is moving towards decentralised school governance, this could not have happened at school level alone, but would require streamlining the involvement of policy decision makers at state, district, block and cluster levels. This necessitates stimulating conditions that foster the School Head to take charge of the school through redefined roles and responsibilities coupled with well designed training programmes of all the personnel functioning in hierarchal positions. Finally, school-based improvement largely hinges on the effectiveness of the School Principal – his or her vision, human relations and professional competence and confidence.

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