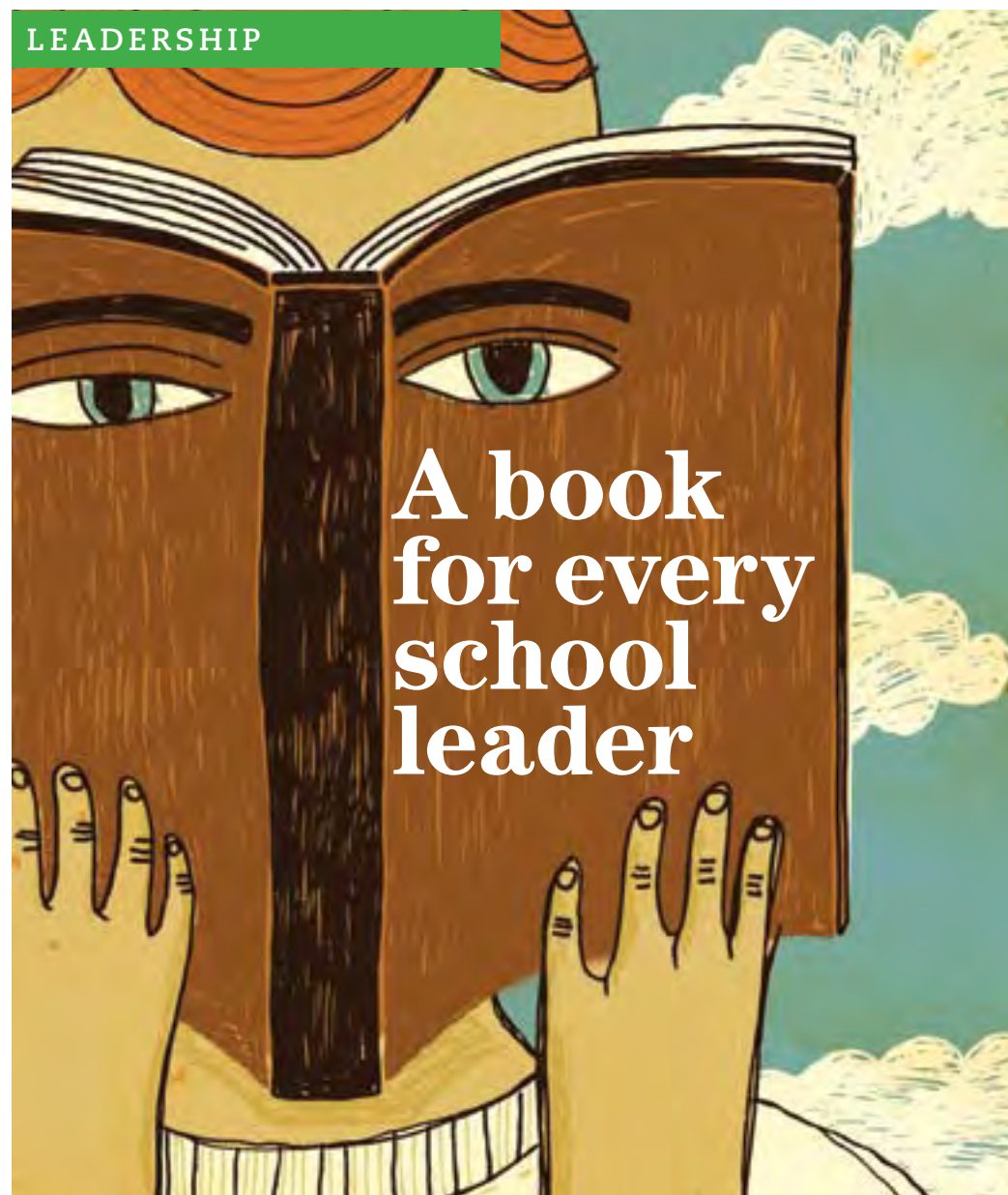


LEADERSHIP



# A book for every school leader

*Dylan Wiliam's latest tome on school leadership is a must-read, says one deputy headteacher*

DAVID JAMES

EVERY TEACHER has a list of books that they think should be essential reading for anyone who works in schools. Such lists will probably feature the usual suspects: Doug Lemov, John Hattie, Daniel Willingham, Carol Dweck, possibly one by Ken Robinson, and perhaps one or two outliers such as Graham Nuthall and ED Hirsch.

You can now add Dylan Wiliam – emeritus professor of educational assessment at UCL Institute of Education – to that list, particularly if you are a school leader.

Since its release earlier this year, his latest book – *Leadership for Teacher Learning: creating a culture where all teachers improve so that all students succeed* – has been a constant companion.

Although mainly focused on schools in the US, this book is the product of 35 years of working with educators across the world,

and this vast experience is apparent on each and every page.

For Wiliam, leadership is central to improving schools, but he says that if the process of change is not equally focused on improving teaching and student learning, then progress at a school-wide level is likely to be at best patchy and at worst counterproductive.

At this point, you might well be thinking: tell me something I don't know. But in every chapter Wiliam does just that by presenting us with compelling evidence about what works and what does not work, and each claim is followed by pragmatic recommendations.

The book presents compelling evidence about what works and what doesn't

Here are five reasons why every school leader should read this book...

## 1 He places the issues in a wider context

For Wiliam, “an obsessive focus on a small number of factors” can make deeper and more meaningful change within an organisation than the “next big thing” that too many schools are often too ready to embrace. He also goes beyond the school gates to find examples that would work in principle for school leaders, referring to companies as diverse as Shell and McDonald's to exemplify why (and how) this matters.

## 2 He clarifies complex ideas with effective examples

We all know the world of work is changing, but did you know that since 2000 the US has lost “over 1000 manufacturing jobs every single day”? Or that in 2002 there were 374,000 special needs teachers in the US, compared to 1,563 in 1970? The book is filled with facts that are directly linked to educational planning and outcomes, and Wiliam asks how educational leaders can adapt to rapid and radical change across society.

## 3 He has done the research

The 29 pages of references that end the book show the depth of understanding that Wiliam has for his subject. But this is only a fraction of the extent of his knowledge. He estimates that he had accumulated around 10,000 documents in his career, making a stack “over 30 feet high”. When he came to move house, he carefully scanned in each page, reducing a monumental task to something more manageable. He adopts exactly the same approach to improving schools and school systems: focus on the small changes, and the culture will eventually change.

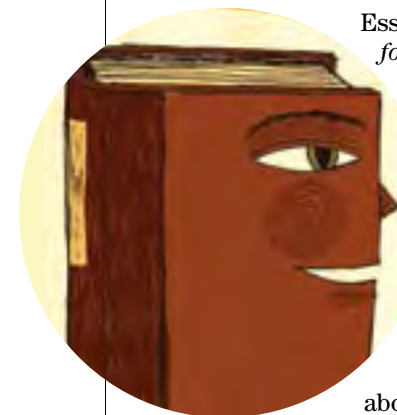
## 4 He puts forward a coherent programme of solutions

Wiliam knows better than most how schools work: he has been a teacher, a researcher and a consultant. I can't imagine how many lessons he's observed, or teachers that he's talked to, in the UK, the US, Canada, Singapore, Australia, to name but a few. His final chapter (“Implementation”) draws much of this experience into one clear-sighted and

practical series of recommendations on how to ensure improvement in schools can be introduced and sustained. If you read this chapter alone it will be quality CPD time.

## 5 He gives us permission to skip chapters

In his surprisingly honest introduction, Wiliam writes that “certain chapters may be skipped or skimmed without losing the main thread of the argument”. This is typical of the book's tone: it is frank, open and grown-up, and treats its readers as informed professionals working in a job that is short on time but populated with people who, unsurprisingly, have a life-long commitment to learn, and to make the schools that they work in ever better.



Essentially, *Leadership for Teacher Learning* is a valuable contribution to the field of pedagogy because Wiliam is unafraid of challenging old (and new) orthodoxies that threaten to gain unmerited influence in schools. He makes us think about the efficacy of lesson study, and he asks

probing questions about the role that research can (and cannot) play in the classroom.

His is a sane, reasoned, objective voice that should be listened to much more amid the (often) bitter and tendentious exchanges that pass for educational debate in this country. Nicky Morgan should find him an office close to hers in the Department for Education: schools this side of the pond deserve to benefit from his insights, too. ●



David James is deputy headteacher at Bryanston School, Dorset @drdavidajames

### TES LEADERSHIP

TES presents a series of webinars focusing on leadership issues. Our next webinar,

“SEND issues and school leadership”, will examine support for children with special educational needs and disabilities. View the video online now and submit questions for our upcoming webchat.

To view all the latest leadership webinars, go to [bit.ly/TESLeadershipWebinars](http://bit.ly/TESLeadershipWebinars)

