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Corporate Culture in Preparatory Schools
(The Business of Independent Education)

David John Williams

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Dedicated to my wife Christine, and my children Alice and James for all their support in my undertaking of this study, and never complaining when I wasn't always there to do the things a husband and father should do with their loved ones.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

EDUCATION

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This study sets out to investigate the impact of corporate acquisition on a group of four small independent preparatory schools owned, and run, by one of the UK's largest suppliers of independent education. Specifically it aims to prove that such acquisition results in the imposition of a business climate which was previously not evident, and the emergent development of 'corporate culture'. Its methodological approach is that of a multiple-site case study utilising a technique developed by Hargreaves (1995), and supported by a series of one-to-one interviews with the head-teachers of the schools and a representative sample of their staff. It begins by considering the characteristics which constitute a typical independent preparatory school and the apparent lack of recent research in this area. From this it undertakes an extensive literature review of previous research into organizational and school culture, and attempts to identify whether any real differences exist between these two terms. Additionally it draws a distinction between the terms 'culture' and 'climate'. The main conclusions from the study are that there is evidence to suggest that corporate acquisition of independent preparatory schools introduces an element of 'business climate' not previously associated with the schools. This climate is perceived by the staff, although not by the head-teachers, as having a detrimental effect on the education of the children within the school, with much of the investment being inappropriately used to improve the facade of the schools. There is also some evidence to support the growth of corporate culture within the schools, although this is far less explicit than the existence of a business climate. Much of this perception appears to be as a direct result of the lack of corporate communication and interaction between the organization's executive officers and the staff of the schools. Staff are generally of the opinion that they do not matter. Finally it makes some firm recommendations for future research in the independent preparatory school sector and in the field of corporate acquisition and its consequences in particular.

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The route to the successful submission of a research project is often seen as long and arduous, especially at the outset of the journey when you are armed with only an idea, having no map and probably wondering as to the direction you will take. Along the way one is likely to cross the paths of many people who will give advice and help, some to a greater degree than others. Research of this kind cannot be undertaken without the support, assistance and cooperation of these people. However, unlike the winning actor or actress at the Oscar ceremonies, it is not always necessary for the successful researcher to stand on the stage and announce the name of everybody who played a part in the production. There are though some key people, without whom, there would have been no film.

Firstly I have to say thank you to all the head-teachers and staff of the four schools who allowed me to intrude upon their time and space. Their hospitality during my visits was much appreciated with their willingness to participate and show interest in the research making my task that much easier and certainly more enjoyable. Even though I am unable to mention them by name, since this would compromise their confidentiality and anonymity, I'm sure they will recognize themselves should they ever read this thesis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Independent schools defined

As with any form of study there is the inherent problem of defining the field of research, and nowhere is this more true than in the area of the ‘non-state education’ sector. This latter term has been deliberately chosen so as to draw a distinction between schools which are either fully or partially funded by ‘the State’, and those that are not. In the non-state sector there are generally considered to be three terms which throughout the literature are seemingly deemed to be interchangeable; public schools, private schools and independent schools. However the perception of these terms varies from individual to individual and the literature indicates that the ‘labels’ public and private are more usually associated with the elitist, or famous old schools, such as Eton and Harrow. In contrast the term Independent is more generally attributed to those schools at the lower end of the sector, that is schools which are, for instance, not members of the Headmaster’s Conference (HMC). These schools may belong to alternative organisations such as the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS) and the Independent Schools Information Service (ISIS). In general they cater for those parents looking for an affordable alternative to the local state school for their children’s education. There is, however, one attribute which all these types of school have in common irrespective of the term they use; they are all fee-paying schools, with the difference being in the level of fees levied, although Johnson (1987, p xii) argues that

“ The term ‘public schools’ is inappropriate for schools at which fees are charged.”

The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) defines independent schools as :

“ A registered independent school is any school at which full-time education is provided for five or more pupils of compulsory school age and which is not a school maintained by a local education authority or a school providing specialist education not maintained by a local education authority.”

(DfEE Web site)

For the purposes of clarification it should be noted that within this study it is the term ‘independent’ which is applied to the preparatory schools under investigation since :

“ The schools themselves, at least in open debate, now usually prefer to refer to themselves as independent schools, stressing the wide variety of provision that is available according to individual requirements.”

(Walford, 1984, p2)

and

“ Independent is now the preferred term, assumed by the schools to be more socially acceptable.”

(Rae 1981 in Walford (1991) p15)

Definition on its own cannot be considered as adequate when considering this field of research, and it is important to understand and clarify the characteristics which constitute the ‘typical’ independent preparatory school.

“ Preparatory schools usually catering for the 7 - 13 age range, vary from the well equipped and expensive feeder schools for the prestigious public schools, to the downright cheap and shady.”

(Walford, 1984, p2)

“ The independent sector is diverse.....schools range from the large traditional public schools, to very small establishments. They may cater for all ages 2/5 through to 16/18, or be pre-preparatory (ages 2 - 7), preparatory or junior (ages 7 - 11+ or 13+), senior schools (ages 11+ or 13+ to 18).

(DfEE web site)

In her studies of small private schools in South Wales, Janis Griffiths (in Walford 1991, p84-97), identified a number of common characteristics among her sample as being, schools with a student population of between one hundred and twenty, and two hundred and seventy, a pupil-teacher ratio average of 1:11.75, and small class sizes matched by small classrooms; additionally few of these schools, if any, were surrounded by acres of private ground, and were generally “ *firmly located in the domestic buildings of the former middle classes.*”. The background of the four schools investigated within this study are outlined in sections 1.4.2 to 1.4.5 inclusive, and all bear similar characteristics to those identified by Griffiths, and fit the general definitions propounded earlier. It is

therefore considered appropriate to view these schools as being typical of small independent preparatory schools.

1.2 Statement of the problem

“ *In Britain there is surprisingly little research on private schooling....* ” so states Geoffrey Walford (1991, p1) in his introduction to his book ‘*Private Schooling : Tradition, Change and Diversity*’, and that this is primarily due to the perception that “*the high quality of private schooling is so evident that research is redundant.*” Given the previous section’s definition of what ‘private schooling’ constitutes, it can be argued that there is in fact so little research on ‘independent schooling’ that this in itself is the problem for anyone wishing to conduct research in this specific field. What research there is has been mainly concerned with the question of parental choice (West, 1992; Falconer, 1997; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown 2000) and the factors that parents consider when deciding on which school is most suited for their children’s education. Foskett & Hemsley-Brown (2000, p6) identify four characteristics of the sector which have influenced this lack of research :-

- a. The competitive nature of the market has meant that collaboration on research has not been acceptable between schools. The desire to keep understandings of the market and research confidential from competitors has been strong.

It is worth noting that this study has failed to find any viable research even where the schools, as in this case, are members of a common group.

- b. The *overall* trends in the independent school market in recent years have been towards growth in pupil numbers, and the demand for independent day school places in many localities exceeds supply.

Within this study the pressure on the schools to increase pupil numbers has emerged as one outcome resulting from acquisition.

- c. Research had tended to be market research for individual schools, and hence confidential. In many cases it has also focused on specific issues (for example, sixth form entry) rather than seeking to provide wider pictures of the operation of the market place.

This study investigates the impact of corporate acquisition on four schools, individually and as a group.

- d. Research is an expensive process. Without the pressure of specific issues to

address, schools feel that the use of resources in this field is not justified.

None of the schools, nor the holding organization, have incurred any costs in the undertaking of this study. It has been fully funded by the researcher.

There does not appear to be any rhyme or reason to this situation, and whilst, from the above findings, it could be argued that much of that which needs to be researched may be considered as commercially sensitive it does not bode well for gaining an academic understanding of the nature of this sector. There are two main organizations, as previously mentioned, within the UK who are associated with independent schools, ISIS and IAPS, neither of which are apparently substantially involved in major research within the sector. Much of their work is in the promotion and marketing of their member schools to parents of potential pupils. One further organization which appears to take a more holistic view to the sector is the Independent Schools Council (ISC). Discussions with professionals working within these organisations suggest that the shape and structure of the sector is changing and that “ *the vast majority of preparatory schools are now charitable trusts*” whilst at the same time “ *there is a growing corporate interest*” (spokesperson IAPS), whereas previously they were proprietor owned and run. Whilst it may be argued that economic forces have had little effect on the more prestigious public schools, there is much evidence to suggest this is not the case within the independent preparatory school sector. Griffiths (in Walford, 1991, p96) concluded that “ *Independent schools at the lower end of the market-place, particularly those run as a business, rather than enjoying the high financial benefits of being educational trusts, operate within a market and are vulnerable to its fluctuations. For smaller schools, existence is precarious...*”. During the 1990's it has been observed that one impact of these market fluctuations, is the number of these smaller schools which have been subject to corporate acquisition by groups such as Nord Anglia and Asquith Court. One of the outstanding issues which has yet to be addressed, is the question of whether this ‘corporate’ acquisition impinges upon the ‘culture’ of the school in any way, and it is this question which forms the focus of this study.

1.3 Purpose of the study

It is important here to understand the direction from which this study has been undertaken. The researcher is a parent of two children who attend, or have attended, an independent preparatory school which during their attendance was subject to corporate acquisition. As a result of this action it was quite discernible, to the researcher at least,

that the ‘culture’ or ‘climate’, terms which are discussed later, of the school changed significantly from that of a family run to a more business like approach. Interest in this area has been further stimulated by an earlier small scale study undertaken as part of the taught element of the EdD, (Williams (1998)). Whilst that previous study was aimed primarily at questioning the ability, even desirability, of identifying school culture it transpires that it also formed the basis of a pilot study for this much wider investigation. Whilst much research has been undertaken into school culture (Handy & Aitken (1984,1990); Glatter (1988); Hargreaves (1995); Prosser (1999)) this has generally been concerned with the management of change within the State education sector (Stoll & Fink (1996)). As discussed in the previous sections the definition, characteristics and nature of the independent preparatory school sector dictate that research undertaken in the state sector cannot be considered generic to all sectors of education. The value, and relevance, of this research within the context of this investigation is discussed in Chapter 2. However, it should be noted that there appears to be very little evidence of this form of ‘cultural’, or any other real research, in respect of the independent preparatory school sector.

The initial pilot study was limited, looking at only a single school, within a group, and hence no comparisons or generalisations with other schools within, or outside, the group could be drawn. A fuller discussion of the pilot study and its findings can be found in Chapter 3. This new study proceeds much further and investigates the culture, and any cultural changes, **as perceived by the staff**, that may have occurred, as a result of corporate acquisition, within four independent preparatory schools which are owned and run by one of the UK’s largest providers of independent education. The key research question this study addresses is :-

Does corporate acquisition of small, independent preparatory schools precipitate a change in those schools’ culture or climate as perceived by the head-teachers and their staff ?

In order to answer this question a number of secondary research questions are also addressed :-

- a) What is the ‘culture’ of each of the schools studied ?
- b) What, if any, are the similarities and differences between these ‘cultures’ ?

- c) Have the staff or head-teachers perceived any ‘cultural’ changes since each school was acquired by the group ?
- d) Is there any perception by the staff or the head-teachers of the emergence of ‘corporate culture’, or ‘ business climate’, within the schools ?

1.4 Background to the Schools and the Group

As with all types of social sciences research two fundamental considerations must be taken into account by the researcher - those of confidentiality and the right to privacy.

“ Confidentiality involves a clear understanding between the researcher and participant concerning the use to be made of the data provided. ”

“ ...privacy is an important right and implies that the individual concerned should decide what aspects of their personal attitudes, opinions, habits, eccentricities, doubts and fears are to be communicated or withheld from others. ”

(Anderson, 1996, p24)

Additionally the researcher must also be aware that when investigating schools these should apply as much to the institutions involved as to the individuals themselves. Mindful of this it should be noted that whilst the study and findings are factual the names and identities of the schools, the staff, and the group are fictitious.

1.4.1 Southern Schools Group Ltd

As it was not the intention of the research undertaken to consider the culture of Southern Schools Group Ltd., it does not form part of the study. However it was deemed ethical and professional to approach the Chief Executive for permission to undertake the research.

“ Many barriers are placed in the way of those who would conduct field studies. Some of these are often discussed, such as obtaining financial support for research and suspending prejudgement when in the field. What is often not considered is the role of the ‘gatekeeper’, the authority who grants or withholds permission for access to the site, in controlling

knowledge.....gatekeeping acts as a mechanism of social control over several stages of the research effort.”

(Rist (1975) in Popkewitz & Tabachnick, 1981, p264)

After due consideration, permission was granted conditional to the agreement of the head-teachers, and staff, of the individual schools, who themselves would act as gatekeepers.

Established in 1989, and based in the South of England, Southern Schools Group Ltd. is one of the UK's leading providers of independent education. Primarily active in 'nursery' or 'pre-school' provision, it has over the years acquired a small number of preparatory schools catering for children from five to thirteen years of age. By the end of 1999, following the acquisition of a competitive group of nursery schools, there were approximately ninety establishments within the organisation. Of this number only eight provide preparatory school education, for children within the age group specified previously. It is a sample of four of these latter schools that forms the foundation on which this study is based. Within the sample, the schools which have belonged to the group the longest, ten years, and the shortest, two years are included. For the purposes of this study the term Southern Schools will be used to identify the group.

1.4.2 Oldest Preparatory School

Founded in 1870, Oldest Preparatory School is an independent, selective school for some two hundred and sixty boys and girls aged two and a half to thirteen years. Located in a large, converted house, situated north of London it has been at its present site since the mid 1900's. It was acquired by Southern Schools in 1990, and over recent years, a programme of modernization and development of facilities has been undertaken. The current head was appointed at the time of acquisition, although he had been a member of the teaching staff for a number of years prior to this. For the three years immediately preceding the acquisition the school had seen four different headmasters, and, according to staff was 'encountering low morale'. Teaching is based on the National Curriculum requirements plus those of the Common Entrance Examination to Independent Schools and the variances of Scholarship and Entrance Examinations required by individual, independent secondary schools. Excluding nursery school, and all

support staff, there are twenty one teaching staff in the preparatory school giving a staff : pupil ratio of 1:9. Boys and girls from a variety of cultural backgrounds, including children whose parents are diplomats from many parts of the world form the student body. The school is proud of its academic track record and of its success in securing places for its pupils at a wide range of senior schools, including Harrow, Mill Hill, and Westminster.

1.4.3 Midway Preparatory School

Founded in 1933, initially for boys only, Midway Preparatory School, which has admitted girls since 1978, occupies a large Victorian house on the edge of Midway, in the Home Counties North. Non-selective, it comprises a nursery department and a main school which together cater for children from the age of two and a half to eleven plus. With a total of one hundred and fifty five pupils, of which approximately one hundred and twenty are in the main school, and a teaching staff of twelve, classes are small with a staff : pupil ratio of 1:10. Midway was acquired by Southern Schools in 1994 following a period of declining pupil numbers and loss of confidence in the then proprietor/headmaster. The current head was appointed at the time of acquisition, prior to which she had worked for many years for Southern Schools within the nursery/pre-school sector. Of the four schools, Midway is the only one to have a female head-teacher. Furthermore, of the remaining staff only one is male. The curriculum is broadly based on the National Curriculum for England and Wales. However, since early foundations are laid for the basic skills, a high standard of literacy and numeracy is achieved well in advance of National Curriculum requirements. When questioned, staff in the school generally felt they deliver National Curriculum Plus in all subjects, covering the demands of entrance examinations to independent secondary schools at eleven plus.

1.4.4 Nearby Preparatory School

Founded in 1952 as a girls only school, with six pupils, Nearby moved to its present site and became co-educational in 1959. The school is non-selective and is contained within a large converted house located in the centre of Nearby town , conveniently situated in the Western Counties. It comprises a nursery and main school catering for children from the ages of three to thirteen. The school was

acquired by Southern Schools in 1993 with the current head being appointed at the same time. As with all the schools in the study, classes are small with a staff population of fourteen and a typical staff : pupil ratio of 1 : 11. Similarly teaching is framed within the broad requirements, and the remit, of the National Curriculum, with pupils being prepared for entry to a variety of secondary schools in both the state and independent sectors. Nearby is proud of its academic achievements with many pupils going on to study at schools such as Cheltenham Ladies' College, and Millfield.

1.4.5 Newest Preparatory School

Newest Preparatory School was founded in 1940 as a boys only school for seven to thirteen year olds. During 1990/1991 it converted to co-education, and introduced a nursery department. Occupying a large converted house and some smaller outbuildings it has been located at its present site, west of London since foundation. Being selective, it comprises nursery, junior and senior departments catering for children from the ages of two to thirteen plus. With a staff of twenty one and a staff : pupil ratio of approximately 1 : 9 class sizes are small. The school is the most recent member of the group, having being acquired by Southern Schools in 1997. The current head has been a member of staff for over twenty five years and was appointed to the headship in 1988. Within the schools covered in the study, Newest is the only one not to have had a new head appointed at the time of acquisition. As with other schools within the group the curriculum is based upon the requirements of the National Curriculum and the Common Entrance, and Scholarship examinations to independent secondary schools. Additionally Newest has an outstanding reputation in the field of special educational needs, and attracts a high proportion of such pupils from its local catchment area.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

As previously outlined this research develops the work undertaken in the pilot study. However, it should still be considered as limited within its scope since it does not address the issues of the culture of schools not owned and administered by Southern Schools. Whilst the study may find that a similar culture exists within the schools studied it should not be assumed that such a culture prevails throughout the much larger independent preparatory school sector. Additionally it must be stressed that this study investigates

only the teachers' perception of whether there has been any change in the schools' culture, or climate, and not whether there has been any actual shift.

1.6 Synopses of subsequent chapters

The following sections are designed to give the reader a brief synopsis of each of the subsequent chapters. Without going into any depth this will allow specific areas of interest to be easily referenced.

1.6.1 Chapter 2 - Organizational, Corporate or School Culture ?

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the study of organizational, corporate and school culture. In doing so the chapter discusses past research and asks the question whether there really is any difference between these terms. It is evident that these phrases are widely used and many researchers within the fields of study have proffered their own interpretations and definitions of them. The chapter considers a cross-section of these views and attempts to identify those deemed most appropriate for the purposes of the study.

1.6.2 Chapter 3 - Design and Methodology

This chapter critiques the methodology of the study in terms of the theoretical and practitioners' position on the usage of the methods adopted. The initial pilot study is discussed along with any recommended improvements proposed. The chapter proceeds to outline the strategy employed, the sampling technique, data collection, data recording, and data analysis methods utilised. Application of a multiple-site case study approach, the adaptation of the Cambridge tool (Hargreaves, 1995) for mapping 'school culture', and the use of semi-structured interviews are discussed in depth. The chapter further discusses the ethical and practical dilemmas of undertaking such research within the environment of busy, small independent preparatory schools.

1.6.3 Chapter 4 - Analysis and Interpretation

Chapter 4 forms the main body of the study by presenting and analysing the data collected. In doing so the chapter discusses the identification of each school's individual culture, similarities and differences between these; the presence, or otherwise, of evidence to support the apparent emergence of a 'corporate culture'

across the schools, and the views of staff within each school on the findings.

1.6.4 Chapter 5

Chapter 5 addresses the conclusions drawn from the study and makes a number of firm recommendations for further research in this field, and for organizations undertaking corporate acquisition of small independent preparatory schools.

2. ORGANIZATIONAL, CORPORATE, or SCHOOL CULTURE ?

2.1 Introduction

What purpose does culture serve and why should we be concerned with its presence ? Edgar Schein, probably the world's leading writer on the subject, argues (1999, p3) that “ *Culture matters. It matters because decisions made without awareness of the operative cultural forces may have unanticipated and undesirable consequences.*” In quoting this Schein is referring to the term ‘corporate culture’, but does not indicate whether the same applies to organizational and school culture, raising the question of whether either of these latter terms have any attributes which perhaps separate them from ‘corporate culture’. The purpose of this chapter is to consider this issue and answer the question of whether there really is any difference between the terms ‘organizational culture’, ‘corporate culture’ and ‘school culture’? It sets out firstly to define culture, no easy task, and follows this by considering both the ‘dimensions of culture’ and ‘types of culture’ which have been identified as existing within organizations. In doing so it recognizes that schools are also organizations and may be treated as such provided due consideration is given to their ‘employees’ and ‘customers’, ie staff and children. It concludes by considering the notion of ‘business climate’ within the school as an organization and argues that the term business is an inappropriate label to attach to independent preparatory schools.

2.2 Culture defined

In discussing culture it is generally accepted that we are referring to the way a particular society behaves in the eyes of the observer. The author and social researcher Gareth Morgan explores the idea that “organization is itself a cultural phenomenon” (Morgan, 1986, p 112), hence introducing the notion that were it not for the existence of the organization then the term ‘organizational culture’ would not exist. If we are prepared to accept that organizations do exist, and therefore by default so does organizational culture, then we need to make a reasoned attempt at defining it. Given the multitudinous writings available to the reader on the subject of culture, be that organizational, corporate or school, the act of definition is one of the greatest dilemmas facing the researcher. It is tempting to simplify the meaning of culture as “the way we do things around here” (Deal & Kennedy, (1982)). However, Furnham (1997, p555) undertook what he describes as “an exhaustive historical examination of relevant literature”, before he was

confident enough to claim he had found “one of the most complete definitions of culture which has been developed in recent years.”

“Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.”

(Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952, p181)

Many writers in the field of Organizational Behaviour (Wilson & Rosenfield (1990); Furnham (1997)) generally agree that the terms ‘organizational culture’ and ‘corporate culture’ may be considered as being synonymous, whilst the literature research reveals that it is the latter of these two terms which has been most widely acknowledged within management writings over the past twenty to twenty-five years. The concept of school culture is dealt with later in this chapter.

The problem of definition has been further exacerbated in that, almost without exception, academics and researchers in the field (Deal & Kennedy (1982); Wilson & Rosenfield (1990); Frost (1991); Handy (1993); Hargreaves (1995); Schein (1997)) all undertook to develop their own definitions, whilst in doing so, accepting that there was already an abundance of alternatives in existence. In considering how these ‘specialists’ have understood the concept, Furnham (1997 p556) takes great pleasure in seeing it as “*a somewhat pointless etymological exercise*”, and accuses many of them of “*muddying the waters, rather than clarifying the concept.*” The following is a selection of these offerings, from which it is hoped it will be possible to judge whether there really is any significant variation in the proponents’ definitions of the broad concept they call ‘corporate culture’.

“ A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.”

(Schein, 1997, p12)

Schein acknowledges that there are numerous meanings to 'culture' including language and rituals, but does not see them as the foundations of organizational culture. These, he believes, consist of the deeper attributes of 'basic assumptions and beliefs'. This is highly indicative of how many of the authors, who have undertaken research into culture, perceive its form.

"Culture is the basic values, ideologies and assumptions which guide and fashion individual and business behaviour. These values are evident in more tangible factors such as stories, ritual, language and jargon, office decoration and layout and prevailing modes of dress among staff."

(Wilson & Rosenfeld, 1990, p229)

A common thread among the writings of academics and practitioners is the importance they stress on the issue that culture does not exist in a void. In fact the opposite is true and they see culture as being created out of the intrinsic assumptions and beliefs of the members of the organization. However, the organization itself may well be subject to fragmentation and hence the evolution of sub-cultures from within. Most will agree that it is the responsibility of the 'leader' to ensure the appropriate culture for the organization is properly nurtured.

" Organizational cultures are created in part by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership is the creation, the management, and sometimes even the destruction of culture.....one could argue that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture."

(Schein, 1997, p5)

" organizational culture may be traced, at least in part, to the founders of the company or those who strongly shaped it in the recent past."

(Furnham, 1997, p553)

" because one or more individuals perceive that the coordinated and concerted action of a number of people can accomplish something that individual action cannot."

(Frost, 1991, p14)

How relevant these are within the context of 'school culture' is explored in later sections of this study, but many of the writers on this subject (Prosser, 1999) support the notion that :

"Schools are shaped by their history, context and the people within them."

(Stoll & Fink, 1996, p83)

Smircich (1983) argues that one of the major criticisms of cultural research, by theorists and practitioners, is the way the term 'culture' is used. She addresses this by raising what is seemingly a very simple question "*is culture something an organization is, or is it something an organization has ?*" This is considered further in some of the following sections. Sackmann (1989) (in Furnham (1997, p557)) supports this view and points out that "*culture is a word with different meanings analysed for different purposes*". From available evidence, however, it has become apparent that the majority of researchers and writers in the field of organizational behaviour are predominantly in agreement when it comes to defining corporate culture.

How then, does the practitioner, manager or indeed researcher undertake the critical task of identifying organizational, or corporate, culture ?

2.3 Dimensions of culture

Two particular schools of thought, and ones which as we will see later, are perhaps most relevant to the concept of 'school culture' are those which can perhaps best be termed as 'dimensionalist' (Hofstede (1980); Bate (1984), Schein, (1990)) and 'typologist' (Deal & Kennedy (1982); Handy (1993); Pheysey (1993)). These have concentrated their research under the notion that corporate culture is not a single consideration but consists of either a number of sub-cultural 'dimensions' or 'types' which together determine the overall culture of the organization. Bate (1984) developed his six dimensions of organizational culture in an attempt to explain why some organizations were encountering unexpected difficulties in solving apparently simple problems. His findings concluded that organizations consisted of a number of characteristics which to varying degrees were partially responsible for a breakdown in communications and collaboration between individual members or groups within the organization.

1. Unemotionality - avoid showing or sharing feelings or emotions.

2. Depersonalization of issues - never point the finger at anyone in particular.
3. Subordination - never challenge those in authority and always wait for them to take the initiative in resolving your problems.
4. Conservatism - better the devil you know.
5. Isolation - do your own thing and avoid treading on other people's toes.
6. Antipathy - on most things people will be opponents rather than allies.

These findings support, and are supported by both Schein (1990), who identifies seven dimensions of organizational culture, and Hofstede (1990) who identifies five. Whilst the terminology of Bate, Schein and Hofstede differs, closer scrutiny leads to clearly definable links between the dimensions proffered. Each of Schein's (1990) dimensions advocates a question, or set of questions, which may be addressed in aiding identification of corporate culture.

- 1 The organization's relation to its environment.
"Does the organization perceive itself to be dominant, submissive, harmonizing, searching out a niche?"
- 2 The nature of human activity.
"Is the 'correct' way for humans to behave to be dominant/proactive, harmonizing, or passive/fatalistic?"
- 3 The nature of reality/truth.
"How do we define what is true and what is not true; and how is truth ultimately determined both in the physical and social world?"
- 4 The nature of time.
"What is our basic orientation in terms of past, present, and future, and what kinds of time units are most relevant for the conduct of daily life?"
- 5 The nature of human nature.
"Are humans basically good, neutral or evil, and is human nature perfectible or fixed?"
- 6 The nature of human relationships.
"What is the 'correct' way for people to relate to each other, to distribute power and affection? Is life competitive or cooperative? Is this the best way to organize society on the basis of individualism or groupism? Is the best authority system autocratic/paternalistic or collegial/participative?"

7 Homogeneity versus diversity.

“Is the group better off if it is highly diverse or if it is highly homogenous, and should individuals in a group be encouraged to innovate ?”

Hofstede's (1980) original research identified four dimensions to national culture, and it was not until he revisited this research, (Hofstede(1990)) that he linked these national cultural dimensions with organizational culture. From this later work it is possible to see how these dimensions replicate many of those propounded by Schein. It is also worth noting that Hofstede (1991) applies his 'types' in the school environment, where he generally considers these from a teacher-student perspective and how the culture of the school affects these relationships. The focus of this study however, is based around the teachers' perspective of the school's culture.

1. Uncertainty Avoidance (UA).

The dimension by which the people within an organization, or indeed, the organization itself, are measured on their willingness to take risks. In low UA organizations risk is not seen as a major issue and is generally deemed acceptable. In strong UA organizations people inevitably feel threatened by uncertain situations, and experience stress and anxiety when faced with even a small degree of uncertainty.

There is a distinctive correlation here with Schein's first dimension 'an organization's relation to its environment', since one can surmise that the more at ease an organization is with its environment the less fearful it will be of taking risks.

2. Power Distance (PD)

This dimension is concerned with how far the culture encourages superiors to exert power over their subordinates, and the level of acceptance by the subordinate to this.

This relates very strongly to both Schein's second dimension - "the nature of human activity" and his sixth dimension - "the nature of human relationships", and Bate's subordination dimension. Each of these has an element of power/dominance within them, concentrated on the relationship and behaviour of superiors and subordinates to each other. No one ever challenges those in authority.

3. Individualism - Collectivism (IC)

The IC dimension is the degree to which a culture encourages individual as opposed to collectivist or group concerns.

Again there is definite reciprocity between this dimension and the sixth and seventh dimensions from Schein's list. All three are concerned with the role of the individual within the organization and the extent to which individualism versus groupism/collectivism is encouraged. Likewise similarities can be found with Bate's isolation dimension.

4. Masculinity - Femininity (MF)

At the 'masculine' end of this dimension the emphasis is on the achievement of tasks, winning rather than losing, with little consideration for the 'cost' of such. The 'feminine' end indicates concern for the whole process and focusses on ways of satisfying the goals of many of the participants.

Here too, it is possible to equate this dimension with that of Schein's fifth dimension dealing with the "nature of human nature" since both are concerned with what is good and the 'end justifying the means'.

Between the publication of his works in 1980 and 1991 Hofstede found himself in a dilemma. Since he had constantly argued that culture was an important factor in determining the way people think, he realised that this must also affect the theories that academics and scholars, like himself, proposed. That is to say he realised his own culture must have been influencing his perceptions of other cultures. To address this apparent discrepancy he collaborated with a colleague of his, who at the time was living and working in Hong Kong, to undertake further research, but with an Asian emphasis. As a result of this work, a fifth, The Long-Term or Confucian Dynamism, dimension was identified. (Hofstede & Bond (1988)).

5 Long-Term - Short-Term (LS)

This fifth dimension advocates that within an organization a culture exists which is dependent upon the attitude of people to the long and short-term prospects for change. Cultures with a high LS score appear to take a long-term view of the need for change, whilst conversely those with a low LS score have the opposite view.

This dimension relates very closely to "the nature of time", Schein's fifth dimension. Both deal with the issue of time and it is reasonable to assume that

when proposing this dimension Schein would have considered the issue of the organization's attitude to change, and the relevant time-scales involved.

Whilst both Schein's and Hofstede's dimensions are detailed and cover many of the factors which influence the development of corporate culture they should not be considered exhaustive. Many writers and researchers still disagree with them, and it is unlikely that a definitive list will ever be forthcoming. Perhaps this is not surprising since we are all individuals and as such will continue to have our own views on what does, or does not constitute culture. Likewise it may be argued that all cultures are unique and hence one should not expect researchers and writers to concur. It raises the interesting question of whether or not two independent studies into the same organization would identify identical cultures ?

2.4 Types of culture

Much has been written about the need to classify, or categorize, corporate culture so that a starting point can be established prior to plotting and implementing change. It is the second school of thought, 'typist' which plays a much more proactive role in this exercise. Even so we shall see in the following discussion that many of these 'types' are intrinsically linked to the alternative, perhaps complementary, 'dimensionalist' school of thought.

Deal & Kennedy (1982, p107-108) identify four differing and recurring types in proposing their 'taxonomy of corporate culture' :-

1. The tough guy, macho culture.

"A world of individualists who regularly take high risks and get quick feedback on whether their actions were right or wrong."

Frequently these are construction, management consultancy, venture capital, media, publishing, and sports organizations.

We can see here some correlation between this 'type' and both Hofstede's and Schein's dimensional approach. All relate to an individualist element of organizational culture where risk taking is part of everyday life and the potential returns justify that risk.

2. The work hard - play hard culture.

Fun and action are the rule here, and employees take few risks, all with quick

feedback; to succeed the culture encourages them to maintain a high level of relatively low risk activity.

Frequently these are estate agents, computer companies, vehicle distributors, door-to-door sale operators. They can get fooled by success because of little long-term planning.

It is more tenuous here to directly establish a link with Schein's dimensions, however much of this type of culture can be seen within the 'long-term, short-term' dimension of Hofstede's work, where the culture of the organization is dependent upon its attitude to timed planning. From this we can extrapolate to see a loose fit with Schein's fourth dimension.

3. The bet-your-company culture.

This culture is one of high-risk and slow feedback where employees may have to wait years before they know whether decisions made have paid off. Types of organizations found to exhibit this culture are frequently banks, mining companies, large-system business, architectural firms, computer-design companies, and insurance companies. Organizations of this type are able to cope with long-term ambiguity, but are invariably exposed to short-term fluctuations and cash-flow problems.

In terms of categorizing this type of organization, it could be classified using Hofstede's dimensions as weak UA, medium-large PD, medium-strong collective, strong masculinity, and medium-long term.

4. The process culture.

A world of little or no feedback where employees find it hard to measure what they do; instead they concentrate on how it's done. We have another name for this culture when the processes get out of control - bureaucracy !

Frequently government, local government, utilities, some banks and insurance companies, and heavily regulated industries.

Both Handy (1988, p188-196), and Pheysey (1993) similarly propound the idea that organizational culture can be categorized into 'types'. It is not the intention, nor is it within the scope of this study to detail all types here. Additionally the work of Handy (ibid) is well known in this field and hence it is deemed sufficient to simply outline his types and to indicate where conflict or agreement occurs between these authors. Handy's research identifies four cultural types :

1. The power culture.

The basis of this 'type' is that organizations, and their structures, are perceived as *web-like*, where the power within the organization emanates from the centre. Characteristics of these types of organizations include strong, centralised leadership, with the ability to move swiftly and effectively when threatened. There are similarities between this and the 'tough guy, macho culture' advocated by Deal & Kennedy outlined previously. It is likely that Hofstede's Power Distance dimension will play a major part in defining culture in these organizations.

2. The role culture.

Based on the notion that the role, or function, of individuals within the organization is more important than the people who enact that role. Handy propounds that these organizations are reliant on an elite band of senior managers supported by the functional areas of the organization, which in turn are supported by the foundations on which the organization is built - trust, procedures, and rules. The presence of this role culture was also identified by Torrington & Weightman (1989) during their investigations into the role of deputy head-teachers in secondary schools.

This type matches very closely to the 'process culture' of Deal & Kennedy, being highly bureaucratic, it is probable that Hofstede's Masculinity - Femininity dimension will be the defining factor in this type of culture.

3. The task culture.

Concentrates on 'getting the job' done. To facilitate this 'task completion' culture, the organization will do whatever is necessary to assemble the most appropriate resources. Knowledge or expertise is respected more than 'positional power' in achieving the common goal. Organizations which function on a 'matrix' structure are indicative of this 'type'.

A more flexible variant of Deal & Kennedy's 'work-hard, play-hard' type which enables the organization to effectively modify its culture to meet the needs of the prevailing conditions. If things go wrong it may adopt a more 'role' or 'power' type culture, as necessary. Also matches very closely with Pheysey's (1993) achievement culture.

4 The person culture.

Handy describes these types of organizations as being of minimal structure, and

consisting of “*a galaxy of individual stars*” (p195).

High in Hofstede’s Individualism - Collectivism dimension these are organizations which exist only for the benefit of the individuals within them. Individuals may cooperate to advance their own ambitions without much redress to the others. Matches very closely with Deal & Kennedy’s ‘tough guy, macho culture’, and Pheyse’s support culture.

It should not be assumed that the similarities between these cultural types are mutually exclusive. Since culture is such a multi-faceted concept then it is probable that organizational culture will consist of a mixture of these types. For example Hofstede’s Masculinity/Femininity type could be as relevant to organizations of a ‘power’ type culture as of a ‘role’ type.

The preceding review highlights the relative homogeneity of research and writing in the field of organizational culture. Perhaps, this can best be pictured in terms of a ‘merry-go-round’ with contributors to the subject adapting existing, but apparently adding little of real significance, to this body of knowledge. Interestingly none of the authors discuss or justify how they developed these classifications, but at least one can gain some confidence in their findings as a result of this accord. In essence it is probably a fair assumption that organizational culture exists in a number of forms and shapes, and that any particular form is highly dependent on the view the observer takes. Simplistically put ‘they are all the same - but different’. In the following section we will take a look at some of the research into school culture and attempt to identify any similarities between this and organizational culture.

Whilst this review has considered both the dimensions and types of culture it should be noted that this study investigates the staff’s perception of the type of culture present within their schools, and in particular the types identified by Hargreaves (1995) which are discussed in the following section.

2.5 School Culture

There has been much written in the area of school culture (Prosser, 1999) which revolves around the issue as to whether there is such a phenomenon as ‘school culture’, or whether it is more conceptual as opposed to tangible. In this section we will examine some of the more critical thinking behind the existence of school culture. However, prior to making any attempt at defining, identifying, and subsequently, categorizing school culture it is important to consider whether there is any similarity between organizations

and schools, and hence their cultural type :

“ ..a school is also an organization, that teachers are people as well as teachers, that children too are ‘adults with L-plates’, all with their own motivations, with the same reactions to groups and to authority as the rest of us.”

(Handy & Aitken, 1990, p7)

Ten years following the publication of his original work on organizational culture Handy (1976), he collaborated with Aitken to investigate whether the four organizational culture types could be applied to schools (Handy & Aitken, 1986, 1990). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Handy discovered that his cultural types could be applied to schools as equally as they could to organizations. It could be argued however, that this research was biased in that Handy may have subconsciously taken a forced-fit approach which would have made the outcome inevitable. If we accept the study at face value then the results allow us to link the culture of schools inextricably to that of organizations. It is not necessary here to discuss or outline the research in any depth. For the purposes of this study it is sufficient to summarise the findings. One further point which needs to be highlighted is that Handy & Aitken’s study was undertaken in state run primary and secondary schools. It will be of interest to this research in identifying whether this holds true in the independent preparatory school sector. What Handy & Aitken found was that the primary schools were, almost without exception, of the ‘task culture’ (Handy & Aitken, 1990, p93) type in that they saw their sole purpose as one of getting the job done. In this case this referred to the need to prepare the children for the challenges that would face them when they moved up to the secondary school. The secondary schools were not so straight forward. Here Handy & Aitken found the ‘role culture’ type to be more dominant, although there was evidence that junior (new) teachers perceived the presence of a ‘person’ or ‘task’ culture, whilst the more mid-level teachers felt a ‘club culture’ was present on top of the role culture (Handy & Aitken, 1990, p93).

We have already seen that Hofstede (1991) was able to apply his cultural dimensions to the school environment which further supports the work of Handy & Aitken (1990), hence strengthening the view that there is little distinction between organizational and school culture.

This then raises the question of whether it is acceptable to assume that since organizational culture research appears to consist of like-minded writers that it naturally

follows the same is true of school culture research ? Available evidence suggests that this may not be the case :

“School culture research in the UK (and throughout the World) does not form a homogenous body of literature.”

(Prosser,1999, p1)

If this really is the case then the question of definition is itself brought into doubt. If we are to believe that since the inception of research into school culture, all evidence suggests there to be no commonality then likewise it can be surmised that the term ‘school culture’ has also been defined in many different ways.

Prosser supports this view by questioning the validity of the term ‘school culture’ :

“... it is not appropriate to proffer a single definition, interpretation, application, or even assume that the term itself ‘school culture’ is appropriate.”

(Prosser, 1999, p1)

Whilst some may deem it inappropriate to propound a single definition, because perhaps, the interpretation of such is at the discretion of the definer and reader, it may be argued that to enable viable research to be undertaken, attempt at such a definition should be proffered. However, the issue of definition is further exacerbated by the inconsistent use of terms which are deemed to be synonymous, but in reality rarely are. Among these terms are ‘culture’, ‘climate’, ‘atmosphere’, ‘tone’ and ‘ethos’. Torrington & Weightman attempt to draw a distinction between some of these terms hence :

“The word ‘culture’ is more common in management circles whereas ‘ethos’ is used more often in education circles, particularly when referring to the children in the school.”

Torrington & Weightman (1989, p18)

Prosser’s (1999) work attempts to differentiate between the ad hoc use of these terms and propounds a framework within which researchers seemingly operate.

“The adoption of a particular term does not follow a pattern although in the UK, generally speaking, ‘climate’ is used by school effectiveness researchers, ‘culture’ by school improvement researchers and qualitative sociologists, and ‘ethos’, ‘atmosphere’ and ‘tone’ used to describe ethereal qualities of schools.”

(Prosser, 1999, p5)

He furthers this by criticising researchers’ ineptitude in failing to justify their choice of term and believes that this, almost cavalier, approach has, in reality *“impeded school culture research.”* (Prosser, 1999, p5), much in the same way that Furnham (1997, p556) criticises occupational psychologists and organizational behaviour specialists of *“muddying the water”* in defining culture. For the purposes of this study the distinction between ‘culture’ and ‘climate’ needs to be clearly outlined. Accepting that culture at its basic level is seen as the way things are done, for example the rules and rituals, then it is perhaps possible to visualize , or conceptualize, ‘climate’ as the environment within which that culture functions. One of the questions this study sets out to answer is whether the staff in the four schools have perceived any change in the climate that exists within the schools. Whilst it may be that the no cultural change has been perceived it is also of interest to identify if the staff have any perception of any changes at all, and what those changes may be, for example they may perceive changes within the macro-environment, or climate, surrounding the school. An analogy one could draw in attempting to clarify this difference would be to consider the cultural diversity which exists within the United Kingdom, irrespective of these cultural differences everyone lives under the same climatic conditions.

In Chapter 1, section 1.3 the purpose of the study was outlined and the key research question identified, along with a number of secondary, supporting questions. It is apparent that this study is grounded in a qualitative approach and seeks to investigate the perception of the head-teachers and staff in respect of the culture of their schools. As such, it should be recognised that for the purposes of this study the term ‘school culture’ is deemed most appropriate. This approach is also supported by Torrington & Weightman (ibid) who argue that when investigating the adults within a school the term ‘culture’ is more appropriate :

“ We are concerned with both culture and ethos but only in relation to the adults in the school, and we therefore normally use the word ‘culture’ .”

(Torrington & Weightman, 1989, p18)

Having reached a stage where the term itself has been chosen, and justified, the next step is probably one of the most arduous and complex tasks faced by the researcher of school culture - that of definition, since *“ its meaning is mostly dependent on an author’s discipline”* (Prosser, 1999, p7). Stoll & Fink (1996, p81-83) approach the issue by posing, and attempting to answer, some salient questions regarding the role culture has to play in changing schools ; ‘What is school culture and what does it do ?’, ‘What influences school culture ?’, ‘Is school culture fixed ?’ However many of their responses to these questions are simply references to the broader definitions of culture and organizational culture as outlined in section 2.1 with the addition of observed instances to support their views. It is perhaps, therefore, more prudent to consider the ‘concept’ that is school culture rather than attempting to define the undefinable. Torrington & Weightman (1989, p18) see this in terms of *“ The history and traditions of a school tell one something of a school’s culture because the cultural norms develop over a relatively long period....The ethos of a school is a more self-conscious expression of specific types of objectives in relation to behaviour and values.”* As Prosser (1999, p9) indicates *“future studies of school culture would be better served by avoiding reliance on definitions and by placing greater emphasis on clarifying its meaning within the context of use.”* He advances this stance by addressing the diversity of meaning in terms of the development of conceptual rather than theoretical frameworks, which he sees *“as attempts to conceive models of school culture using either a ‘common sense’ approach or are loosely based on a theoretical stance which act as a vehicle for discussing school culture”*. To facilitate this in practice he devised a model which uses four broad categories within which school culture could be discussed (Prosser (1991) in Prosser (1999, p7-9)) :

1. A wider culture

Schools do not exist in a vacuum and national and local cultures are impregnated into and are part of all schools....Studies that draw on the ‘wider culture’ emphasise the relationship between a nation’s culture and the culture of its schools.

Within the independent preparatory school sector there are issues of the role that both national and local cultures play in its development. Johnson (1987) raised the question of whether “*private education and public education in Britain should be seen as interconnected, or totally separate, mutually antipathetic, systems ?*” It can be argued that with the advent of the National Curriculum and its adoption by the schools investigated in this study there is evidence to support the notion that the preparatory school sector has become more interconnected with the state system. After all many of the children who attend independent preparatory schools do not necessarily continue in independent education but go on to study at state secondary schools, hence the necessity to ensure delivery of a common curriculum. However, there is also a further consideration worth noting here, and that is, that within the independent preparatory school sector the term ‘wider culture’ could possibly be equally applied at the micro level, hence one of the aims of this study is to identify the presence, or otherwise, of the ‘wider culture’ of Southern Schools and the role it plays, or has played, in determining the culture of the individual schools within the group.

2. A generic culture

Teacher folklore has it that ‘all schools are the same but different’. Generic culture is used as a ‘flag of convenience’ to describe the similarities of schools in terms of norms, values, rituals and traditions, which constitute taken-for-granted schooling. Generic culture not only differentiates schools from other institutions such as hospitals, prisons etc., but also other educational institutions such as colleges, private/independent, high and elementary schools.

One of the aims of this study is to identify the culture of each of the schools and to identify both similarities and differences between them. As part of this research there is a need to identify whether any changes in culture have been perceived by the staff since acquisition. This will necessitate the need to identify the culture pre and post acquisition. It will be interesting to discover whether the culture of the schools pre-acquisition were similar hence supporting this view that there is such a ‘generic independent preparatory school culture’ and that other than each schools’ unique features one independent preparatory school is much like another.

3. A unique culture

Since schools generally possess a degree of freedom of choice and ability to interpret and reinterpret generic culture then it follows that they are able to create

their own unique culture as an integrated element of the whole culture. This is supported by Handy's view (1990, p83) in that "each school is different from every other school."

We have seen from previous sections and the work of Janis Griffiths (in Walford (1991)) that there is a degree of uniqueness attributable to independent schools, and in particular independent preparatory schools. The question of a unique culture follows on from the previous section and questions whether the individual schools within the study have a unique culture attributable to their ability to effectively do as they please. Within this study interest will lie in whether this flexibility was still present post-acquisition or whether the schools within Southern Schools found themselves engulfed in corporate/organizational culture and have effectively lost that element of 'uniqueness'.

4. A perceived culture

This takes two forms; 'on-site perceived culture' which describes staff and the casual visitors' view of a school which reflects elements of its unique culture; and 'off-site' perceived culture which describes an outsider's view of a school.

Within this review we have considered the writings of a number of authors on the subject of culture (Hofstede (1980); Schein (1990), Handy (1993)), all of whom propound their 'perception' of culture. It could therefore be argued that all forms of culture are in fact perceived and that even within Prosser's works the identification of the wider, generic and unique cultures are in reality only other forms of perceived culture since their presence will rely on the perception of the observer ! It is this meaning of 'school culture' more than any which plays a pivotal role in the basis of this study, since it is the staffs' perception of a school's culture and whether that culture has changed through acquisition which is explored.

The use of perception in identifying school culture has been applied by a number of authors and researchers, such as Hargreaves (1995), who devised a technique for mapping school culture. In the context of the technique, mapping is the process by which school staff are able to identify the existing culture, the position they would ideally like the school to be in and to chart the direction in which they perceive the culture to be actually moving. Whilst the methodology involved in this technique is discussed at length in Chapter 3 it is important to outline and understand the 'types' of school culture it helps identify.

Based on the two dimensions of social cohesion (expressive domain) and social control or coercion (instrumental domain) respectively, and the degree (high to low) of each within the school, Hargreaves (ibid) identified four distinct cultural types as outlined below :-

1 A formal school culture (Low, High)

This type of school has high social control, with exceptional pressure on students to achieve learning goals, including exam performance, and perhaps athletic prowess, but with weak social cohesion between staff and students. School life is orderly, scheduled, disciplined. Within the work ethic no time is wasted : interference with instrumental goal achievement is ruthlessly excised. Homework is regularly set and marked : tests are common. To those who succeed in the school's goals, there are prizes and prestige. Expectations are high, with low toleration for those who do not live up to them. To staff the head-teacher appears cold and distant, even authoritarian; to students, staff appear aloof, strict and unapproachable. Each side displays little warmth, whilst valuing institutional loyalty. Social support for students comes from informal peer groups that tend, because of students' socio-emotional isolation from teachers, to be strong and influential, whether pro-school or anti-school. The tone of the institution is custodial: in hard forms (a military academy) it could be described as coercive; in softer versions (the grammar school) as a 'tight ship' fostering 'traditional values', reflecting the institutional inheritance from the nineteenth century.

In reading this highly descriptive outline it is possible to see strong correlation between this 'formal' culture and the 'role' culture propounded by Handy & Aitken (1990) which they found to be present in secondary schools. Both are concerned with position and status and the organization/school being very bureaucratic in its management style.

2. A welfarist school culture (High, Low)

The school is relaxed, carefree, cosy. It places high emphasis on informal, friendly teacher-student relations. The focus is on individual student development within a nurturing environment. The educational philosophy is child-centred and relations between head-teacher and staff are held to be 'democratic'. With the aversion to social controls, work pressure is low; academic goals are easily neglected and become displaced by social cohesion goals of social adjustment and life skills. In this undemanding climate of contentment, truancy and delinquency rates are low.

The 'child-centred' primary school or 'caring' inner-city secondary school with a strong pastoral system exemplify this type: staff ask whether they are primarily a teacher concerned with the mastery of academic content, or primarily a social worker of sorts concerned with pastoral care. In this culture the students are happy at the time but in later life look back on their experience with resentment at the teachers' failure to drive them hard enough.

Here too we can see some correlation, although perhaps not so strongly, between this type and Handy & Aitken's 'person' culture. Within the school environment the individual is the pupil and the structure and organization of the school is there to assist them with whatever resources are deemed appropriate.

3. A hot-house school culture (High, High)

In this culture the high instrumental and expressive emphasis creates a frenetic school. All are under pressure to participate actively in the full range of school life. Expectations of both work and personal development are high. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed, being pedagogical experimenters and innovators. In this pervasive intimacy, everyone seems to be under surveillance and control. Teachers and students experience anxiety about failing to achieve instrumental goals and about intrusions into privacy with a consequent reduction in independence, autonomy and individuality. It is a culture that is not coercive or tyrannical: social control is more likely to be exercised over members by challenge and emotional blackmail than by threat of punishment. Since such high control and high cohesion create a sense of institutional oppression, members sometimes feel like 'inmates'.

This type appears to be highly indicative of the 'task' culture that Handy & Aitken (1990) attributed to secondary schools. Here too the goal is to get the job done, to achieve the instrumental goals as a team irrespective of rank or status. Knowledge and ability prevail.

4. A survivalist school culture (Low, Low)

This is a culture where both social control and social cohesion are exceptionally weak. For teachers and students the school is close to breakdown - a classic 'at risk' situation. Social relations are poor, teachers striving to maintain basic control and allowing pupils to avoid academic work in exchange for not engaging in misconduct. Lessons move at a leisurely pace; little time or effort is given to academic task. Teachers feel 'on their own', unsupported by the head-teacher and

colleagues in curriculum planning and classroom control: they manage each lesson as best they can. Life is lived a day at a time. Many students feel alienated from their work which bores them, but there are no compensations in warm relationships with their teachers, who enjoy little professional satisfaction. Delinquency and truancy rates are high, as is staff absenteeism, especially of the occasional kind. The ethos is one of insecurity, hopelessness and low morale. There is little, if any, direct correspondence between this type and any of the four organizational types of Handy & Aitken (1990). Perhaps this is not surprising since one can assume that it would be difficult for any organization to exist under such conditions. The most obvious conclusion to reach is that under these circumstances organizational culture has broken down and whatever 'type' was present has now disappeared. From his work Hargreaves (1995) found that few, if any, schools were located at the extremes of these descriptions, and that if such extremes were used then it was the case that most teachers would avoid them as such and place their schools in a position between them, a central school culture whose attributes are not specifically defined. This outcome is of particular importance to the basis of this study due to the very nature of the research and the fact that it is being undertaken in the independent sector. This will enable a future comparison to be made between schools in the state and independent sectors to identify whether this holds true in both cases. Likewise, and despite their work pre-dating that of Hargreaves (ibid), Torrington & Weightman (1989) were able to identify different types of culture within the four schools they studied which fit very closely with these types. Although they did not attempt to categorize them there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Valley High (p20) is an example of a school with relatively high cohesion and control (hothouse); Summerfield High (p22) shows itself to be high in cohesion and low in control (welfarist); William Barnes (p24) is seen as low in cohesion and high in control (formal); whilst Ridley (p25) is clearly low both in terms of cohesion and control (survivalist). If we are prepared to accept the works of Hargreaves (ibid), Prosser (ibid), and Torrington & Weightman (ibid) then we must also accept that the culture of a school is not only unique but dynamic too, since there is reference to the management of change, hence cultural change. This concept introduces the need to question the 'broad-brush' approach in classifying school culture under Hargreaves' categories, a critique of this methodology can be found in chapter 3. Prosser (1999, p14)) summarises his review of the evolution of school culture research by implying that there is still much work to be done in order to gain a full understanding

of the role of culture within the school environment. In doing so he makes reference to Nias (1989, p143) who outlined five developments which were considered to be essential if the understanding of school culture was to be advanced :

1. A clearer definition of the term.
2. Greater attention to the beliefs and values at the heart of all cultures.
3. Detailed studies of particular school cultures and the creation of appropriate typologies.
4. Empirical and conceptual accounts of school cultures which allow for micro-political activity and internally initiated change.
5. Detailed explorations of the links between particular cultures and macro-societal forces.

The evidence so far indicates that in the period leading to the end of the twentieth century a substantial effort has been applied in addressing most of these developments, although we do not yet appear close to agreeing on definition.

2.6 Business climate

There is one further phrase which needs to be considered within the context of this study - 'business climate'. The word climate has been specifically introduced here to draw a distinction between the culture of a school and the climate which exists within it, or within which it exists. The use of appropriate terms has already been discussed as a major issue (p25) which, without justification of its selection, can lead to confusion. A problem here is whether, in general, independent preparatory schools are classifiable as businesses on a stand-alone basis ? To address this let us first consider how Longman's Dictionary of the English Language defines the term 'business' :

*Business - " a usually commercial activity engaged in as a means of livelihood....
a commercial or sometimes an industrial firm or enterprise."*

Longman (1988)

Handy and Aitken argue that :

"A school is not a business, but it is important for a school to work out what kind of a business it is.....what kind of organization it is".

(Handy&Aitken, 1990, p45)

Some may argue that in saying this they are referring to schools within the state education sector and, by default, independent preparatory schools should be viewed separately. It is true that independent preparatory schools charge fees, and are the primary livelihood of the owners, however, it can be argued that to classify them as businesses is inappropriate for the following reasons :-

1. Other than the proprietor, who is usually also the head-teacher, there are generally no other shareholders or investors in the school. That is not to say there are no other stakeholders.
2. The proprietors/head-teachers do not themselves classify the school as a business, since they do not see the education of children as a business. Neither they or their staff refer to the pupils or parents as customers.
3. Throughout the literature the term 'business' is seldom, if ever, used in describing such establishments.
4. Both ISIS and IAPS agree that the majority of these schools are run as charitable trusts. This status draws an important distinction between these schools and those investigated within this study.

“ Parents may perceive a school which has charitable status as being different in kind from an independent school run as a business.”

(Johnson, 1987, p79)

5. Where 4 is not the case the schools can be considered as 'Not For Profit' (NFP) organizations, in that any excess of income over expenditure is re-invested into the school, ie no dividends are paid to shareholders.

What then of climate ? The Longman Dictionary of the English Language defines climate as :

Climate - “ the prevailing state of affairs or mood of a group or period.”

Longman (1988)

It therefore appears prudent to define the meaning under which the term '*business climate*' is used throughout this study.

'The prevailing state of affairs or mood of a usually commercial activity.'

This is important since one of the issues addressed in this study is whether independent preparatory schools which have been the subject of corporate acquisition have, as a

result of that acquisition, been exposed to influences more usually associated with the 'business' world. Or perhaps to consider whether corporate involvement in the independent preparatory school sector demands that it now be classified as a business ?

2.7 Conclusions

Where then does this leave the researcher or practitioner in their quest to define, identify and categorize culture, be it individual, organizational, corporate, or school ?

One of the most comprehensive set of conclusions uncovered by this review are probably those proffered by Mallory & Paton (1999, p 38-39) :

- Culture is *real* : organizations differ in the cognitive, emotional and interpersonal orientations they expect from their members. These differences are often subtle, but values and beliefs and the way employees communicate and relate have a degree of coherence and persistence; and they can, to an extent, be explained by such circumstances as the nature of the work, the influence of founders, or particular events.
- Culture is *pervasive*, but to a great extent implicit. We may be familiar with the culture of our organization yet not aware of it - just as we 'know' our personalities but cannot easily describe them (and we may be mistaken in some respects).
- Culture makes a *difference* - in the very practical sense it may be more or less appropriate to the work being undertaken. Culture can inhibit communication and problem-solving or convey values that are highly functional for performance. Likewise, some people will fit into a *particular culture more easily than others*. So managers (head-teachers) cannot just ignore culture.
- Culture is not just '*out there*', a characteristic of organizations; it is also '*in here*', it is how we, as members of an organization, deal with each other and think about our work. We reproduce the culture of our organization and perhaps also help it evolve by the way we conform to or adjust the unwritten rules.
- Culture is '*multifaceted*', and there is no best way to describe it. We have to try different approaches and models to see what insights each provides.

As we move on to the next chapter to consider the more practical difficulties the researcher may encounter when undertaking school culture research we should perhaps spend a few minutes reflecting on the following thoughts :

“ Culture lies within the control of those who participate in them; leaders and the members together make their own school.”

(Webb & Vulliamy, 1996, p456, quoting Nias; in Prosser, 1990, p10)

“ Schools are one of society’s key devices for adapting to the future.”

(Handy & Aitken, 1990, p31)

“ Education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself.”

(John Dewey)

“ culture is not a substitute for life.....but a key to it.”

(Anon)

3. DESIGN and METHODOLOGY

3.1 Structure of chapter

This third chapter critiques the methodology of the study in terms of the theoretical and practitioners' position on the usage of the methods adopted. Following a general introduction to designing a research project the pilot study is discussed along with any recommended improvements proposed. From this point, the chapter proceeds to outline the strategy employed, the sampling technique, data collection, data recording, and data analysis methods utilised. Application of a multiple-site case study approach, the adaptation of the Cambridge tool (Hargreaves, 1995) for mapping 'school culture', and the use of semi-structured interviews are discussed in depth. Finally the chapter discusses some of the ethical and practical dilemmas of undertaking such research within the environment of busy, small independent preparatory schools.

3.2 Introduction to research design

One of the many questions which needs to be addressed when designing a research project is in relation to the type of research and data to be explored; is it to be quantitative, qualitative or perhaps a combination of both? For many years there has been the assumption that these two methods are opposites and hence may not be used as part of the same study. However, Hammersley (1992) argues that this is no longer the case and that the two methods can be, and are, used within the same investigation. To support this he outlines a number of ways in which the differentiation between qualitative and quantitative methods have been shown to be of minimal value, even resulting in disingenuous conclusions :-

1. Both qualitative and quantitative researchers use terms which relate to numbers.
2. Claims of the qualitative researchers regarding perceived falseness of quantitative data are ill-founded, in that both methods involve a degree of artificialness as a result of the settings under which the research is conducted. His argument is that both types of researchers are responsible for 'setting-up' the environment for data collection.
3. He challenges the belief that qualitative researchers are only concerned with meaning, and that quantitative researchers are only concerned with behaviour, by arguing that in reality they are not mutually exclusive.

4. He further argues that both qualitative and quantitative researchers use each others methods to a greater or lesser degree. He believes that even the most hardened 'natural science' researcher adopts an element of the 'social scientist', and vice-versa.

He furthers this by arguing that *“one of the principal differences between qualitative and quantitative research is the process for generating and testing theory. Qualitative researchers have a natural tendency to analyse their data more inductively, ie they move from simple observation through empirical generalisation and then on to theory.”*

Whereas *“quantitative researchers are more deductive using a set of logical rules to deduce that from their findings specific conclusions will naturally follow.”*

It will become evident during this chapter that the chosen research methodologies lie within the qualitative approach although an element of quantitative research is also present.

One of the more critical stages in any research project, whatever the scale or scope of the research, is to ensure that the whole process is designed and planned in advance of any research activities being undertaken. Most marketers will immediately recognize the simple mnemonic known as 'The Seven P's' - **Product Price Place Promotion People Process and Physical** evidence, this researcher has adapted this mnemonic for ensuring that adequate and appropriate planning is performed well in advance of any research being undertaken :-

'Proper Planning and Preparation Prevents Potentially Poor Performance.'

The sensitivity of undertaking research within the independent preparatory school sector dictates that such an approach be adhered to. Research, however, can mean many different things to diverse groups of people depending upon its context and the discipline under which it is performed, eg scientific, technical, marketing, educational etc. Whilst meaning may be implicit by the very nature of the research it should also be explicitly defined to ensure that no misunderstanding or misinterpretation is inherent in the design of the methodology.

“Research is best conceived as the process of arriving at dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data.”

(Mouly, 1978 in Cohen & Manion, 1996, p40)

“Research in education is a disciplined attempt to address questions or solve problems through the collection and analysis of primary data for the purpose of description, explanation, generalization and prediction.”

(Anderson 1998, p4)

These definitions imply that success in educational research lies to a great extent in the ability of researchers to discipline themselves when undertaking data collection and analysis, hence supporting the need to implement a seven P’s approach. In order to achieve this success it is of critical importance to undertake an extensive examination of the techniques for data collection that are available and to select the method(s) most appropriate, based upon the needs of the research and the resources which can be allocated. In support of this, Gill & Johnson (1997, p13-16), identify six key areas of concern :

1. Access

The question of access to the research base needs a high degree of consideration, particularly where that research base is located in the domain of a group of working schools. The problem of access may vary depending upon the position of the researcher within the context of the unit to be researched. An insider may gain easier access but the outsider is likely to gain a higher degree of trust due to their perceived impartiality by the participants. Within this study access did not present any major barriers to the research by ensuring that the ‘gatekeepers’, as discussed previously, were kept fully aware at all times of the purpose and progress of the research.

2. Achievable in the time available

As with any research there is an inevitable need to complete the project within a pre-determined time limit, more often than not this translates to sooner rather than later. One of the major failings in achieving this goal is a tendency to underestimate the time required to complete the project. Writers on the subject of research methodology generally identify time as being the variable which if overlooked can lead to the build up of unnecessary pressures during the life-span of the research.

“Research - particularly in its last stages, when everything has to be brought together and submitted by a due date - is notoriously a stressful business, and few of us get through it without experiencing moments of despair, panic, acute anxiety, rage, or tears.”

(Orna & Stevens, 1997, p74)

Much of this is self-induced by the researcher neglecting to take into account the complexities of undertaking research and the numerous stages that must be gone through.

“Many studies are jeopardized by failing to recognize all the various steps required and by not allocating time and resources to accommodate these requirements.”

(Anderson, 1996, p76)

This study was allocated a minimum period of two years for the completion of all stages of the research process including data collection, data analysis and the final writing up of the findings, and was considered to be adequate by the researcher.

3. Symmetry of potential outcomes

It is also important for the researcher to recognize and accept that whatever the outcomes of their research the results will be of equal value, that is to say that even if the research question is not answered in the positive, that in itself will constitute a contribution to the field of study; this is known as symmetry of potential outcomes. Given the lack of research in the area covered by this study it is the belief of the researcher that even should this occur the project will demonstrate a degree of symmetry in its outcomes by virtue of the research undertaken.

4. Student capabilities and interest

Whilst this may at first sight appear to be somewhat obvious it is one of the major reasons why many research projects fail to reach completion. Students who elect to study areas of research outside their capability and interest are likely to find it difficult to sustain the motivation necessary

to complete such a project. It is essential therefore for the student to pay particular attention to their own abilities and interests to ensure they complement the proposed research topic.

5. Financial support

Financial support can be of the greatest concern in research studies, such as this, where the researcher is acting independently of any sponsoring organization. It is a limiting factor, both in terms of the cost of undertaking research and the need to dedicate quality time to it. By definition it is likely to restrict many aspects of the research project since the lack of sufficient funds to cover travelling and day-to-day expenses may be detrimental to the success of the study. Within this study the major expense incurred was that of the course fees, fifty percent of these were paid for by the researcher's employer with the remaining fifty percent and all sundry expenses paid out of pocket. This did not have any adverse affect on the ability of the researcher to carry out the study.

6. Value and scope of the research

This is an area of concern which cannot be addressed until completion of the project and the undertaking of some form of assessment to judge the value of the outcomes. However, it is important for the researcher to be aware of this concern and to ensure that they are not deterred from undertaking the project simply because they do not believe it has any value or scope. The extent to which this applies will rely heavily on the reason for undertaking the research. As Gill & Johnson state :

“ In projects which form part of taught courses the value of the work may usually be judged primarily by its suitability in demonstrating sufficient research competence or problem-solving ability to fulfil the criteria judged necessary to pass the course. For higher degree by research both problem-solving ability and research competence are needed and, additionally, the findings should add to the general body of knowledge - without necessarily being of value to the community at large. ”

(Gill & Johnson, 1997, p15)

One recognized method of assessing these concerns and hence the viability of proceeding with the research is for the researcher to plan and implement a small-scale, pilot study. The benefits and purpose of such a study are well documented enabling the researcher to concentrate on the research objectives whilst simultaneously evaluating the methodology without the need to commit large amounts of both financial and time resources. The outcomes of the pilot study can then be used to modify the methodology, where appropriate, prior to undertaking the full-scale research study.

3.3 The pilot study

As previously stated the pilot study forms an important and integral part of the research process allowing the researcher to test the validity of the research questions and the methodology employed. The pilot was undertaken as part of the taught element assessment of the research degree for which this thesis has been submitted. At the time of its undertaking it had not been specifically planned as a pilot and was not considered as such until the main topic of this thesis had been developed. In fact it was the pilot study that stimulated the interest in the area and led to the development of the full study. This did not cause any problems since the study had been performed as a potential pilot study on the advice of the faculty responsible for the assessment. Its original purpose was an attempt to identify and categorize the culture of a small, independent school as perceived by the teaching staff. Whilst the school formed part of Southern Schools Group Ltd it was chosen more for its convenience and accessibility. The pilot study was undertaken during December 1997 and an outline account is reproduced below. The resultant paper from the study remains unpublished but readers wishing to make reference to the study should consult 'Institutional Culture in an Independent School - a case study' (Williams, 1998, University of Southampton).

3.3.1 Very Close School

Very Close School is a medium-size, independent, co-educational day school catering for approximately five hundred pupils between the age of three and sixteen. Founded in 1953 it has been at its present location situated in a village on the south coast of England since 1983. It was acquired by Southern Schools in 1991 and the present headmaster was appointed shortly after. The school is unique within Southern Schools in that it is the only school that consists of both junior and senior departments. It also includes a pre-school, or kindergarten, but

as with the other schools this did not form part of the study.

3.3.2 Study methodology

For the purposes of this study the techniques utilised were based upon ease of use and took into account that the researcher would not be present during the study. Hence it was important that the sample undertaking the study clearly understood the requirements. To this end a technique from *Mapping Change in Schools - The Cambridge Manual of Research Techniques* (Hargreaves, 1995) was adopted as being a suitable tool with which to undertake the research. In parallel with this and to support, or otherwise, the outcomes of the study a number of photographs were taken in and about the school.

Access to the school was limited and although it was originally envisaged that a number of follow-up interviews with staff would take place it was not possible to do so within the time allocated to the study.

To facilitate access the headmaster of the school was approached with a request to use the school as a pilot project for a possible future longer term study in the field of institutional culture. A meeting between the headmaster and the researcher was arranged and the purpose of the study and its implementation were discussed and agreed. It was also agreed that the staff would be briefed and their cooperation asked for during their regular staff meetings with the headmaster. In the case of the secondary school these were at 08:45 on Monday, with the primary school meeting at the same time on Tuesday. The headmaster felt it would not be possible for the study to be undertaken during the school day with the researcher present and that the best alternative was to leave the cards etc. with the staff for them to complete in their own time. Although this was not totally satisfactory since it removed any form of control and allowed possible collusion between staff it was deemed, for the purposes of the pilot scheme, to be acceptable.

The researcher visited the school on the Monday and Tuesday of a week during December 1997. The purpose of the study and the rationale behind the techniques were outlined to the staff and their participation in the study sought. It was agreed that staff could complete the grids and return them via the head of either the primary or secondary school by the following Monday and Tuesday. It was during the researcher's return visit to the school to collect the results that the

photographs were taken.

Given the small size of the school it was considered appropriate to undertake a one hundred percent sample of the teaching staff. Accordingly eighteen sets of cards and individual record sheets were distributed to senior school staff, and seventeen sets distributed to junior school staff. Given the nature of the study and the researcher's knowledge of the school a high response rate was anticipated and achieved, eighty-three percent from the senior department, eighty-eight percent from the junior department. This relates to three and two non-returns respectively. There was no apparent reason for the non-returns although the researcher suspects this was due to staff mislaying the packs. No staff had shown any apprehension to participating in the study.

Given the small scale and specific objectives of this study, data collection was limited to the returned individual record sheets which form part of the methodology used. Since there was no intention of a comparative analysis between schools, other than between the junior and senior departments within the school no secondary data collection was undertaken.

The individual record sheets were collected, counted and sorted to enable data from the junior and senior departments to be analysed independently prior to combining them. The present and future positions of the both departments were transposed from each individual sheet on to a group aggregate sheet for each department. A further group aggregate sheet was completed which was a combination of the two departments. This strategy allowed the researcher the opportunity to identify and categorize the culture of both departments individually prior to identifying and categorizing the overall school culture. It also allowed for a comparison of the culture between the junior and senior departments to be made. Photographs of areas of the school were taken in order to help support, or refute, the findings of the study.

Data analysis was achieved by categorizing the departments, and the combined school, in accordance with the five quadrants outlined within Hargreaves' (1995) methodology (full descriptions of these categories can be found in Appendix 5 whilst a critique of the method is undertaken later in this chapter), namely :-

Formal

A 'tight ship' fostering 'traditional values'. Exceptional pressures on students to achieve learning goals etc. The old 'grammar school'.

Hothouse

A frenetic school where staff and students alike are under pressure to participate fully in all aspects of school life. High control and cohesion creates a sense of institutional oppression, members sometimes feel like 'inmates'

Welfarist

School is relaxed, carefree, and cosy. High emphasis on informal, friendly teacher-student relations. Child centred and relations between staff and headmaster are democratic.

Survivalist

Social control and cohesion are weak, Both teachers and students feel the school is close to breakdown. Ethos of insecurity, hopelessness and low morale.

Central

Reality, where most teachers will place their school as opposed to taking one of the extreme positions outlined above.

Further analysis was undertaken in two ways - by considering the findings within the context and definitions of the typologies of culture identified within the literature review, and by relating the photographs taken to the views expressed by the staff when completing the grids.

3.3.3 Outcomes and Recommendations

As a result of this study it was possible to determine the culture of not only the whole school but of the different cultures that existed between the primary and secondary departments. Whilst the primary department was found to be in the centre of the grid the senior department was predominantly of the 'formal

culture'. For the future direction of the departments there was significant shift identified with the junior department looking to become more 'hothouse' and the senior department wanting to move to a more 'central' position. There may of course have been numerous reasons as to why these results were obtained, and it would have been useful for this to have been followed up to further investigate likely causes. One potential cause could have been because many staff in the junior department had been newly appointed and one consideration is that they had insufficient exposure to the culture to be able to make a reasoned judgement. There are also a number of weaknesses with the use of the Hargreaves' tool which could have led to the results. Firstly the quadrant descriptors are quite extreme and hence some of the staff may have had difficulty in locating the culture, or perhaps were not prepared to accept, that their department fitted into such neat boxes. Secondly a number of staff from both departments commented afterwards that they felt the grid was too coarse with some staff unable to indicate precisely enough their preferences. It seems that these two criticisms are linked and some adjustment to the grid could be made in order to alleviate these concerns. In order to substantiate the findings some attempt was made at supporting, or refuting, the findings by the use of visual research. The rationale behind this approach is well documented as evidenced in the work of Michael Ball :

“ As a research method, ethnographic fieldwork is organized around participation in, and observation of, socio-cultural arrangements and behaviour. In practice, whilst ethnographic fieldwork is being carried out, it is embedded in an environment which is powerfully visual, and exhibits a distinct visual availability....As a research product, ethnography adopts primarily a textual form of representation. A programmatic argument fashioned...is that an ethnographic variant could be sponsored which makes an investigative topic of cultures' visual availability.”

(Ball in Prosser, 1998, p131)

A number of photographs eg of the trophy cabinet, notice boards, and procedures were taken to include visual representation of both the formal and pastoral

culture of the school. However, on reflection, these were considered to be insufficient and hence the study findings were not fully triangulated. The failure of this approach can be partially attributed to the growing concern among the population regarding photographic images being taken of children within school by people from outside the school staff. Whilst disappointing this was not seen as too great a problem since the study did serve as a very good pilot scheme on which to build for a future, fuller research project. As a direct result of the pilot study a number of improvements and modifications have been identified :-

1. Undertake a fuller briefing of staff to ensure their complete understanding of the purpose of the study and the processes involved.
2. Refine the Hargreaves instrument from an eight by eight matrix to a sixteen by sixteen matrix. This is aimed at overcoming the problems identified by the staff and will hopefully allow respondents the opportunity to define more closely the present, ideal and future cultures
3. Follow-up the initial findings through interview, either in small groups of like-minded respondents, or on an individual one-to-one basis, with a view to obtaining verbal confirmation of the findings.
4. Reconsider the appropriateness of the use of visual research within the school environment.

The results of the pilot project played an intrinsic part in the decision to proceed with a full study covering a number of other schools within the group, and in developing and implementing the appropriate research strategy to be employed.

3.4 Strategy employed

3.4.1 Dilemmas in choosing method and strategy

One of the many dilemmas facing the social science or educational researcher is the decision regarding which of the plethora of research methods and strategies they should employ. Whilst some will argue that “ *it is perfectly possible to carry out a worthwhile investigation without having detailed knowledge of the various approaches to or styles of educational research.* ” (Bell, 1999, p7) others will argue that at doctoral level “ *in undertaking a piece of research, inevitably the researcher must choose between these different approaches in making an area of*

interest researchable.” (Gill & Johnson, 1997, p128). These two views differ in that Bell sees the method and strategy as secondary to the research, whilst Gill & Johnson imply that unless the method and strategy are fully understood then valuable and valid research, particularly at doctoral level, is improbable. Although there is apparent disagreement on the depth of understanding required they, along with others, all agree that :

“ the social researcher is faced with a variety of options and alternatives and has to make strategic decisions about which to choose.”

(Denscombe, 1999, p3)

There is no right or wrong in this decision since each piece of research will differ and hence the importance lies in the ability of the researcher to select, and justify, the most appropriate method and strategy based upon their defining of the unit of research.

“ the crucial thing for good research is that the choices are reasonable and that they are made explicit as part of any research report.”

(Denscombe, 1999, p3)

Similar dilemmas are to be found in the type of data or information to be collected, and the researcher must consider this when selecting and implementing their strategy.

“ different kinds of information about man and society are gathered most fully and economically in different ways, and the problem under investigation properly dictates the methods of investigation...This view seems to be implied in the commonly used metaphor of the social scientists’ kit of tools to which he turns to find the methods and techniques most useful to the problem at hand.”

(Trow, 1957, p33 in Gill & Johnson, 1997, p134)

It is not within the realms of this study to debate the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments since there are sufficient texts available which undertake this task far more competently and comprehensively than is possible here. However, it is

important to have an understanding of the philosophical, social, political and practical influences on the researcher's conceptualization of the research problem and hence their selection of appropriate methods and strategy. Gill and Johnson (1997, p152) summarize their findings, reproduced in figure 3.1 below which enhances the discussion on their six key considerations discussed previously in section 3.2.

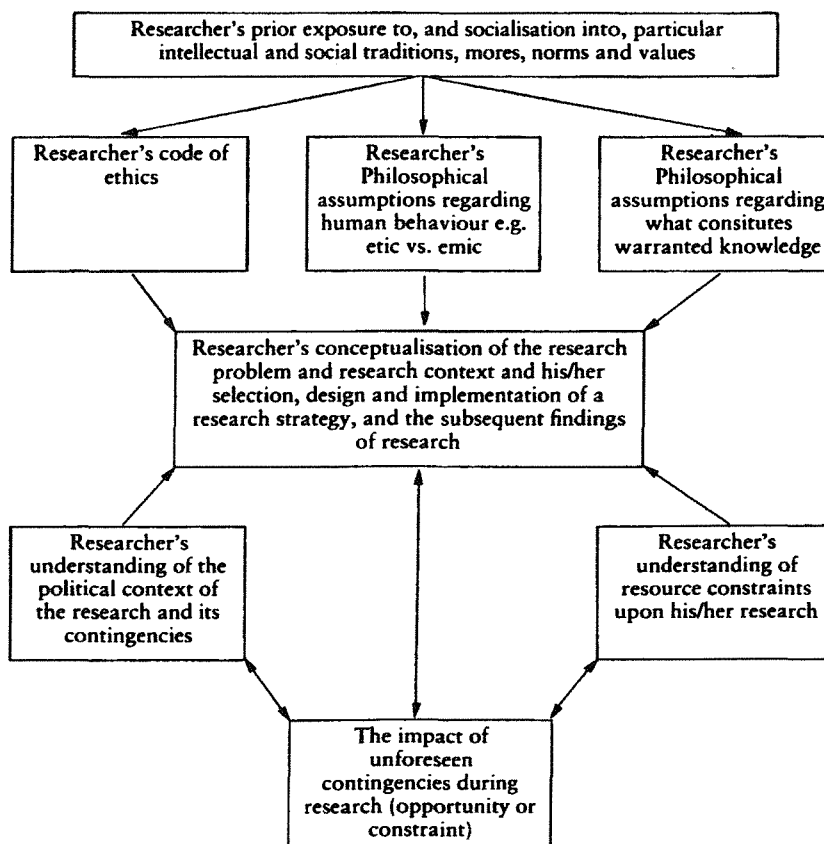


Fig 3.1 : The impact upon research of philosophical, social, political and practical dilemmas

This diagram further highlights the dilemmas facing the researcher in their choice of method and strategy, from a practical, rather than simply a theoretical context. This is further reinforced by the view that

“ dilemmas are to be found at all levels of the research process : strategic, design and methodological.” (McGrath, 1982 in Gill & Johnson, 1997, p154).

There is no simple solution, no single method or strategy which can be said to be the correct and proper way of conducting research. As Morgan (1983, p380) states *“ we should accept all research strategies as having something to offer...”* That is not to say that anything goes but implies that the researcher should be

looking to employ more than one method to ensure reliability and validity of the research findings.

Many of these concerns have already been addressed elsewhere within this, and previous chapters, including the understanding of the resource constraints and unforeseen contingencies. This study has been planned taking into account all of the factors raised by Gill & Johnson and the success of this planning can be evidenced within the findings of the research. From their research Gill and Johnson reached the conclusion that the consensus between writers was to recommend a ‘multimethod’ approach :

“ by multimethod we imply a strategy that requires not only a convergences of substantive findings derived from the diversity of methods of study but also debate about the contribution of each approach used: debate that is possible only if a detailed methodological justification is available to students of the research.”

(Gill & Johnson, 1997, p156)

In an attempt to alleviate the dilemma and to illustrate the possible choices available to the researcher Gill & Johnson devised a matrix, see figure 3.2 below, where they ‘fit’ four strategies into the quadrants and the axes represent their findings derived from the literature.

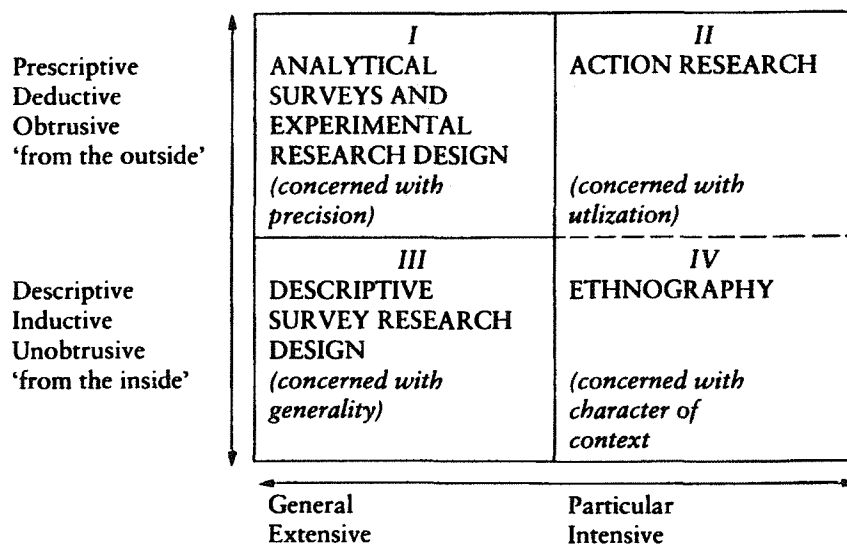


Fig 3.2 : Choosing research strategies

“ The nature of the dilemma faced by the researcher is therefore clear, for the experimental researcher is concerned primarily with precision, the survey methodologist with generality, the ethnographer with the character of the particular context and the action researcher with issues of utilization.”

(Gill & Johnson, 1997, p155)

It is also worth noting the words of Becker (1965, p602-603) quoted by Gill & Johnson, which still hold true to this day :

“ As every researcher knows there is more to doing research than is dreamt of in philosophies of science, and texts in methodology offer answers to only a fraction of the problems one encounters. The best laid research plans run up against unforeseen contingencies in the collection and analysis of data; the data one collects may prove to have little to do with the hypothesis one sets out to test; unexpected findings inspire new ideas. No matter how carefully one plans in advance, research is designed in the course of its execution. The finished monograph is the result of hundreds of decisions, large and small, made while the research is under way and our standard texts do not give us procedures and techniques for making those decisions....It is possible, after all, to reflect on one's difficulties and inspirations and see how they could be handled more rationally the next time around. In short one can be methodological about matters that earlier had been left to chance and improvisation and thus cut down on the area of guesswork.”

(Gill & Johnson, 1997, p154)

It is apparent that this study falls within the fourth (IV) quadrant and is concerned with the specifics of a single group of ‘case schools’, but what is it about the study aims that made the use of a case study approach most suitable ?

3.4.2 Use of the Case Study

In addressing this last question it is perhaps worthwhile re-iterating the aims of this study in order to put the use of a case study approach into context :

1. What is the 'culture' of each of the schools studied ?
2. What, if any, are the similarities and differences between these 'cultures' ?
3. Have the staff or head-teachers perceived any 'cultural' changes since each school was acquired by the group ?
4. Is there any perception by the staff or the head-teachers of the emergence of 'corporate culture' or 'business climate', within the schools ?

These aims imply that in order to examine them sufficiently the research will necessitate the adoption of a case study approach by virtue of the need to examine each aim independently of the others and in depth. This stance is further supported by Stake (1995, p4) who argues that :

“ Case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case.”

Denscombe (1999, p32) argues that the aims of case study research in conjunction with the research strategy employed should characteristically emphasize:-

1. The depth of study rather than the breadth of study

The aims of the study are quite specific and their intentions are to gain a unique insight into the culture of each of the schools as perceived by the staff. By adopting a case study approach the research was able to be far more probing than would have been possible if a wider sample survey had been undertaken.

2. The particular rather than the general

The adoption of a case study approach has allowed the research to focus on a few instances (4) of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences or processes occurring in those particular instances.

3. Relationships and processes rather than outcomes and end-products

In order to understand the final aim of the study it is firstly necessary to understand the preceding aims and then to understand how they are all

linked. Here, the question is not only whether a corporate or business culture has developed in the schools, but also to identify what events have occurred which have led to that development, or not.

4. An holistic view rather than isolated factors

This follows on from the previous point in that it is not possible, nor desirable to consider culture in isolation, an issue which we have already discussed in previous chapters. The case study approach allows the researcher to deal with the case as a whole and to perhaps identify for example how corporate acquisition - a single factor - has affected school culture.

5. Natural settings rather than artificial situations

The schools exist, the culture whatever it may be is there, nothing has been generated for the specific purposes of the study. It was there before the research, and will still be there long after the study is completed.

6. Multiple sources rather than one research method.

There has already been discussion of the benefits of the use of multiple sources and methods in the previous section (3.3.1). One of the strengths of a case study approach is the flexibility it gives the researcher in identifying the most appropriate methods for conducting the research. Within this project the adoption of a case study approach has facilitated the complementary use of the Hargreaves' (1995) tool along with one-to-one interviews.

One further driver of the decision to adopt a case study approach in this project was the success, albeit limited, of the pilot study. The pilot itself took the form of a single-site case study and it therefore seemed appropriate to extend this approach and adopt a multiple-site case study. To justify this further we need to consider what a case study involves :

“ A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.”

(Yin, 1994, p23)

Within the field of social science and educational research the case study approach has become more widely used and is recognized as being “ *...something of a boom industry...* ” (Cohen & Manion, 1996, p107).

“ Education is a process and there is need for research methods which themselves are process-oriented, flexible and adaptable to changes in circumstances and an evolving context. For such situations, the case study method is often appropriate.”

(Anderson, 1996, p157)

“ The use of case studies has become extremely widespread in social research, particularly with small-scale research. When researchers opt for a case study approach they buy into a set of related ideas and preferences which, when combined, give the approach its distinctive character.”

(Denscombe, 1999, p30)

Denscombe (1999, p33) propounds that there are a number of ways in which the case study can be used within educational research, and that the selection of cases can be made in several ways :

1. Selection on the basis of ‘suitability’

“ A good case study requires the researcher to defend the decision by arguing that the particular case selected is suitable for the purpose of the research, and there are broadly speaking four grounds on which this can be justified.”

Typical instance - selection based on the principal that the case is typical of any other case that may have been selected for the purposes of the research, and hence the findings from the research may be generalized. It has already been outlined that this is not the scenario within this study. Whilst the schools themselves may be typical of other independent preparatory schools there is insufficient evidence to support the group of schools as

being typical of other groups.

Extreme instance - based on the assumption that the case is in fact not typical, that for some reason it is outside what may usually be called normal. As for the above there is insufficient evidence to suggest that this specific case study was selected on the basis of being atypical.

Test-site for theory - applicable where the case study is to be used for the purpose of theory-testing as well as theory-building. Enables the researcher to predict the outcomes. Not the reason for adopting a case study approach here.

Least likely instance - the case is selected for the purpose of testing the validity of the theory on the premise that it occurs in a case where it may be least expected. As for the previous basis this study has no stated aim for testing or validating theory.

2. Selection on a 'pragmatic basis'

" There are times when case studies are selected for reasons which seem to fall short of the high ideals of scientific research. The newcomer to research should be warned against relying on any such pragmatic reasons as the principal or the sole criterion for selecting a case. Having said this, in the real world of social research there are often elements of such pragmatism which can be detected just beneath the veneer of scientific justification. They are in the background and, as such deserve some attention. "

a. A matter of convenience - *" in the practical world of research, with its limits to time and resources, the selection of cases is quite likely to include a consideration of convenience. "*

The issues of time and finance have already been covered, as has that of access, and it is the latter of these considerations which played a major role in the selection

process. Whilst travel and sundry expenses were of some concern these were deemed irrelevant if access to the research base could not be achieved.

- b. Intrinsically interesting - *“ if a case is intrinsically interesting then it can prove an attractive proposition. The findings are likely to reach a wider audience and the research itself is likely to be a more exciting experience.”*

Likewise we have already discussed the role that the researcher's interest and motivation plays in the success or otherwise of a research project. The fact that the study was initiated as a direct result of the researcher's own interest in the area also played a major role in the selection process. Prior to finalising the area to be researched a number of alternative projects had been considered and eliminated on a comparison basis where the criteria included interest and resources.

3 Selection on the basis of 'no real choice'

“ On some occasions, researchers do not really have a great deal of choice when it comes to the selection of suitable cases for inclusion in the investigation. The choice is more or less dictated by circumstances beyond their control.

Not really the case here, since there was some choice initially as to which schools could or should be included in the study, although the final sample was eventually dictated by the unavailability or unwillingness of two schools to participate.

To summarise the basis on which selection was made it is apparent that this was primarily founded on a pragmatic basis with a degree of 'no real, or rather limited choice.'

Both Denscombe (1999, p31) and Anderson (1996, p160) agree that one of the major benefits of opting for a case study approach is the opportunity to make use of multiple sources of data and methods, including, documentation, file data, interviews, site visits, direct observation and physical artefacts for this purpose.

Cohen and Manion (1996, p123) adapt a summary of the advantages propounded by Adelman et al (1980) which they believe enables even the most ardent anti-case study researchers to accept their relevance and appropriateness to educational research :

1. *“ Case study data, paradoxically, is ‘strong in reality’ but difficult to organize. In contrast, other research data is often ‘weak in reality’ but susceptible to ready organization. This strength in reality is because case studies are down-to earth and attention holding, in harmony with the reader’s own experience, and thus provide a ‘natural’ basis for generalization.”*
2. *“ Case studies allow generalizations either about an instance or from an instance to a class. Their peculiar strength lies in their attention to the subtlety and complexity of the case in its own right.”*
3. *“ Case studies recognize the complexity and ‘embeddedness’ of social truths. By carefully attending to social situations, case studies can represent something of the discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants. The best case studies are capable of offering some support to alternative interpretations.”*
4. *“ Case studies, considered as products, may form an archive of descriptive material sufficiently rich to admit subsequent reinterpretation. Given the variety and complexity of educational purposes and environments, there is an obvious value in having a data source for researchers and users whose purposes may be different from our own.”*
5. *“ Case studies are a ‘step to action’. They begin in a world of action and contribute to it. Their insights may be directly interpreted and put to use; for staff or individual self-development, for within-institutional feedback; for formative evaluation; and in educational policy making.”*
6. *“ Case studies present research or evaluation data in a more publicly accessible form than other kinds of research report, although this virtue is to some extent bought at the expense of their*

length. The language and the form of the presentation is hopefully less esoteric and less dependent on specialized interpretation than conventional research reports. The case study is capable of serving multiple audiences. It reduces the dependence of the reader upon unstated implicit assumptions...and makes the research process itself accessible. Case studies, therefore, may contribute towards the 'democratization' of decision-making (and knowledge itself). At its best, they allow readers to judge the implications of a study for themselves."

It would be somewhat biased to consider only the advantages of a case study approach when it is apparent that there are also some disadvantages. Denscombe (1999, p40 - 41) identifies a number of disadvantages of the use of the case study approach :

1. *" The point at which the case study approach is most vulnerable to criticism is in relation to the 'credibility of generalizations' made from its findings. The case study researcher needs to be particularly careful to allay suspicions and to demonstrate the extent to which the case is similar to, or contrasts with, others of its type."*

Within this study great care has been taken to highlight the limitations of the research and to clearly state that no generalizations should be drawn from the study and applied to other groups of independent preparatory schools.

2. *" Unwarranted though it may be, case studies are often 'perceived as producing 'soft' data. The approach gets accused of lacking the degree of rigour expected of social research.... Often, case studies are regarded as all right in terms of providing descriptive accounts of the situation but rather ill-suited to analyses or evaluations. None of this is necessarily justified, but it is a preconception which the case study researcher needs to be aware of, and one which needs to be challenged by careful attention to detail and rigour in the use of the approach."*

Within this study this is clearly not the case. Considerable effort has been applied to the data collection and data analysis to ensure that the case study provides findings appropriate to the rigour expected of educational research at doctoral level.

Other disadvantages identified by Denscombe (ibid) include the difficulty in deciding which data to include and which to exclude, negotiating access to the study base, and the potential for the researcher to influence the investigations by virtue of their presence. All these factors have been addressed in previous chapters of this study. In conclusion it would be a fair assessment to state that within this specific research project the benefits of the case study approach generally outweigh the disadvantages.

3.5 Sampling Technique

Whilst we have previously acknowledged that “ *Case study research is not sampling research...* ” (Stake, 1995, p4) we must still recognize that within a multiple-site case study approach there exists a need to undertake some form of sampling in deciding on who or what is to be studied. As outlined earlier, time is a limiting factor and it is this which generally leads to the need for some form of sampling. In an ideal world it would be desirable to undertake a one hundred percent sample, however, in reality this is seldom possible. There are generally considered to be five broad approaches to sampling - purposeful, random, systematic, theoretic and opportunistic. It is not considered feasible nor desirable within the scope of this study to discuss in detail the strengths and weakness of each of these types since much has already been written on this topic, (see Cohen and Manion (1996, p86-92), Bell (1999, p126-127), Anderson (1996, p196-201) and Denscombe (1999, p11-19)). More important is to outline and justify the chosen methods. Within this study there were two stages of sampling for consideration. The first stage was to identify and select which schools to investigate. The second stage could not be implemented until completion of the initial phase of the research study and involved selecting which staff should be approached for the purposes of follow up interview.

3.5.1 Selecting the schools

The first consideration when planning the study was to define precisely the ‘target population’. In this instance this was determined as a direct result of the pilot project since it was seen as a natural extension. At the time of the study Southern

Schools consisted of approximately nineteen schools of which seven were preparatory, with the remainder being within the nursery or pre-school sector. The study was to form an investigation into the effects of corporate acquisition on the culture of the seven preparatory schools owned and operated by Southern Schools.

This definition of the target population is critical since it clearly identifies what is to be investigated and makes it quite explicit that the study should not be generalized to the independent preparatory school sector as a whole.

For reasons previously outlined Very Close School was excluded from the main study, this left six schools which were deemed suitable for inclusion. The issue of how typical of the schools within the group these were has been discussed previously, hence the question of including non-typical schools did not arise. The use here is of purposeful sampling where the study sets out to learn about specific issues deemed essential to the investigation. Its use is justified on the grounds that the study was aimed at a specific group of schools and was not intended to imply that the findings would be held true across the sector. To ensure a representative sample is investigated the researcher must address the question of what constitutes an adequate size for the sample. A simple question, but one which does not have a corresponding simple answer. Two major factors which generally influence the decision on sample size are those of resources, in terms of time and finance, and the level of accuracy required from the study. The impact of these limitations on the research has already been discussed in previous sections. With these limitations in mind it was initially envisaged that all six schools, ie a one hundred percent sample, could contribute to the study, since this was a relatively small number and the schools were not too geographically distributed. However, due to a number of reasons two of the schools declined to participate. This was not seen to be problematic since within the target group a sixty-six percent sample was considered adequate. Whilst it would be possible to perform a mathematical calculation to justify this stance this is not deemed appropriate here since :

“ In practice, the complexity of the competing factors of resources and accuracy means that the decision on a sample size tends to be based on experience and good judgement rather than relying on a strict

mathematical formula.”

(Hoinville et al, 1978 in Denscombe, 1999, p23)

Hence the four schools outlined in Chapter 1 effectively self-selected themselves by agreeing to participate in the study.

3.5.2 Selecting staff for follow-up interview

Since the study entailed investigating the perception of the staff it was vital that following completion of the first stage of data collection (see 3.6) it was necessary to identify a sample of staff from each school for the purposes of interview. Whilst the number of staff per school is relatively small it would not have been possible, due to time and resource constraints, to interview them all. It was however, considered essential that the head-teachers of the schools were included in the interview sample. The issue of sample size is one which often causes concern among researchers, but as in the broader issue of sampling technique, it can be addressed from a time and resource perspective. A further consideration here, due to the nature of the study, was the availability of staff during the normal working day, and the need not to be seen to be ‘getting under people’s feet’. The criteria for the staff interviews was thus set on a time based limit, allocating forty minutes to the head-teacher interview, and twenty minutes to each staff interview. When setting sample size it is also important to consider response rates since too small a sample coupled with a low response rate can lead to findings which may be highly skewed. The response rates from the initial phase were greater than seventy percent which allowed for the second stage to be appropriately undertaken. The plan was to ensure that all interviews in a school would be completed within the course of a normal working day, allowing for teaching periods and breaks etc. With this in mind the decision was made that in addition to the head-teacher, three members of staff from each school would be interviewed, giving a sample size of approximately thirty three percent of initial respondents. Having determined the sample size one further question had to be addressed - other than the head-teacher who else should be interviewed ? The very nature of the study and the need to maintain confidentiality and anonymity necessitated a random sample approach. A random sample is where each member of the survey group has an equal opportunity of being selected. There are

different ways in which this may be accomplished but, in this case, each member of staff had previously been allocated a computer generated number which identified them and their school. On completion of the first stage of data collection the master list containing these numbers was updated to remove staff who had not responded to the initial survey. From this updated list staff were selected randomly without any reference to their response, this ensured that no bias could be introduced by selecting members of staff who had responded in a particular way.

The two important factors that emerge from the complexities of undertaking sampling, are those of the validity and reliability of the sampling methods. There is no prescribed way in which sampling should be implemented, it is at the discretion of the researcher. However, responsibility for ensuring the appropriateness of the method(s) chosen lies solely with the researcher who needs to be fully aware of the limitations of the sampling and the implications this will have on the outcomes of the study. Considered and justified selection of the sample and methods is essential since these will dictate to a large extent the validity and reliability of the data collected through them. Even though we have argued that a case study does not constitute a sample survey we must still bear in mind that within the schools which form this project a sample survey of staff has been undertaken and hence it seems appropriate to consider the following :

“The main pitfall with sample surveys is that many researchers forget what they are dealing with and consequently begin to assume that the data they have is actual data pertaining to the target population rather than a pale reflection of it.”

(Anderson, 1996, p205)

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Introduction

One of the key success factors of any research project is that it is only as good as the data collected, since the collection of inappropriate or irrelevant data will inevitably lead to incorrect analysis and hence ill-founded conclusions. Research data can be divided into two main categories - ‘primary data’, which is original research data collected by the researcher, and ‘secondary data’, which is data already collected and available. Within the context of this study the data collected

from the schools during both stages of the study is primary data, whilst the literature and other sourced data is considered as secondary data. Secondary data is usually sub-divided into two, dependent upon where the source of the data lies. Internal data is data that is available from within the organization, an example here would be the prospectus for each of the schools contained within the study. External data is data that is available from outside the organization, here this may be regarded as reference to previous publications and research available from libraries and other such sources. It is usual to undertake secondary data collection prior to designing and planning the collection of primary data. Each source of secondary data has its strengths and weaknesses. They are generally easier to obtain, or access, and will involve minimum financial resource, which in turn leads to savings in time and money. However, secondary data may not be able to directly address the research questions being asked, and much of it is likely to be historical and hence of limited value. Primary data collection has the distinct advantage of being specifically designed for and therefore aimed at seeking answers to some clearly defined research questions. Within educational research this may very often be the only way in which the research questions can be answered. However, primary data collection inevitably requires the commitment of both financial and time resources. An important issue in respect of data collection is the need to be aware that prior to deciding on the method of collection it is critical to identify the information needs, ie what information is needed and why? It is only possible to approach the questions of where the information can be found, how it can be collected and what to do with it once collected afterwards. It should also be noted that it is neither likely nor desirable that only one method, or type, of data collection will be undertaken, since they are not mutually exclusive.

There are a number of influencing factors which need to be taken into consideration with respect to data collection. Firstly there is the question of what 'constraints' are present which may affect the extent of data collection possible, and the potential impact these may have on the 'reliability' and 'validity' of the data collected. Whatever the constraints it is of vital importance that every effort is made to ensure the reliability and validity of the data are not brought into question, and that appropriate 'triangulation' of the data is evident. This is particularly relevant where the use of a case study approach has been initiated.

“ The advantages of a particular technique for collecting witnesses’ accounts of an event -triangulation- should be stressed. This is at the heart of the intention of the case study worker to respond to the multiplicity of perspectives present in a social situation. All accounts are considered in part to be expressive of the social position of each informant. Case study needs to represent, and represent fairly, these differing and sometimes conflicting viewpoints. ”

(Adelman et al, 1990 in Cohen and Manion, 1996, p241)

The following sections outline and discuss the data collection methods, secondary and primary, implemented in the undertaking of this study, and the steps taken to ensure triangulation of the primary research data. It should be recognized here that the study set out to investigate the perceptions of staff in respect of the culture and climate changes which may have taken place within their schools since acquisition, and as such no attempt was made to undertake any objective measurement of school culture.

3.6.2 Secondary data collection

Secondary data collection was undertaken through a number of different sources. Prior to an intensive literature search it was deemed necessary to obtain information regarding the four schools which were to form the subject of the study. To facilitate this, a copy of each school’s prospectus, and a staff list, was obtained at the time of the initial visits (see 3.5.3). This data enabled an overview of the schools to be drawn including an understanding of the size, history and more recent developments. From this data it was also possible to determine the level of primary research which would be necessary. Part of the secondary data collection was to identify any existing research which had taken place in the same field. Whilst data was found on cultural research within the state education system there was very little evidence of similar research in the independent preparatory school sector. The search was therefore widened to attempt to identify any parallel research data to which a proxy could be drawn, again this search proved fruitless. This was rather unexpected, although not disappointing, since it gave rise to the opportunity to undertake research in an area not apparently previously investigated. This may have been as a direct result of the

relative newness of the growth of corporate acquisition in the sector, and/or a lack of interest in this area by educational researchers and writers.

A further purpose of secondary data collection is to facilitate the background reading necessary to identify the relevant theoretical underpinning in support of the research area. This form of data collection can be widely undertaken making appropriate use of the tools of research available today. This may include university libraries, city libraries and the potential plethora of data available through the Internet. This form of data collection can seem straightforward but it is necessary to be aware of the pitfalls waiting for the inexperienced researcher to fall into. One of the most common faults with secondary data collection is the quality and relevance of the data collected, it is easy to collect data - but not to collect good data. Whilst assessing the relevance of data is naturally quite subjective it is an essential part of the data collection process, which when performed correctly can alleviate many of the problems, eg data overload, associated with it. The results of this part of the secondary data collection process are evidenced and illustrated in the quality and relevance of the literature review which forms part of this volume. It should not be assumed however that secondary data collection is only undertaken at the outset of the research project. Whilst it is acknowledged that the majority of this data will be collected ahead of primary data collection, it is essential to understand that secondary data collection is an iterative process and is likely to continue well into the primary data collection phase, and probably, beyond.

3.6.3 Primary data collection

Throughout this chapter the need to plan carefully has been continually stressed, this is never more so than prior to undertaking primary data collection and the requirement to define what will be done, when will it be done, and how will it be done? This is particularly so where the methodology and strategy is case study based.

“ Because the case study is part of a contemporary phenomenon, the data collection should ideally be phased so that the researcher is present as major events occur. ”

(Anderson, 1996, p161)

It is important to understand that whilst the secondary research, and hence the literature review examined both the dimensions and types of culture, the primary research focused solely on types of culture. Given this and the need to adopt the recommendation resulting from the pilot study to follow up the identification of each schools' culture with interviews, the primary data collection process was planned and implemented in two distinct phases. However before either phase could be undertaken it was necessary to obtain approval from Southern Schools (previously discussed), and the agreement of individual head-teachers to their school's participation. To facilitate this a personalised letter was sent (October 1998) to the head-teachers of the six preparatory schools giving a very brief overview of the research area and requesting a meeting for the purposes of a fuller discussion. The letters were followed up one week later with a telephone call to the head-teachers with a view to arranging a firm appointment. The response was very good with four of the six agreeing to and confirming a convenient appointment to visit the school, these four meetings took place between 21st October and 11th November 1998. The rationale for these initial visits was to allow the head-teachers to gain a deeper understanding of the research area and the role the school, the staff and they would play in it, should they agree to participate. The outcome of these meetings was very pleasing with all the head-teachers agreeing in principle to participation, subject to the agreement of their staff. It was agreed that the head-teachers would introduce the topic at the next staff meeting and that a further telephone call should be made to ascertain the outcome. Due to the closeness of the end-of-term it was deemed sensible that the next visits would not take place until the commencement of the spring term in January 1999 at the earliest. A reasonable interval between the visits was also seen as necessary to allow for adequate planning and preparation of the initial phase of data collection.

3.6.3.1 The initial phase

As a result of the pilot study the initial phase of primary research was planned around the adaptation and application of Hargreaves' (1995) technique for identifying school culture types. This technique concentrates on staff perception and requires participants to indicate on an Individual Record Sheet (IRS) in the form of an eight by eight,

adapted to a sixteen by sixteen, matrix (see appendix 2), where they perceive the school's present culture, ideal culture, and the direction in which it is moving, to be located based on four descriptions. A full outline of these descriptors, which were also allocated colours to allow easy identification, are included in appendix 3.

However, prior to undertaking the second visits to the schools it was necessary to assemble individual information packs for each member of staff. The questions of confidentiality and anonymity were addressed by allocating each staff member a unique, computer generated, number which made no reference to schools or individuals. A master record was maintained thus enabling identification of returned responses to be made. The number allocation was such that in the event of a member of staff finding another's response they would be unable to identify that person. The contents of the pack included a letter (see Appendix 1) thanking the member of staff for agreeing to participate and giving contact details and instructions; a copy of the IRS; the sheet describing the four types of school culture, and a stamped addressed envelope to facilitate return on completion. The packs were sealed and individually addressed to each member of staff ensuring that their personal number would not be known until they opened their pack. On completion of this preparation the head-teachers of the schools were contacted to arrange a mutually convenient time for a briefing of their staff. These second visits took place between 4th January and 12th February 1999. To facilitate as full as possible understanding of the rationale behind the study these meetings took the form of a formal briefing outlining the research and the use of the method. Overhead transparencies of both the IRS and the descriptions of the culture were prepared in advance and used during the briefings to illustrate their purpose. Any questions, concerns or doubts regarding the study, including those of confidentiality, anonymity, impartiality and sponsorship were also addressed. Generally this was not a problem although there was some suspicion among a group of staff at Newest Preparatory School that there were ulterior motives and that the findings would be used by Southern Schools to implement changes. The members of the meeting were shown the IRS with the corners

highlighted in yellow, green, blue or red to relate to the description cards. The four descriptions of school culture were read out and it was explained that they were being asked to indicate on the IRS where they perceived the culture of the school to be presently, ideally and the direction in which it was actually going. It was stressed that when undertaking this activity they should consider the four descriptions very carefully and indicate the positions accordingly, bearing in mind that the more extreme the culture was, the closer to the corners it should be placed. At the end of the briefing the packs were distributed to the staff with a request that it be returned, as soon as possible, but preferably no later than the half-term break. This was considered important since the requirements would be fresh in their minds and hence a more valid response. A further request was that even if they did not wish to participate, the return should still be made, giving as high a response rate as possible, and to enable a full analysis to be undertaken. The question of what constitutes an acceptable response rate is dependent upon the type of survey method employed, the composition of the respondents and the issues being researched. Market researchers will tell you that it is not unusual for the response rate to be as low as fifteen to twenty percent if a postal questionnaire has been used, whereas personal interviews give a response rate of one hundred percent. Too low a response rate will result in a lack of confidence in the accuracy and reliability of the data collected, and the findings may not be truly representative of the population under investigation . There are a number of actions the researcher can undertake to ensure as high a response rate as possible. Within this study a reminder letter was sent to individual staff members two weeks after the briefing. A further two weeks beyond, and following the receipt of a few outstanding responses, no further action was taken and it was accepted that no additional responses would be received. The response rates achieved were :-

Midway Preparatory School	92%	(11/12)
Nearby Preparatory School	79%	(11/14)
Oldest Preparatory School	77%	(16/21)
Newest Preparatory School	72%	(15/21)

No incomplete IRS's were returned therefore the rates correspond to one, three, five and six non-returns respectively. If we accept that the method used was a form of postal survey then we can see that these response rates were extremely high and hence facilitated a full and representative analysis.

To enable a comprehensive analysis of the data collected in the initial phase and to provide sufficient time and resources for the next phase to be properly planned, it was decided that follow-up interviews would not be undertaken until the beginning of the autumn term of the 1999 school year. There was some concern that by the time these took place some respondents may have forgotten their responses, whilst others may have left the school. However, it was felt this would be a risk which would have to be accepted rather than making a hurried and possibly inaccurate analysis of the first phase data.

3.6.3.2 The second phase

With the analysis of the first phase complete (see chapter 4) it was now possible to progress to planning and conducting the second phase. The purpose of the second phase was two-fold; firstly there was a need to triangulate the findings from the first phase, and secondly to obtain further original, primary data in order to answer the research objectives. As previously discussed, this second phase entailed undertaking a number of follow-up interviews with the head-teachers and members of their staff. The importance of the need to triangulate, and the method for achieving such, are clear since :

“there is no absolute guarantee that a number of data sources that purport to provide evidence concerning the same construct in fact do so...In view of the apparently subjective nature of much qualitative interpretations, validation is achieved when others, particularly the subjects of the research, recognise its authenticity. One way of doing this is for the researcher to write out his/her analysis for the subjects of the research in terms that they will understand, and then record

their reactions to it. This is known as respondent validation."

(McCormick & James, 1983 in Cohen & Manion, 1996, p 241)

Analysis of the first phase data gave rise to a number of questions which needed to be addressed, both in terms of triangulation and development of the study (see appendix 4).

The advantages of interviews eg. depth of information obtainable, flexibility to modify structure or line of enquiry are well documented, as are the disadvantages or areas of concern eg. time consuming in terms of planning, conducting, transcribing and analysis, so it is of extreme importance to take all necessary steps to ensure their success. Bearing in mind the complexities of setting up the interviews and with the information needed clearly defined a number of factors had to be considered and appropriate decisions made :

Who was to be interviewed ?

The sample method has been discussed previously (see 3.4.2) so the issue here was one of gaining the permission and willingness to be interviewed from the selected staff. The head-teachers had agreed to be interviewed during the second visit which meant that it was only now necessary to approach the individual members of staff. The question of anonymity needed to be addressed here since this could not be done without the head-teachers' knowledge as it would be necessary to conduct the interviews during school time. The decision was taken to contact the head-teachers with the names of those selected asking them to approach staff and seek their agreement to interview. The risk here was that some of those approached by the head-teachers may have declined to be interviewed as their anonymity was no longer valid. It was stressed that staff had been selected randomly and that nothing should be assumed as to any specific criteria for interview being applied.

Additionally it was guaranteed that the content of the interviews would remain confidential and that no direct reference to respondents would be made in the study. A reserve list of staff was formulated as a back-up should any member of staff still decline the interview, fortunately this

was not required with a one hundred percent acceptance from the original sample.

How would the interviews be structured ?

The use of interviews is widely acknowledged by researchers and writers alike (Anderson (1996); Cohen & Manion (1996); Scott & Usher (1996); Denscombe (1999)) as one of the most appropriate methods of data collection in educational research. Anderson (p223) identifies two basic types of interviews, 'normative' for use where collected data is classified and analysed statistically, and 'elite' where the respondent has specific knowledge or experience about the area of research. Denscombe (p112 - 115) identifies six types of interviews and propounds that the decision as to which should be used is dependent upon the degree of control the researcher requires over the interview, and the length of responses allowed by the respondent. Within these types he identifies, and draws a distinction between interviews that are structured, involving tight control over the questions and answers, or semi-structured allowing a degree of flexibility both in the way the questions are offered and the responses given. For the purposes of this study, taking into account the information sought and the use of 'elite', one-to-one interviews, the use of a semi-structured approach was deemed most appropriate.

How would the interviews be recorded ?

One of the most difficult tasks facing the researcher when conducting interviews is the question as to the most appropriate method for recording the data. The two most common methods are the use of written notes, and audio tapes. The decision will depend heavily on the ability of the interviewer to listen and write simultaneously, equipment availability and reliability, and the agreement of the interviewee. The latter of these has a major influence since a conversation recorded on tape is a permanent record, and that which has been said cannot be unsaid. The type of interview employed also influences the data recording method since the level of flexibility and hence opportunity for the interviewee to respond as they wish will help define the choice.

One further factor needed to be considered, the analysis of the qualitative data collected by the interviews. A fuller discussion on this factor is undertaken later in this section. Taking account of all these factors it was decided that, subject to interviewees agreement, an audio recording of the interviews would be made. To avoid the necessity to carry unwieldy equipment two small Dictaphones, plus a supply of blank tapes and batteries were acquired. The second machine was seen as a back-up contingency in the event of failure of the first.

How would the interviews be conducted ?

The success or failure of an interview relies heavily on the way in which it is conducted. Poorly planned and executed interviews due to the lack of question preparation, insufficient time allocation etc., invariably lead to the collection of poor or inappropriate data. The type of interview and the questions to be raised have already been determined and justified, the issue now was one of how best to approach the interviewees to ensure their full cooperation. Prior to this it was important to decide on the order in which the interviews should take place, whilst it was appropriate for the head-teachers' to be interviewed first the order of the staff interviews was pre-determined by timetable and availability constraints. Following the initial introductions and formalities it was considered important that the purpose of the study and the follow-up interview be re-established. Interviewees were reassured of the confidentiality of the interview and their agreement to tape the conversation sought, in doing this they were advised that once the tape had been transcribed it would be wiped clean. As expected many of the interviewees could not remember, due to the time lapse, how they had responded during the initial phase of the research, and it was therefore necessary to allow them time to review their Individual Record Sheet. Following this they were shown the correlated results for their school identifying it within one of the four types of school culture, 'hothouse', 'welfarist', 'formal', or 'survivalist', as propounded by Hargreaves (1995)(see appendix 5). The next step required the interviewee to read the descriptions of these four types, paying particular attention to the type related to their school. The

interview questions (see appendix 4) were not shown to the interviewees but used as prompts to elicit and develop responses. One weakness of this approach was a tendency for some interviewees to use the interview as a means of getting 'things off their chest'. This was interesting in that it identified issues, such as low morale and general grievances, but was also time consuming and not always directly relevant to the study. It was necessary in some instances to break the flow of conversation in order to re-establish and re-focus the interview. It is inevitable that each interview will be different from the others, part of the interviewer's skill in conducting interviews is to be able to introduce issues raised in previous interviews into the current discussions. This allows for further triangulation and helps identify a consensus view among the interviewees.

This was evidenced where unprompted comments regarding the changing role of staff were voiced during several interviews not only in the same school but also in other schools within the study.

On completion of the interview the interviewee was thanked for their time and cooperation, and at the end of the visit when all interviews had been completed, a small gift was presented to the staff common room as a sign of gratitude. Since no mention of the gift had been made prior to any of the research being undertaken this action could not be considered unethical, in practice the use of a small reward for this purpose is considered usual.

Where would the interviews take place ?

The environment within which the interview takes place can have a major impact on its success or otherwise. Using a room which is open to easy access or constant interruptions will destroy the fluency of the interview and possibly undermine the interviewee's confidence and willingness to be open in their views, this removed the potential to hold the interviews in the classrooms, staff common room or the school office. Likewise a room or setting in which the interviewee may feel intimidated can have similar effects, this removed the head-teacher's study from potential locations, other than for the head-teachers

themselves. Also of importance is the layout of the room and the furniture available, the more comfortable the surroundings are the more relaxing will be the interview. Preferably there should be no physical barrier eg a large desk or table, between the interviewer and their subject. There is a need for a suitable work surface on which to place equipment and material to be used during the course of the interview. Mindful of these restrictions it was agreed with the head-teachers that their interviews would take place in their study, whilst a suitable room would be found and allocated for the purposes of the staff interviews. Whilst some of the locations were not ideal all were quite adequate and allowed the interviews to be conducted appropriately.

When would the interviews take place ?

It had originally been planned for the interviews to take place during the early part of the autumn term of the 1999 school year. However due to a number of reasons and the unavailability of some staff it was not possible to arrange these until later, as a result the interviews took place between the 21st October and 24th November 1999. Each set of interviews were allocated a full day to allow for travel to and from the school and to ensure that all staff selected for interview would be available. The precise time for each interview was at the discretion of the head-teacher and the staff member subject to their timetable and other duties. The length of the interviews had been pre-determined although a break between each was included to allow for over-run and the need for additional verbal notes to be made on the tape at the end of each interview.

Finally it is worth noting that planning interviews is time-consuming and arduous work, but without which they will add very little in terms of valid data collection. If the interviews have been meticulously organised and executed then the benefits and rewards of the experience will be evidenced in the resultant analysis.

3.6.4 Ethical and practical considerations

The growth in social sciences research, and in particular educational research, has

resulted in the need for researchers to be aware of the ethical dilemmas they are likely to encounter, not only in the topic of their research, but also in the way they choose to undertake that research. By its very nature educational research necessitates the need to study the behavioural patterns of the subject (in this case teachers), and the environment (schools) in which they operate. To this end it is critical that the researcher has a real understanding, not only of the issues involved, but also of the numerous guidelines which have been developed to help them address the issues. It is neither practical nor feasible here to outline these in depth since there are an abundance of sources available eg. The British Educational Research Association, University of Southampton Research and Graduate School of Education (RGSE) Ethical Guidelines for Research, to which reference can be made. It is important, however, to consider those ethical issues most relevant to this specific study. The first of these is the principle of 'informed consent' whereby the subjects or participants must be informed of the purpose of the research and they must consent to inclusion in the study without any form of 'incentive' or coercion. How this was addressed has been discussed in some depth in previous sections, but it is worth reiterating that following agreement from the head-teachers a full briefing was given to the staff and their permission to participate obtained with guaranteed anonymity. This is linked intrinsically to the needs for 'confidentiality' and the 'right to privacy', both of which were addressed in chapter one of this study. This was a particular issue within this study which arose from the taped interviews where respondents were happy to volunteer information and comment which they stressed was confidential, even though they knew the conversation was being recorded 'live'. In one particular instance the respondent, without any prompting said " I shouldn't be telling you this, it's very confidential, but....." and proceeded to discuss another member of staff who was going to be interviewed later. This caused problems of being in possession of knowledge concerning a respondent who were themselves not aware of the situation. Curiosity can also be a dilemma which needs to be curtailed when undertaking educational research, not only from the viewpoint of the researcher but also from the participants in the research. This links back to the need to constantly bear in mind factors relating to confidentiality. One of the interview questions put to the staff and to the head-teachers concerned the role of the head in developing the school culture. In all four schools the heads where

very interested to know how the staff had responded, to divulge this information would have been a breach of confidentiality and would have led to a loss of confidence in the impartiality of the study. One further issue which arose and required a considered approach was that of a 'vulnerable population' where there is the potential to damage or upset segments of the research base due to their age or other such factors. This was of significant importance within the context of this study since the research was conducted within schools where the age of the children ranged from two and half to thirteen years. It was crucial to be constantly aware of the surroundings and consider the needs of the children and their approach to a 'stranger' in the school. Initially the use of visual evidence in the form of photographs taken within the schools had been considered as part of the research methodology. However, given the small size of the schools and the presence of a very intimate atmosphere it was deemed that taking photographs within a school full of very young children could be misinterpreted, even though the head-teachers had all agreed to the initial request. Additionally it was felt that the inclusion of photographic evidence within the research report could lead to identification of the schools and hence be a breach of anonymity. No guidelines or code of practice can make allowance for the diversity of ethical dilemmas the researcher may encounter. However, it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure they conduct their research in an ethical way at all times whilst considering the needs of the study :

“ we live in a relative universe and it has been said that relativity seeks adjustment; that adjustment is art; and that the art of life lies in a constant readjustment to our surroundings”

(Okakura, 1991 in Cohen & Manion, 1996, p381-382)

“What better precept for the art of the ethical researcher ?”

(Cohen & Manion, 1996, p382)

3.7 Data Analysis Method

3.7.1 Introduction

Data analysis is perhaps the key to the success or failure of a study to answer the research questions identified. The previous section discussed and stressed the need to undertake detailed planning of the data collection, yet few researchers, if

any, apparently apply the same level of commitment to data analysis. Most will allocate considerable resources to data collection without the slightest reference or thought as to what they will do with all the data once they have it. Whereas in reality it should form a central element of the research process.

“ The process of analysis should not be seen as a distinct stage of research; rather, it is a reflexive activity that should inform data collection, writing, further data collection, and so forth. Analysis is not, then, the last phase of the research process. It should be seen as part of the research design and data collection. The research process of which analysis is one aspect, is a cyclical one. ”

(Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p6)

The above quote is a key point and it was essential to ensure that reflection played a major role in determining subsequent stages of data collection emanating from the preceding data analysis. Within this study an example of this can be found in the conduct of the interviews with the staff. Although planned as being unstructured the interviews relied on a set of pre-determined questions which needed to be addressed. However, it was found that the questions were being continuously modified between interviews in the same school and, consequently, between each set of interviews. This was attributable directly to responses given by the staff and head-teachers which had not been anticipated when designing the initial set of interview questions, for example the question referring to the role of the head. Following the first set of interviews this was rephrased to enquire as to whether that role was perceived to be one of a ‘business manager’ or a ‘head-teacher’.

A further problem in the analysis of qualitative data is displaying the data in a format that will be recognized and understood by the reader :

“ As the data are analysed, they must be displayed in ways that will convey to the reader what has been discovered. Since raw data are rarely presented, the data must be classified and grouped into tables and figures. This too, is an important, if time-consuming task. ”

(Anderson, 1996, p82)

“ A fundamental and persistent question in any research is ‘What do the data mean’? The facts never speak for themselves. Some human voice must articulate what collected data signify with respect to some human purpose. ”

(Popkewitz & Tabachnick, 1981, p181)

Within the context of this study and considering that data collection took place over two phases it is reasonable to discuss data analysis methods in a similar style.

3.7.2 Initial phase data

“ A school is a beehive of activity, exhibiting patterns of behaviour that even a casual observer can recognize. Certain sounds and movements follow the ringing of bells. Teachers use the same phrases again and again, and these are followed by similar responses from students. ”

(Popkewitz & Tabachnick, 1981, p29)

At this stage the purpose of the data analysis was to attempt to identify the culture of each of the schools as perceived by the staff in their use of the Hargreaves (1995) tool. Responses to the initial phase of data collection were received in the form of completed Individual Record Sheets, an example of one of these can be found in Appendix 6. In his work Hargreaves advises that at this level the analysis should be kept fairly basic by simply producing a sheet showing the collated responses from the individual sheets (see Appendix 7). Likewise he advocates only transposing the individual spots (for the locations of actual culture) and the stars (for the ideal culture), since it would be too confusing to also include the arrows (for direction culture is perceived to be moving in) on the same sheet. With this completed the problem now was what sense to make of the responses. There were a number of statistical methods that could have been adopted, however it was deemed adequate to follow the procedure as outlined by Hargreaves to simply calculate the proportion of staff falling into each of the quadrants :-

Formal quadrant - the sixty four squares forming the ‘pink’ corner.

Hothouse quadrant - the sixty four squares forming the ‘green’ corner.

Welfarist quadrant - the sixty four squares forming the ‘yellow’ corner.

Survivalist quadrant - the sixty four squares forming the ‘blue’ corner.

Central quadrant - the sixty four squares forming the centre of the grid.

It is important to note here that there is over-lap between the four ‘type’ quadrants and the central quadrant. Hargreaves does not explain this but it does enable the notion of uncertainty to be considered where the respondent is perhaps unwilling, or unable, to precisely define the positions of present and ideal culture. With this complete it was a relatively straight-forward exercise to determine the present and ideal cultures of the school. In the example shown in Appendix 7, which relates to Oldest Preparatory School, the following analysis can be seen :-

	Present	Ideal
Formal	0%	0%
Hothouse	79%	86%
Welfarist	21%	14%
Survivalist	0%	0%

Below are the percentages of responses that fell into the central quadrant :-

Central	7%	29%
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It should be noted that whilst the grid had been refined to allow a more precise judgement to be made, no attempt at dividing the findings into more than the five categories was undertaken. This decision was based on the need for this stage to simply identify the staff’s perception of their school’s culture. These figures in themselves are of no significant value since they do not provide any sense, evidence or justification to support the outcomes of this phase of the study, hence the necessity to undertake follow-up interviews as discussed in previous sections. The full outcomes and resultant analysis from this phase of the data collection are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.7.3 Second phase data

Second phase data collection took the form of individual interviews with the head-teachers and a sample of their staff from each of the four schools. These interviews were recorded on to audio tapes with additional commentary added on completion of each set of interviews. The greatest task in the use of taped

interviews is that of transcription :-

“ Transcription of the tapes is generally far more time-consuming than the actual collection of data. ”

(Denscombe, 1998, p128)

“ Transcription is not a mechanical process of putting tape-recorded talk into written sentences. The talk needs to be ‘tidied up’ and edited a little to put it in a format on the written page that is understandable to the reader. Inevitably, it loses some authenticity through this process. ”

(Denscombe, 1998, p132)

Whilst accepting that transcription is both labour intensive and valuable, Denscombe (ibid) also identifies three distinct problems the researcher faces when undertaking the task :-

1. The recorded talk is not always easy to hear - external noise, poor recording, simultaneous speaking of the interviewer and interviewee, can all make the transcribing of the tape very difficult, and raise questions as to which parts of the interview can be excluded without jeopardising the validity of the transcription
2. People do not always speak with nice finite sentences - necessitating the need to ‘tidy-up’ the interviews so that sense can be made of them by the reader not present during the original recording.
3. Intonation, emphasis and accents used in speech are hard to depict on a transcript - to include these is often too time consuming and hence results in some loss in the meaning of the words which for example may have been ‘stressed’ during the interview.

In addressing these problem areas Denscombe advocates the need to undertake a number of ‘checks’ to ensure the validity of the data. These include checking the transcript with the informant to gain agreement on the accuracy and interpretation of the interview discussion, checking the data with other sources hence ensuring

triangulation has been undertaken, and checking the plausibility of the data to ensure the interviewee had the necessary experience or expertise to discuss the topic of the interview. Further to this Denscombe recommends that any emerging, common themes from the interviews be identified, giving the findings substance rather than being reliant on perhaps a single respondent's view.

In support of this approach Cohen & Manion (1996, p293 -296) make reference to the work of Hycner (1985) who developed a set of fifteen guidelines for the analysis of interview data. Whilst not all of these are seen as relevant to this study the following are worthy of inclusion :-

Transcription : having the interview tape transcribed, noting not only the literal statements but also non-verbal and paralinguistic communication.

Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole : this involves listening to the entire tape several times in order to provide a context for the emergence of specific units of meaning and themes later on.

Delineating units of general meaning : this entails a thorough scrutiny of both verbal and non-verbal gestures to elicit the participant's meaning.

Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question(s) : once the units of general meaning have been noted, they are then reduced to units of meaning relevant to the research question(s).

Writing a summary of each individual interview : it is useful at this point to go back to the interview transcription and write up a summary of the interview incorporating the themes that have been elicited from the data.

Composite summary : it is useful to write up a composite summary of all the interviews which accurately captures the essence of the phenomenon being investigated.

The value of such an approach must not be underestimated since the analysis of the interview data is likely to rely heavily on the accuracy and reliability of the transcribed data and the meaning and interpretation attributed to it by the researcher. Since it is unlikely that a full transcription of each interview will be included in a study report the issue of the use of interview extracts must also be addressed. Extracts from the interviews play a major role in this study since they allow the reader to effectively hear what was said whilst providing supporting

evidence for the respondents identification and placing of their school's culture. However, it must also be recognized that such extracts should not be considered as absolute proof of a point since they are inevitably quoted out of context, and are selected as being appropriate for inclusion using the 'categorisation of content' approach. In particular it was important when transcribing the tapes to identify key words or phrases used by the interviewees which supported their perceived changes in culture or climate. It was anticipated that the use of words 'business' or 'business like' would be evident when discussing how they have perceived the climate to have changed. This is an important factor when attempting to identify common themes across the interviews. An example of this can be seen in the responses given by interviewees N3 (see p94) "*The culture of the school has changed.....Since the change it's become much more business like.....*" and M4 (see p101) "*There's been money spent.....there's a much more business approach to the staff.*" This was important not only within the interviews held in each school, but also across all interviews, since it would enable any themes or relationships to be identified as the tapes were being transcribed. This is seen as "*a vital part of the reflections undertaken by the qualitative researcher.*" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p9) The use of extracts in the discussion of the findings of this study contained in Chapter 4 have been subject to close scrutiny to ensure that both the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondent have been maintained at all times. To give substance to the transcriptions some background details of respondents are included eg length of service, and, where considered critical to the discussion, extracted quotes have been included verbatim.

4. ANALYSIS and INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the analysis and interpretation of the data collected in both phases of the data collection stage. In doing so it addresses the secondary research questions of identifying :-

1. What is the 'culture' of each of the schools studied ?
2. What, if any, are the similarities and differences between these 'cultures' ?
3. Have the staff or head-teachers perceived any 'cultural' changes since each school was acquired by the group ?
4. Is there any perception by the staff or the head-teachers of the emergence of 'corporate culture' or 'business climate', within the schools ?

It begins by analysing and interpreting the data for each of the schools in turn, and follows this by undertaking a comparative analysis between all four schools. Finally it identifies a number of common themes which have emerged as a result of the study making reference to the supporting evidence. It is presented in such a way so as to allow the reader to appreciate the situation of individual schools. The outcomes of the perceived culture as identified by staff using the Hargreaves (1995) tool are illustrated in the form of a matrix showing the proportion of staff that positioned the school in each of the four quadrants. The fifth or central quadrant has little influence on the outcomes and hence for the purpose of clarity no figures for this quadrant are illustrated. The matrix shows percentages for each quadrant of staff that perceived the present culture to be in that quadrant, would ideally like the culture to be in that quadrant, and feel the culture is moving, or being driven, towards that quadrant. Whilst we should be prepared to accept these classifications we must also acknowledge their limitations in identifying school culture. The major drawback of this type of classification is that it effectively categorizes different schools in the same quadrant, and makes no allowances for the uniqueness of each particular school's culture. A further adaptation to the use of grids could be made to facilitate the ability to include the degree to which staff perceive the culture. An element of this is implicit in that it is assumed that the closer to the corner the more the emphasis on that description. This however does not carry over when the individual responses are collated on to the aggregate sheet. The simplicity of indicating the percentage of staff that

positioned the school within an area of the matrix takes no account of the extreme of that positioning. Effectively this means that no distinction can be drawn between two schools where for example seventy percent of staff in both cases positioned their school in the same quadrant, but where in one school these were very much towards the extreme of the quadrant, and in other the positioning was less so. Some form of computational calculation would need to be devised to address this weakness, which in turn would reduce the simplicity and effectiveness of using the tool. At this point the reader may wish to revisit the Hargreaves (1995) descriptors outlined in Appendix 5.

The results of the interviews are presented in the form of transcribed responses to the interview questions. In most cases the interviews really followed the format of an open discussion with the questions (see appendix 4) being used to prompt respondents as necessary. It has not always been possible to separate responses and attribute them directly to the questions asked, since many of the respondents covered the issues at different stages of the interviews. It is neither feasible nor desirable to include complete transcriptions from all the interviews since, as with any interview, some of the discussion is not relevant to the study. Likewise information which the respondent felt was too personal and should remain confidential has been excluded. To maintain anonymity the respondents within each section are identified by the letters 'O', for Oldest, 'N' for Nearby, 'M' for Midway, and 'Ne' for Newest followed by a number indicating the order in which they were interviewed. The conclusion to each section takes the form of an overall summary of the findings for each school. The schools are presented in chronological order based on the year they were acquired by Southern Schools. This approach may allow the reader to quickly identify whether length of corporate ownership has played any role in determining the culture of the school.

4.2 Oldest Preparatory School

Table 4.1 overleaf illustrates the collated responses of the head-teacher and those staff from the school who returned completed individual record sheets. The overall response rate from the staff was seventy-seven percent and the figures within the table are the percentage of respondents who positioned the culture accordingly.

School	Position	Hothouse	Welfarist	Formal	Survivalist
Oldest	Present	79%	21%	0%	0%
	Ideal	86%	14%	0%	0%
	Towards	50%	29%	14%	7%

Table 4.1 : Collated Responses from Oldest Preparatory School

In this instance it illustrates that seventy-nine percent of staff have located the school's present culture in the hothouse quadrant, with the remaining twenty-one percent locating it as welfarist. In positioning the ideal culture there is a seven percent increase to eighty-six percent who have opted for the hothouse quadrant, matched by a seven percent decrease to fourteen percent for the welfarist quadrant. Whether this is the same seven percent is not apparent. In essence the school is currently perceived as strongly hothouse with an even greater majority looking for it to remain there. An interesting outcome from this data concerns the direction the school is seen to be moving in with only fifty percent of the staff believing it is moving toward hothouse, twenty-nine percent towards welfarist, fourteen percent have identified a move towards a more formal school, and seven percent clearly showing concern in believing that the school is entering a survivalist culture.

This rather wide disagreement between staff on the perceived direction of movement may indicate a lack of firm guidance from the head since it appears that half the school cannot agree on the direction in which it is being driven. Hargreaves (1995) suggests that when de-briefing takes place there may be some surprise or even shock at the collated responses, both in relation to the placements of the present and ideal cultures as well as to the amount of agreement on present and ideal, as well as the distance between them. Evidenced in Oldest Preparatory School by the close proximity of the present and ideal cultures. How then did the head-teacher and staff respond to these initial findings? Each person to be interviewed was given time to review the collated results and to read the four culture descriptors as outlined previously. The following is a partial transcription of the interviews interspersed, where necessary, with the questions poised to facilitate the response. As background information O1 has been at Oldest Preparatory School for fifteen years, nine of them as head-teacher, O2 has been with the school only two years, O3 five years and O4 for more than twenty years, part-time and full-time.

Question 1 Why did you place the present position of the school as you did ?

- O1 “ To be honest I can’t remember....”
- O2 “Don’t know really...it seemed right at the time.”
- O3 “ It was such a long time ago...I have to say that I can’t remember.”
- O4 “ Good question - but I’m afraid I can’t remember.”

Question 2 How much of the description do you agree with ?

- O1 “I would agree that people are under pressure to participate. I don’t want anyone in the school who’s along just for the ride. I would expect anyone who comes here to be fully involved in the school.....I would agree that teachers are enthusiastic and committed.... I find the culture interesting.
I agree that we are between hothouse and welfarist....maybe people feel they want tighter lines of control in the school - more guidance, I don’t know”.
- O2 “ It’s a very relaxed place to work at, we all get on very well socially, even between the staff and the students....The students seem to be happy, they’re happy children and don’t seem to be stressed about social relationships, and they’re not afraid to talk to the teachers....”
- O3 “ I suppose most private schools are concerned with exam performance, not always to the advantage of the students.”
- O4 “ There’s tremendous pressure from the parents...This is not a particularly academic school, most of the children are just above average, but the parents want the top academic schools....All the parents want their children to go to the top secondary schools.”

Question 3 What role/part do you consider you have played in developing the culture of the school ?

- O1 “ I suppose every head has their own style of leadership which controls how the school is going to be....I’m trying to create an environment where children enjoy coming here and learning and the staff enjoy working. The two dovetail in together, if the staff enjoy

what they're doing that enthusiasm rubs off on the children and they take that back to the parents. If the parents can see that their children are learning and having a good time then everybody's happy.....There are restrictions in this - salary always comes into it, we would like to pay people more than you actually can. I'm not totally convinced that by just paying people more you're going to get more out of them. People will always complain, people will always say the grass is greener on the other side.....This is one of the restrictions that frustrate me, along with the lack of space. Everyone who comes here will say the same thing and it frustrates the staff as well.

People seem very happy to come and see me and I also try and get round the school once a day if it's possible to get into every classroom so that I see all the children.....It shows them that I am just an ordinary person and not some chap that just sits behind a desk that they never see at all and it gives them the confidence to come and talk to me as well, and I think that gives the right impression to the parents.... I think that's one of the big strengths of the school. Obviously everybody may not feel the same as I do about that but hopefully people can see what the school is trying to do."

- O2 "It's a very, very small school and we're all working in very small spaces and we're all very close to each other, forcing us to get on well. If we didn't get on well there would be a huge problem because of the working environment....I fitted in with what was here already, but that actually is very much along the lines of my own personality...I naturally adapted to the culture."
- O3 "I believe I have played a role in the development of the school culture both formally and informally."
- O4 "I don't know if I've really played a role in the way the school culture has developed....I've seen a lot of heads."

Question 4 What role do you consider the head/staff has played in developing the culture of the school ?

- O1 “ Hopefully the staff are trying to do the same thing that I’m doing. They certainly work jolly hard and I’m not aware of any concerns about expecting them to work hard because we get very good holidays in this job.....My philosophy is that while they’re in school I expect them to work damn hard.”
- O2 “ The head is very, very accessible, both to staff and children. In assemblies he’s quite casual, very relaxed...It is not always a good thing, he can be a bit too informal.”
- O3 “ I’ve seen two heads - the new head tries to communicate with everybody, he’s quite informal in his approach, I think maybe there could be more formality with overall procedures within the school. The movement of children around the school needs an overall policy, which I chatted to him about, He’s very good with the parents, encourages them to come into the school. I don’t think the academic side has changed that much, I think it’s still oriented to the exam system but then that’s part of the private school culture as well.....Yes there has been cultural change with the change in heads, the present head is more concerned with staff welfare, the previous head was more concerned about the image of the school.”
- O4 “ When Southern Schools took over there was a feeling of get rid of all the staff that were here then, it was too friendly....We had four heads in three years and I felt I couldn’t go and talk to them...The culture did change, we had a head who got things much happier and I think things now are much happier and I can say things to the head now. He may not take any notice of me, but at least I can say it...I find it hard to envisage that cultures just happen, when they don’t....Obviously it’s influenced by all members of the staff, and the head influences that because he chooses the staff...Although many of the staff here now are left over from the previous head, I think the staff are very young....that may be a financial thing.

Question 5 Do you consider that Southern Schools has influenced the development of the school’s culture ?

O1 “ Each school develops its own culture and that culture is largely developed by the character who is the head of that school. Southern Schools may play a minor role in it in that they control the finances and that inevitably has restrictions on what you can and cannot do in the school....So to that extent they may play a part in it, but the culture of the school is determined by the head and through the rest of the staff....As a group they do not have a great deal of input into the day-to-day running of the school, and that in my opinion is what really creates the culture.. We have an open forum once a term where parents are invited into the school and can ask any questions they want to. Once a year one of the governors attends. We’ve done that on 3 occasions and on the first one there were a lot of question about Southern Schools, since then there have been very few, they are more interested in how this school runs.

O2 “ We all band together against them. There is an anti-Southern Schools culture building within the school... We’re all paid like crap and none of us are valued for the fact that we’re actual teachers and we work our arse’s off in really bad conditions, so there’s a common enemy....It’s almost as if they don’t exist - it’s like God - we never see them we don’t know anything about them. If the head walked in here I wouldn’t know them from a bar of soap. If any members of the board walked in I wouldn’t know them from Adam, yet they run the school. It’s like head office...

The headmaster has to go along with what they say. I’d hate to be in his position... I don’t think he has any option at all and that is influencing the culture of the school. Southern Schools doesn’t take into consideration that they are dealing with people’s lives and not just running a business... And, it’s children’s lives I’m talking about and they are influencing children’s lives, and we are influencing children’s lives, the pressure that’s put on us from outside....Bums on seats....The culture in the school is despite of Southern Schools not because of.... Since I’ve been here the attitude in the staff room has changed, it’s become a lot more negative, frustrated.... I see it

drifting towards the survivalist.”

- O3 “ I think they have a sort of background role, they control the finance and the senior appointments within the school...I don't think there's enough of an overall Southern Schools culture. I'm surprised that with the number of schools they control that there isn't a sort of Southern Schools culture. Every school seems to have its own individual way of doing things, I think that's a little bit surprising in some ways. Maybe they feel that's the best way to do it...There is some evidence of corporate culture but I don't think there's a form of school culture revolving around the school directly from Southern Schools..... We're not given that and expected to maintain it , which is a bit surprising really. I see a role for corporate culture, there could be more sharing.”
- O4 “ When they first took over I was much, much more aware of them as a presence, whilst now I'm not aware of them at all...certainly parents are not aware of them, they're more interested in the school.”

Question 6 Do you know anything about the culture of the other three schools participating in this study ?

- O1 “ I've been to all the schools, I guess I know Newest best and I know the head very well....Not very much about the others.”
- O2 “No.”
- O3 “ We don't have much to do with the other schools other than playing sports against each other.”
- O4 “Sorry - no.”

Question 7 Do you see similarities between the culture of your school and the others ?

- O1 “ That's a very difficult question to answer...I've met the heads but haven't really met the children. The feeling in Nearby is very similar to here, it's a happy lively school. Newest is, I guess, the same but I haven't been around the classrooms to be able to judge....Don't know enough to comment on the others....Midway and Nearby are

similar to Oldest in that they are small... Newest is in my opinion the ideal size for a prep school.

O3 “ We’re all joined together, yet separate.”

What then does this tell us about the culture of the school, the level of agreement between staff on its positioning, the changes that have occurred since acquisition, and the influence of that acquisition on the school and its culture ? Firstly we must be prepared to accept that the delay in returning to the school has had some detrimental effect on the ability of respondents to recall their rationale for positioning the school, as a result of these responses the decision was made to delete this first question for the interviews in the other three schools. However, it does not necessarily follow that this invalidates or detracts from the responses to questions two through seven. In responding to question two the interviewees are considering the overall positioning of the school in the ‘hothouse’ quadrant. From this we can see that there is general agreement in that they perceive the school’s culture to be somewhere between hothouse and welfarist, whilst acknowledging that the degree to which it is in a particular quadrant varies. This latter point is quite important since if we combine the hothouse and welfarist responses we are faced with the position that one hundred percent of respondents either perceive the culture to be there or would ideally like it to be, perhaps indicating that things are really quite good in the school and the head is getting it right. The concern would be that twenty-one percent see it moving away from that position. The responses to questions three and four need to be analysed together since they concern the role of the head and the staff in developing the school’s culture. It is apparent from these responses that the head and staff see his role in developing the culture as central to the philosophy of the school. This is not surprising and is supported by the view that “ *The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture.* ” (Schein, 1985, p2). With regards to staff involvement in developing the culture there again appears to be general consensus that all were involved, although the degree of involvement varied dependent on length of service. Interestingly the member of staff with the longest service felt they had not really participated, this however, may be attributable to the fact that a lot of that time has been on a part-time basis. The responses to question five are rather more surprising - there are clearly a number of differing views present. At the one extreme the head is very forceful in seeing Southern Schools has having a predominately background role, with the culture of the school being determined primarily by himself albeit with the

aid of his staff. At the other extreme is the reaction to the question of respondent O2, who has only been at the school for two years. They are quite adamant that there is an anti-group culture within the school, and that the academic culture is there despite Southern Schools. This respondent was particularly aggressive towards Southern Schools and the way they saw the school being driven, with the head having little choice other than to follow policy. In this response we also see the first emergence of a view of the school as being run as a business. This is in part supported by both the head and O3 who make a point of highlighting the control over the finances of the school held by Southern Schools. It was this development that led to the inclusion of the question regarding the role of the head as a head-teacher or as a business manager. Respondent O3 also raises the issue of corporate culture and voices surprise that there is only minor evidence that it exists, as such, within the school, for example by the inclusion of the Southern Schools name on letterheads. Questions six and seven combine to give an assessment of how well the head and staff know the other three schools and whether they perceive any similarities in the cultures. Other than the head there was no real feel for the other schools and respondents generally felt unable to answer this particular question. In summary the findings for Oldest school indicate a general consensus as to the type of culture which exists, it is also apparent that Southern Schools has had, through the head, an influence on the development of that culture, and that the school operates within a 'business climate'.

4.3 Nearby Preparatory School

Table 4.2 below illustrates the collated responses of the head-teacher and those staff from the school who returned completed individual record sheets. The overall response rate from the school was seventy-nine percent and the figures within the table are the percentage of respondents who positioned the culture accordingly.

School	Position	Hothouse	Welfarist	Formal	Survivalist
Nearby	Present	64%	0%	18%	18%
	Ideal	82%	18%	0%	0%
	Towards	46%	0%	36%	18%

Table 4.2 : Collated Responses from Nearby Preparatory School

In this instance it illustrates that sixty-four percent of staff have located the school's actual culture in the hothouse quadrant, eighteen percent locating it as formal, eighteen percent as survivalist, whilst none felt it lay in the welfarist quadrant. In positioning the ideal culture there is an eighteen percent increase to eighty-two percent who have opted for the hothouse quadrant, coupled with an eighteen percent option for the welfarist quadrant, whilst both the formal and survivalist have fallen to zero. In essence the school is currently perceived as fairly strongly hothouse with an even greater majority looking for it to remain there. Also of interest here is data concerning the direction the school is seen to be moving in with only forty-six percent of the staff believing it is moving toward hothouse, thirty-six percent perceive it moving toward formal, with a concerning eighteen percent having identified a move towards a survivalist school culture. Combining the hothouse/welfarist and formal/survivalist responses as we did for the previous school identifies an interesting development. In Nearby we find that sixty-four percent perceive the culture to be in the hothouse/welfarist quadrants, whilst one hundred percent would ideally like it to be positioned there, a significant shift. Of concern here is that more than half the school, fifty-four percent, believe the culture to be actually moving away from that ideal state. The responses to the questions posed during the interviews give a detailed insight into the school's culture and the role of Southern Schools. N1 has been at the school for seven years since their appointment as head at the time the school was acquired by Southern Schools ; N2 has been a member of staff for ten years, and N3 for fourteen years. It is interesting to note here that both these members of staff were at the school before, during, and after acquisition and so have experience of the changes since.

Question 1 How much of the description do you agree with ?

N1 " I think first of all it isn't a frenetic place. I think there are those amongst my staff who perceive it as such. Because we have had to bring about a cultural change in a school which in its previous life was a very different school from that which it now is. Different in the sense that the demand made of staff were significantly below those we have felt it proper to make. To the point where one of my staff was moved to comment to me some years ago that I have made her a full-time teacher when she really regarded her role with the school as being a fairly part-time one....We are teachers, that's

what we're here for, teachers are committed and enthusiastic...Many of them are required to be more autonomous, and many of them find that difficult - they prefer to have something which is clearly delineated.

I have had to be the proactive element and others have been prepared in their different capacities to aid and help. A number of my staff say that it is the happiest school they have worked in...The old culture would have come very much in the red, formal, very formal, area.”

N2 “ I would say it's about seventy-five percent true, I think it's a frenetic school because we're under pressure rather than running about. It's not the everyday teaching it's the extras, all the clubs and things. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed, we do give all of the time, the problem is we're always asked for a little bit more. Last year's extras become this year's norm. It's a gradual on-going thing and by the end of the term you realise how much you've done. I don't feel threatened by surveillance - it's there but I'm not anxious about it.”

N3 “ I feel there's a tremendous amount of pressure, and the minute you fulfil one goal, before you've almost reached it, you've got more to live up to. The general feeling is the more you do the more is expected. I can never catch up, there is very little time, there is so much to do. It shouldn't be that way after you've taught for many, many years. Because of the whole situation of having to write everything down you don't have the same time to be so innovative. Things are not discussed, they're a fait accompli. You wonder sometimes if you've been heard.”

Question 2 What role/part do you consider you have played in developing the culture of the school ?

N1 “ The school was very prescriptive in that staff were required to follow a very clearly defined curriculum pattern, and in many cases were happy to do so because some were not particularly innovative or inventive, creative teachers and it suited them well to have laid

down for them a very tight timetable. I think that significant cultural change did not sit easily with a lot of people. Now its residue is still in the minds of some, it's been expunged from the minds of many others. A far greater number of the staff now were appointed by me and therefore have little, if any, knowledge of the previous regime.... What one actually sees over a period of time is the fairly consistent erosion of a former culture, which only hangs on in its vestiges as a legacy of a time past. But as a head you are aware that you haven't always got a happy ship."

- N2 "I've gone with the flow, but I've changed some of my teaching attitudes - you had to change. I'd quite like to think I played a minor role in the change of the culture."
- N3 "I have learnt a lot..No matter what school you are at you have to go along with what the head wants, after all you're part of a team."

Question 3 What role do you consider the head/staff has played in developing the culture of the school ?

- N1 "Many of the staff have been committed in their support of the changes I have made, not always to their liking, but in many ways have supported and helped in that cultural change. Perhaps by making me reappraise my own ideas etc....In terms of age the balance of the staff is very much towards the upper end of range. Quite a number of the staff are over 50, quite a number are probably between 40 - 50, and significantly a smaller number of staff are under 40, and there is only 1 who is under 30. So that in itself is a part of the culture of the school, because people of that age are not often exceptionally amenable to change."
- N2 "The culture of the school has changed and the head has played a major role in that - it's more relaxed, less formal. The old school fell more into the formal quadrant. Now it's a much more modern approach than it used to be."
- N3 "The academic goals haven't changed, my feeling is that we were trusted more by people.. The head has really driven the culture change. The change has been of the best intentions and I think it is

a very difficult position for the head, since he is answerable to Southern Schools and he has got to do what they say, so he's not a free man either."

Question 4 Do you consider that Southern Schools has influenced the development of the school's culture ?

N1 " The change happened as a consequence of the acquisition, it couldn't afford to happen naturally because it was too pressing a requirement. The school previously had concerned itself with primarily ensuring the pupils were prepared for their selective examinations in secondary schools..In terms of the corporate role, Southern Schools has played a limited role in the cultural change, it has been a supportive role rather than anything else. Its interest is not only an educational one but also a financial one. I don't think in terms of developing a culture which is distinctly Southern Schools it has played any significant role. I truthfully don't believe there is any corporate culture. I think there are elements of corporate culture but these are not unique to Southern Schools."

N2 " Southern Schools has played a financial role, they're willing to listen to more modern ideas. The culture has been developed the way the head wants it, but he is always accountable to Southern Schools for his actions. I personally think the head and Southern Schools see eye-to-eye."

N3 " The culture of the school has changed, it's more pressurised. I think that there is such a consciousness of how much things cost that sometimes that comes before the needs of the children, and that to me is not right. Since the change it's become much more business like, it's become much more money orientated. An awful lot of money has been spent on the school property but not in the school. There are many more children being helped now, the academic ability of the children has certainly gone down. But, this is not necessarily as a direct result of Southern Schools but in response to government. I think the school is looking for the parents who have the money to pay and it needs to ensure it has the

things they want. The parents are much more demanding now than they ever were, they're less trusting.

Question 5 Do you see yourself/the head as a head-teacher or a business manager ?

N1 " I would like to think of myself still as a head-teacher, and that my staff also see me the same way. I still teach classes, but perhaps don't have as much time as I used to."

N2 " It's difficult to say whether the head is a school man or a company man, his first thought is always to the children, but again when he's working he is accountable to Southern Schools and that must influence him."

N3 " I think the head would see himself as a school man, but my own feeling is that although he tries to listen he doesn't actually seem to hear."

Question 6 Do you know anything about the culture of the other three schools participating in this study ?"

N1 " I would expect the other schools in some respects to be quite similar. There are common characteristics but I would think these are as much to do with the like mindedness of the people running the schools as to any input which is discernibly Southern Schools."

N2 " No I'm afraid I don't know anything about them."

N3 " No."

Question 7 Do you see similarities between the culture of your school and the others ?

N1 " They're all the same, but different. I would think Midway is not dissimilar to us, Newest falls between hothouse and the formal, and Oldest I would think probably falls closer to the hothouse than the formal.

N2 " I'm not sure I can answer this question, but I would imagine them to be a bit like us."

N3 " Can't help you - sorry."

What then does this tell us about the culture of the school, the level of agreement between staff on its positioning, the changes that have occurred since acquisition, and the influence of that acquisition on the school and its culture ? The responses to the first question indicate a clear difference between the culture of the school as perceived by the head and the staff, with the head being of a differing view to the other three respondents. The head goes to some lengths to justify this by inferring that the staff had it much easier prior to his appointment and are now simply performing to normal expectations. There is agreement however that the school has become far less formal and that this has had a positive effect on the culture. Responses to questions two and three indicate that the culture has been driven, almost to the point of exclusivity, by the head and that the staff have had to go along with the changes resulting in the residue being “ expunged from the minds of many”. There is general agreement in responses to question four that the culture has changed as a consequence of the acquisition, although the role played in that by Southern Schools is accepted by the majority to be one of financial. However, there is also implicit suggestions that the school has become more cost conscious whilst N3 believes “it’s become much more business like, it’s become much more money orientated.” From this it can be concluded that an element of business climate now exists within the school where previously this was not perceived to have been the case. In conjunction with question five responses we can surmise that the head sees his role as head slightly diminished whilst the staff apparently perceive it to be more so. The staff responses to questions six and seven are interesting from the perspective that although Nearby forms part of a group of schools there is very little knowledge of the other schools present. In summary the findings for Nearby school indicate a general consensus as to the hothouse culture which exists, that Southern Schools has had, through the head, an influence on the development of that culture, and that the school operates within a more discernible ‘business climate’. There is a degree of unrest in the staff with the school perceived to be moving away from its ideal positioning, indicating a need for the head to perhaps ‘go back to the floor’.

4.4 Midway Preparatory School

Table 4.3 overleaf illustrates the collated responses of the head-teacher and those staff from the school who returned completed individual record sheets. The overall response rate from the school was ninety-two percent and the figures within the table are the percentage of respondents who positioned the culture accordingly.

School	Position	Hothouse	Welfarist	Formal	Survivalist
Midway	Present	64%	27%	9%	0%
	Ideal	55%	36%	9%	0%
	Towards	36%	36%	28%	0%

Table 4.3 : Collated Responses from Midway Preparatory School

In this instance it illustrates that sixty-four percent of staff have located the school's present culture in the hothouse quadrant, twenty-seven percent locating it as welfarist, nine percent as formal, whilst none felt it lay in the survivalist quadrant. In positioning the ideal culture there is a nine percent decrease to fifty-five percent who have opted for the hothouse quadrant, matched with a nine percent increase for the welfarist quadrant, with the formal remaining at nine percent, and the survivalist at zero. In essence the school is currently perceived as quite strongly hothouse but, perhaps surprisingly, a smaller majority looking for it to remain there. The data concerning the direction the school is seen to be moving in shows that thirty-six percent of the staff believe it is moving toward hothouse, thirty-six percent perceive it moving toward formal, and twenty-eight percent having identified a move towards a more formal school culture. This may be indicative of a school where the leadership is perhaps not as strong as it could be leading to a sense of loss of direction and confusion as to where the school is trying to go. At least the school is not perceived as having reached the stage where it begins to move towards a survivalist culture. Combining the hothouse/welfarist and formal/survivalist responses as we have done for the previous schools identifies that in Midway ninety-one percent perceive the culture to be in the hothouse/welfarist quadrants, with the same ninety-one percent ideally liking it to remain positioned there, and seventy-six percent believe it is moving that way. The responses to the questions posed during the interviews give a detailed insight into the school's culture and the role of Southern Schools. At the time of the interviews M1 had been at the school for five years since their appointment as head at the time the school was acquired by Southern Schools ; M2 has also been a member of staff for five years arriving at the same time as the head, M3 has been there for only one year, whilst M4 is the longest serving member of staff with twenty-four years at the school and therefore has experienced the culture before, during, and after acquisition, and any subsequent changes.

Question 1 How much of the description do you agree with ?

M1 “ Expectations of work and personal development are high - ‘yes’, I see it more as everybody with quite firmly set goals. Had I been given these descriptions I don’t think I would have placed the school so far to the green (hothouse). On reflection I might have moved a bit more towards the yellow (welfarist), maybe the staff are right. We don’t have any selection procedures, and that’s quite important. We’re prepared to take on ‘different’ children and that pushes us a little more towards the welfarist. We have children coming to us at 8 or 9 who have never really been taught to read and that would push me to the welfarist view rather than the hothouse view. A school as I perceive as being a hothouse would have no place for the ‘different’ children, and we do have quite a number of them...Educational philosophy is child-centred and decisions are democratic, I would like to think I would never be seen as a not invented here person.

Frenetic - perhaps yes, we’re always busy, as soon as we’ve done something then we’ve got something else to do. I don’t think it’s all bad, we don’t have great cultural deserts when we’re not teaching. Parents are paying us to get their children ready for whatever comes next so we mustn’t lose sight of that.”

M2 “ We’re definitely under pressure, there’s no doubt about it, we couldn’t work any other way. Pressure partly comes from the people who own the school because there are basics like the need to undertake other duties. Although we’re bringing in the money, which is what the company wants, they’re not putting it all back in. They rely on the good nature of the staff.”

M3 “ We’re constantly under pressure to get things done. We sit around in the staff room going arrgh !!!!! By half-term we certainly all felt we needed it. I’m not surprised at the culture since we all talk and we all feel the same. It’s a mixture of the children and the culture of the school, there’s not much space so it’s all a bit frenetic.”

M4 “ Yes - I would say that’s largely true, I think we are under pressure. In any private school I’ve always felt that if people are paying money they’ve got higher expectations. I’ve always felt this has been the culture of a private school, although I’ve never regarded myself as a ‘hothouse’ teacher. Perhaps it’s because we get so many children here who cannot read. Hothouse is not a word I would use, I would say forced flowers.”

Question 2 What role/part do you consider you have played in developing the culture of the school ?

M1 “ I actually think that ‘it’s my school’ and the reason for that is that as Southern Schools took it over there were forty-three children here, this term we’ve got one hundred and fifty-five. Most of that is down to me, I’ve filled up the school. People come and see it the way it is and they like it. I can’t put my finger on what it is that people feel when they come, but the number of people when they walk into the building say ‘oh isn’t it nice’, they feel comfortable, it feels like a home with people living in it. I hope I have developed the school to give that feeling. I’m not saying it didn’t exist before I came but I hope that’s what I foster. The children will come and show me things, they know who I am. That sort of family - yes I suppose it’s a family thing - I want engendered.”

M2 “ I really don’t know that I’ve played any part in it.”

M3 “ Generally I’ve fitted in with what is here - it’s where I saw myself going.”

M4 “ I’ve always laid a great emphasis on sports and cultural activities and I’ve always seen that as my role to make the school part of the culture of the community - school is part of the society.”

Question 3 What role do you consider the head/staff has played in developing the culture of the school ?

M1 “ Quite a lot of the staff are here because I appointed them. So

my most successful staff I look at as being pretty much in my mould. “

M2 “ She has driven the culture to some extent but you cannot do it without the staff commitment. If you did it in a small school where the staff did not pull together it wouldn't work.”

M3 “ The head has a fair amount of input but there's not a lot she can do about it.”

M4 “ The head has succeeded in building up the numbers. The school is a happy, loving, friendly school - it always has been, it's got that kind of reputation here and I think she's done very well in that respect. I think she's taken the culture that was here and has developed it, giving the staff a sense of their worth. You have to be prepared to turn your hand to anything here, and muck in. I think the culture of a school and its attitudes are with the head teacher, I've always felt that, and the head teacher gives the lead and sets the trend and sets the mood and the atmosphere.”

Question 4 Do you consider that Southern Schools has influenced the development of the school's culture ?

M1 “ I don't think Southern Schools have had any role in the development of the school culture. As an example the Chief Executive was sat with income sheets in front him and he said “ I don't care about this, which is income. I don't care about this, which is expenditure. I only care about this, which is the bottom line.” That's their theme, they are educationalists and recognise that delivery of education is what parents are paying for. I wouldn't ask any of them for educational advice. Southern Schools are just the holders of the purse-strings. I don't know whether the school culture has changed since the takeover. I would hope that external factors are not influencing the culture of the school. Parents come because of the school culture and not the other way round. They come on my terms and I wouldn't want it any other way.”

M2 “ Southern Schools do not have a say in the culture of the school - they just provide the money. The school only works the way it

works because of the commitment of the staff. We carry on making it work despite what they do.”

M3 “ Southern Schools affect the culture of the school indirectly by setting the number of children in the school and the number of staff. I don’t really know how much say they have had in the decisions of the head.”

M4 “ There’s been money spent - the school has changed structurally. I don’t think we feel as much part of the group as we might. I think sometimes we’re out on a wing, we’re doing very well in a small environment. I think we feel we’re of a group but I don’t think we feel we’re of a corporate culture. There’s a much more business approach to the staff etc.”

Question 5 Do you see yourself/the head as a head-teacher or a business manager ?

M1 “ I’ve only ever considered myself as a head.”

M2 “ Oh definitely a head.”

M4 “ I don’t think she’s anything other than the head.”

Question 6 Do you know anything about the culture of the other three schools participating in this study ?”

M1 “ I know something about them from the regular meetings I have with the other heads. Not a lot of detail though.”

M2 “ No not really - I know of them, but that’s all.”

M3 “ No - I’ve not been with the school long enough to get to know the others.”

M4 “ A little, but only because we play sports against them.”

Question 7 Do you see similarities between the culture of your school and the others ?

M1 “The network it provides is very useful, I know that I can phone other heads if I need to. I think the other schools are different, the heads are similar in a number of ways but we are not all the same. I would think the predominant factor is the situation of the schools

and the staff. I don't see any evidence of corporate culture within the group, whether it has happened by default since they appointed all the heads, I don't know. It maybe they set out to appoint staff in their mould much as I do. I think there are schools which are more formal than here. I think Oldest's culture is very indicative of the head's leadership. I am really surprised at Nearby's culture, similar problems - restricted site, small school, small staff. Again I'm surprised that anybody would put it in the survivalist area. I think 'hothouse' has to be indicative of any prep school since parents are paying us to get a result. They don't pay us to get them into the good secondary schools, they would go somewhere more formal, regimented, and we can't offer that because we have 'different' children."

M2 " This school is unique, people in the locality know what it is. Things will stick to a small independent that wouldn't in a state school."

M4 " I don't think the other schools are much to do with us. I actually don't believe we're like any of the others, and they're not like us.

What then does this tell us about the culture of the school, the level of agreement between staff on its positioning, the changes that have occurred since acquisition, and the influence of that acquisition on the school and its culture ? There appears to be some contradiction in the head's response to the first question in her statement that "perhaps the staff are right". It is clear from her later acknowledgement that the school is frenetic, whilst Table 4.3 and the staff responses both indicate that the school is perceived as being a hothouse, although M4 prefers to relate to this as "forced flowers". The head's initial response to question two "I actually think that it's my school" is supported by her own responses to question three and to her staff's responses to both questions. The staff strongly believe that the school's culture has been driven and developed by the head, whilst they have generally gone with the flow, although there is some concession to their role in it. The appointment of staff 'in her mould' has obviously played a part in making it "a happy, loving, friendly school", "it's a sort of family thing", much more indicative of a welfarist school than hothouse. Perhaps this explains why the ideal positioning shows a desire to move more toward the welfarist and become less hothouse ? The implications

of the responses to question four require some further analysis. Unlike the previous two schools there is a definite consensus here that Southern Schools has played no part in the development of the school culture, other than their financial involvement. What is unique about this finding is that whilst the heads of Oldest and Nearby were appointed at the time of acquisition, they were from outside the group. In Midway's case the head was already in the employment of Southern Schools at the time of acquisition and hence could possibly be considered as a company-person, hence allowing them a greater degree of say in what goes on. This is further supported by the responses to question five which clearly indicate the head is a head and always has been. Responses to questions six and seven are supportive of the view that there appears to be little interaction between the schools other than at head-teacher level. The staff have very little to do with their counterparts, other than the occasional sporting fixture. Even this has its drawbacks since one member of staff commented during a coffee break that "we always lose to the other schools - they are that much bigger". In summary the findings for Midway school indicate a general consensus as to the hothouse culture which exists, that Southern Schools has had little, if any, influence on the development of that culture, and that there is no evidence, or perception, of a discernible 'business climate'. This school appears to present a happy family and may be indicative of the head's style of leadership.

4.5 Newest Preparatory School

Table 4.4 below illustrates the collated responses of the head-teacher and those staff from the school who returned completed individual record sheets. The overall response rate from the school was seventy-two percent and the figures within the table are the percentage of respondents who positioned the culture accordingly.

School	Position	Hothouse	Welfarist	Formal	Survivalist
Newest	Present	61%	0%	33%	6%
	Ideal	61%	22%	17%	0%
	Towards	38%	6%	28%	28%

Table 4.4 : Collated Responses from Newest Preparatory School

In this instance it illustrates that sixty-one percent of staff have located the school's present culture in the hothouse quadrant, thirty-three percent locating it as formal, six

percent as survivalist, whilst none felt it lay in the welfarist quadrant. In positioning the ideal culture there is no change in the hothouse quadrant with a sixty-one percent placing, however twenty-two percent have opted for the welfarist quadrant, seventeen percent for formal, and none for survivalist. In essence the school is currently perceived as quite strongly hothouse with the same majority looking for it to remain there. The data relating to the direction the school is seen to be moving in is of some interest and shows that only thirty-eight percent of the staff believe it is moving toward hothouse, whilst twenty eight percent perceive it moving toward formal, twenty-eight percent have indicated a move towards a survivalist culture, with a minority of six percent of staff perceiving a move towards a more welfarist culture. As for Midway, this may be indicative of a school where the leadership is perhaps not as strong as it could be leading to a sense of loss of direction and confusion as to where the school is trying to go. However, of far greater concern is the situation where a substantial number of staff see the school heading for a survivalist scenario. Combining the hothouse/welfarist and formal/survivalist responses as we have done for the previous schools identifies that in Newest sixty-one percent perceive the culture to be in the hothouse/welfarist quadrants, with eighty-three percent ideally liking it to be positioned there. Overall fifty-six percent believe it is moving away from that position. The responses to the questions posed during the interviews give a detailed insight into the school's culture and the role of Southern Schools. At the time of the interviews Ne1 had been at the school for twenty-seven years, eleven years as headmaster, and has remained in-post for two years since the school was acquired by Southern Schools. Ne2 has been a member of staff for ten years, Ne3 for four years, and Ne4 for nine years. All have therefore served under the head before, during and post acquisition.

Question 1 How much of the description do you agree with ?

Ne1 “ Not really surprised by the findings - I would be very surprised if we fell into the welfarist or the survivalist, or if there was any significant number in there. I think this spread between the hothouse and the formal is about right. We have gone through quite a change here at Newest and I think some of the feelings the staff have may be prejudiced because of the quite different style that Southern Schools have in comparison to the previous owners. The previous owners lived on the site and were present, and seen to be

present, and took an interest in the school which wasn't just lip service. It was a genuine interest because the previous owners were the family of the founder of the school, so there was quite naturally an interest in what was going on. They would take an interest in you as a person as well as a professional. Now moving into an organization such as Southern Schools, that personal touch diminishes, not because of any deliberate intent but because it is bigger, well it is a large organization. The structure of the school in terms of those who make the decision has been almost turned upside down, and that has certainly unsettled the staff. We do believe we have a very frenetic school - it could be the timing of the timetable, a practical thing, it certainly has to do with the number of activities we want to supply for the children. We don't have sets of rules, we tend to say this is what you do rather than what you don't do. I think the hothouse culture is probably typical of any independent prep school. In the state system you might get totally different results depending on the location of the school, a deprived area school would be a lot different from a more affluent area."

Ne2 "A lot of work we are doing in running the school is done on a day-day basis, there's seems there is no planning going on. There are so many things coming in that you feel it is a hothouse. It is a frenetic school and we are all under pressure, I don't think the staff are enthusiastic and committed, we are committed but the enthusiasm has gone down. We haven't any time for experiment and innovation because there's hardly any time to think about these things. When parents complain it is always us that are wrong. It's always what we have done badly rather than what good things we do. We are teachers, and there's the headmaster, who has the ultimate control. We feel as if we have no say."

Ne3 "I think there's too much freedom as to what staff can do in the classroom. I've no doubt the staff are committed and enthusiastic. I think it's a real mix between the hothouse and the survivalist. Looking at this now I would much rather go for the welfarist than the hothouse. I certainly feel we're going more towards the

survivalist in that we're a business, it feels very much like a business sometimes. You do feel the situation when somebody's away ill for the day. You do feel you're working from day-day."

Ne4 " I put it in hothouse basically because this was the direction I felt we were in, but we were going back slightly to survivalist.

Originally this was a small caring school, it was a family school, so the focus was predominantly on the child. The staff all knew everybody, parents knew the staff, where now it seems we're going more business, commercial."

Question 2 What role/part do you consider you have played in developing the culture of the school ?

Ne1 " A headmaster, in any case, is going to have an influence on the culture of the school. If the headmaster doesn't take much notice of the relationships between pupils and staff, pupils and pupils, and staff and staff, then you're not going to get a good working team. It will never be perfect since you will never get all the staff working in the same direction at the same time. I would hope that I have certainly had an influence in driving the school forward as a caring school where firstly and foremost we look out for each other and care for each other. The original owners would have had the major drive in the culture of the school. There is always a direction in which you want to take the school which is different from the previous head. Had I felt the culture was so different from my own I would not have taken on the post of head, however I did feel the school could move in a slightly different way in some areas. I think the school is responding to what the parent's want. I would like the school to be something different from what it is, but if I try to do that we wouldn't get the children in. I would like parents to be committed to independent education, we have a trickle out after the nursery, we have an exit at eleven plus to the grammar schools, and then at thirteen plus to the state system. Therefore the culture of the school is not quite what I would like it to be, but I cannot influence the culture this way."

Ne2 “ I don’t think I have played an active role in developing the school culture.”

Ne3 “ I was happy when I first came just to fit in, it’s my first teaching post.”

Question 3 What role do you consider the head/staff has played in developing the culture of the school ?

Ne1 “ The staff have been fairly stable for some time with only one or two moving per year, I would prefer it to have been three or four, to bring in new blood. Interestingly this year we do have four new staff.

The staff have had active input in policy documents, not just in academic documents, eg the bullying document. I would actually like a greater input from staff, but some staff feel they don’t need to or don’t want to. Those that wish to make a contribution have had the opportunity to do so. It came through from all the staff that it was difficult to accept one, and one only, culture. There is always going to be an element in the Staff Common Room along the disaffected line, perhaps disaffected is too strong but you get the feeling for what I mean.”

Ne2 “ The school is going away from an open ear, of listening to one another, to saying this is what I tell you to do, and you do it.”

Ne3 “ He is the authoritative figure at the end of the day. There isn’t the same relationship between head and staff as there is between staff and children. Whereas we praise the children the head is sometimes slow to praise - it’s always been like that, I was amazed. You feel sometimes like the naughty boy in front of the headmaster’s desk, it’s a room, it’s a desk, it’s a distance. There’s all these things, and you get a feeling that cock-ups will be remembered, and not the good things. Yes there’s a distance which I feel shouldn’t be there - I don’t feel him very accessible, he agreed this was a failing and put it down to pressures from Southern Schools and he was dealing with that, he wasn’t around.”

Ne4 “ I think the head has changed with the demands of the

environment for filling the school. At one time his role was as a headmaster where he was in contact with the children and the staff, and now he's becoming management. I feel that's been brought about by the acquisition. In a small school like this the headmaster plays an important role, because he can be the culture. I feel that as a result of the acquisition he's changing and hence the culture as well."

Question 4 Do you consider that Southern Schools has influenced the development of the school's culture ?

Ne1 " Do I think it's changed or do I perceive it's changed ? I think both. I think the culture has changed and it has been perceived to have changed, even though the perception may be wrong. The staff and I feel that the personal touch has been lost in the transfer, but we've tried hard to replace it with its proper replacement, and of course the time we've been with Southern Schools hasn't enabled us to reach that optimum situation yet. Now I think I'm further down the road than the staff are because I have more contact with the governors, and therein lies a statement of course that the governors need to make contact with the staff and the staff with the governors. We've got to get them together more. We would then have the staff feeling that the governors were for them, which they clearly are, but has that message been sent ? Has that message been received ? It is all to do with perception and fact.

Southern Schools are absolutely not doing anything to change the culture of the school. All that is happening is as a result of a different method of operation, it is not through anybody's deliberate attempt.

There is corporateness as a concept floating around but it's to do with statements made outside the culture of the school. I do believe that Southern Schools want to have a corporate image both in terms of the education it delivers and therefore the perception of the parents who look at the school. But also from the perception of the staff, how do the staff view their lords and masters in that

sense. Far be it from me to tell them how to do their job, but I think they should be doing it from within rather from outside. Statements are made which don't necessarily fit. There are many other external factors which affect the school, eg instability of support staff, we are going through a change of type of school. Over the last eight or nine years we've moved from a single sex, boys' school age seven to thirteen, to a co-educational age two to thirteen."

Ne2 "I don't think the school culture has changed as a result of the Southern Schools' takeover. There is no influence, this is what I see as the negative side because in the sense of being purchased by Southern Schools they have done the outside, this is a facade, and is more or less a facade trimming exercise. We haven't been able to speak to anyone, they haven't actually reacted to us, it just seems that we are bought - part of the school - and that's it. They deal with the headmaster, maybe it's their culture not to interfere with the staff, but on the other hand we don't see ourselves as part of Southern Schools at all. With the previous owners we always felt part of them, but Southern Schools have not even talked to us."

Ne3 "Culturally since Southern Schools took over I don't think there have been any changes, none at all. I think we might have seen the head a bit more under pressure, but it hasn't affected the children. No evidence of corporate culture, there's things like print at the bottom of letters etc. I think they've got the balance about right at present. At the end of the day why are Southern Schools in it? Is it for the benefit of education because that's the way they believe it should be, or is it just because it's a good job and they get paid a lot of money for doing it? They keep saying that we're going to be more selective, take in more academic children. It is getting more selective, but if numbers drop then we'll go back to being less selective."

Ne4 "We're becoming more business and business like, whereas before we were working solely on children's education and moral life, and I feel we've gone a bit astray on that point. The school is losing its identity as a family and just becoming part of a large organization. I

don't think this has been deliberate it's just that we've become part of a big group. We're being streamlined to meet the requirements of Southern Schools , not just management side but the way the school is run from ordering down to minibuses, everything is standardised. They have spent a lot of finances on promoting the school and the look of the facilities, but my argument is the focus hasn't been on what's important - that's the kids in the school - and the staffing of the school. Newest has had a good reputation as a school for dealing with children who have had learning difficulties. The problem is that with all the investment in the new facade their trying to promote themselves as an academic school, and their trying to put themselves in a market where other schools in the area do have a high academic standing.”

Question 5 Do you see yourself/the head as a head-teacher or a business manager ?

Ne1 “ My role has changed considerably, I was very much a hands-on headmaster in so far as I would roll my sleeves up and put my hand down the loo if I needed to, and that sort of thing. My responsibilities have increased, I'm much more involved in the financial side of things, and in many of those areas where I wasn't involved. I believe I've got a degree more autonomy than I used to have, and I feel I had a reasonable degree then so that's a positive statement. Therefore I want to make sure I don't lose touch with the staff and with the children. Because I was so involved in getting the governors informed as to what Southern Schools did I spent less time with the staff, becoming slightly more remote. Hence the same must have been perceived by the children and the parents. I think that was quite significant and I was conscious of the need to ensure that the staff's morale was maintained and that the jitters were kept to a minimum. I don't teach now as much as I used to do previously, but I think the staff see me as a school person.”

Ne2 “ I think he's more under pressure now, he's moved away from the staff and become an admin person to deal with the paperwork



required by Southern Schools. From seeing each other on a daily basis, he's moved away from that."

Ne3 " Schools aren't businesses, schools shouldn't be businesses. I think he's a bit of a school man who enjoys the corporate man image of it - it's given him a bit of a business edge, but at the end of the day he's a school man."

Ne4 " I think the head would like to see himself as a corporate man, I think he would love to be a big part of the big wheel. He's distanced himself from the staff, not deliberately, but as a result of the pressures from Southern Schools."

Question 6 Do you know anything about the culture of the other three schools participating in this study ?"

Ne1 " I would expect the culture of the other schools to be all different from a geographical aspect and other factors."

Question 7 Do you see similarities between the culture of your school and the others ?

Ne1 " I would not expect any of them to be in the welfarist or survivalist, I would expect them to range in the formal and hothouse."

What then does this tell us about the culture of the school, the level of agreement between staff on its positioning, the changes that have occurred since acquisition, and the influence of that acquisition on the school and its culture ? The responses from the interviews very much support the results of the initial survey in that the school is undergoing a period of turmoil and uncertainty. All respondents are in agreement that the school is in a hothouse position although there is some disparity between the head and his staff as to the degree of formal and survivalist that is also present. The head acknowledges that things are not going well, and the apparent disinterest of Southern Schools in the staff at Newest is playing a major part in this, although he states this is more a perception than a reality. One interesting comment of the head here is that he believes a hothouse culture to be typical of any independent preparatory school, this is discussed further in section 4.6 where a comparison between the four schools is made.

The head implies that the school has moved away from a 'family' interest into part of a large organization, whilst Ne3 is more forceful in their statement that "it feels very much like a business sometimes". This is further supported by the comments of Ne4 that "Originally this was a small, caring school, it was a family school.....now it seems we're going more business, commercial". The responses to questions two and three indicate very strongly that it is the head, with apparently minimal contribution from staff, who has been responsible for the developing culture. The head, whilst acknowledging the culture was present when he was appointed, also confirms that he set out to change that culture, although he still cannot influence some factors within it. All the staff are in agreement that the head is somewhat authoritative in his role, and that this has been further exacerbated by the changes within the school environment. The degree of influence over the development of the present culture school by Southern Schools since acquisition is addressed in question four. The head states categorically that he believes the culture has changed and a result has been the consequent loss of the "personal touch". Given that he was the headmaster before the acquisition one can only assume that this loss is as a direct result of his changing role, since he has been "a bit more under pressure". There is some difference between staff in their perception of this. They all appear to say that the culture of the school hasn't changed, yet all identify changes that have occurred, Ne2 comments "we don't see ourselves as part of Southern Schools at all", whilst Ne4 responds "We're becoming more business and business like...the school is losing its identity as a family and just becoming part of a large organization." There is definite concern among the staff that investment has been limited to the physical structure of the school, "a facade trimming exercise", "they have spent a lot of finances on promoting the school and the look of the facilities....the focus hasn't been on what's important". It is interesting to look closely at the responses to question five. The head admits to a changing role, becoming less "hands-on", teaching less than he used to, and "becoming slightly more remote", but still sees himself as a school man and believes his staff share this view. The staff however, do not see him this way, "he's moved away from the staff and become an admin person", "he's a bit of a school man who enjoys the corporate man image", "would like to see himself as a corporate man". Ne3 supports this with the response "Schools aren't businesses, schools shouldn't be businesses". The inability of the staff to respond to questions six and seven further supports the previous view regarding not feeling part of the group. It is apparent that the staff have no knowledge of other schools in the group, it is unlikely that they would be able to name any of the other three schools in this study. On posing this

additional question it was met with a succession of blank looks. Only the head appears to have any feeling for the other schools, but judging from his response to these two questions even this is somewhat limited.

4.6 Comparison and conclusions of analyses

The preceding sections have considered the culture of each of the schools in isolation and the views of the staff on the outcomes of the initial phase of data collection. From this it has been possible to identify a number of findings which necessitate the requirement to undertake a comparative analysis between the four schools. Table 4.5 below represents the collated results from all four schools.

School	Position	Hothouse	Welfarist	Formal	Survivalist
Oldest	Present	79%	21%	0%	0%
	Ideal	86%	14%	0%	0%
	Towards	50%	29%	14%	7%
Nearby	Present	64%	0%	18%	18%
	Ideal	82%	18%	0%	0%
	Towards	46%	0%	36%	18%
Midway	Present	64%	27%	9%	0%
	Ideal	55%	36%	9%	0%
	Towards	36%	36%	28%	0%
Newest	Present	61%	0%	33%	6%
	Ideal	61%	22%	17%	0%
	Towards	38%	6%	28%	28%

Table 4.5 : Collated Responses for all Four Schools

From this we are able to deduce that the present culture of all four schools is that of a 'hothouse' and hence propound a conclusion that this is fairly typical of independent preparatory schools and therefore generic to this particular group of schools. Further to this, three out of the four schools either wish to strengthen this position or maintain the current degree of presence. It would be unsound at this stage to make any generalization across the independent preparatory school sector since the sample contained within this study cannot be considered representative of that target population. Additionally it can be

argued that this is not the purpose of a case study. Adelman, Jenkins and Kemis (1976), in (Popkewitz & Tabachnick, 1981, p214) argue that whereas

“ Experimental research ‘guarantees’ the veracity of its generalizations by reference to formal theories and hands them on intact to the reader, case study research offers a surrogate experience and invites the reader to underwrite the account, by appealing to his tacit knowledge of human situations. The truths contained in a successful case study report, like those in literature, are ‘guaranteed’ by ‘the shock of recognition’ ”.

Popkewitz & Tabachnick (ibid) further this argument by stating “ *The implication of this view is that generalization is more like thinking by analogy than discovering law-like empirical relationships* ”.

Moving on from this point there is also evidence of a trend within the schools for a slight move toward a more formal culture; whilst none of the schools ideally want this position it may be seen as a reasonable conclusion that one of the influencing factors of corporate acquisition has been to generate this move. Perhaps the perception is that financial controls necessitate a more formal culture to enable the schools to work within the apparent restrictions this imposes ? All schools desire a degree of welfarist, this should not be seen as surprising since it is reasonable to assume that independent preparatory schools are not solely concerned with the education of the child, but also with their pastoral care and welfare. In their survey (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2000, p31) found that this was one area “*where improvements would be welcomed.*” Something perhaps for the head-master of Newest to consider given his statement “*I would be very surprised if we fell into the welfarist...or if there was any significant number in there.*” A position which twenty-two percent of his staff identified as being a requirement. It is evident from the findings of both the initial survey and the follow-up interviews that this mix of hothouse and welfarist has emerged from the study as being an important element of independent preparatory schools and is therefore worthy of further analysis.

To facilitate a comparison Table 4.6 overleaf illustrates the collated results of the four schools following the combining of the hothouse with the welfarist quadrant, and the formal with the survivalist quadrant.

School	Position	Hothouse and Welfarist	Formal and Survivalist
Oldest	Present	100%	0%
	Ideal	100%	0%
	Towards	79%	21%
Midway	Present	91%	9%
	Ideal	91%	9%
	Towards	72%	28%
Nearby	Present	64%	36%
	Ideal	100%	0%
	Towards	46%	54%
Newest	Present	61%	39%
	Ideal	83%	17%
	Towards	44%	56%

Table 4.6 : Effect of Combining Cultures within the Four Schools

The results from this action are quite illuminating in respect of how it may now be possible to classify the ‘ideal’, or perhaps more, ‘typical’ culture for an independent preparatory school. They also give an intriguing insight into the leadership styles of the four head-teachers and similarities between them, as perceived by the staff. One of the first observations from this exercise is that the four schools have effectively sub-divided into two pairs based on their responses to using the Hargreaves’ (1995) tool. The first of these pairings brings together Oldest and Midway and the similarities in the perceived cultures of these schools is clearly visible. Both schools show an overwhelming majority in favour of the hothouse/welfarist mix with little or no preference for the formal/survivalist. In the case of Midway it should be noted that the nine percent showing the ideal as being in this latter position equates to a single member of staff. However, it is not only the positioning of the present and ideal cultures which bear striking similarities, but also the percentages of staff agreeing as to the direction the culture is perceived to be moving in, with seventy-nine percent and seventy-two percent respectively seeing it moving toward the hothouse/welfarist, and twenty-one percent and twenty-eight percent respectively moving toward formal/survivalist.

The second of the pairings brings together Nearby and Newest, and as for the first pair

the similarities between present and ideal cultures are striking in more ways than one. Firstly there is the question of the percentage of staff who opted for the hothouse/welfarist position, sixty-four percent in the case of Nearby and sixty-one percent for Newest. More strikingly are the percentages of staff who positioned the present culture in the formal/survivalist quadrant, thirty-six percent and thirty-nine percent respectively. Further, and perhaps of more concern to the respective head-teachers, is the fact that fifty-four percent of staff in Nearby and fifty-six percent of staff in Newest feel they are moving more towards this position. It is worth noting that considering the 'ideal' culture in isolation identifies a greater similarity between all of the schools except Newest, indicative perhaps of the effect of length of corporate ownership may eventually have on a school's culture given that Oldest, Nearby and Midway have been part of Southern Schools for nine, six and five years respectively, whilst Newest has only two years ownership to their credit. This latter point was highlighted by the head-master of Newest in his interview as one possible reason why the staff's perception of the influence of Southern Schools was wrong - "the time we've been with Southern Schools hasn't enabled us to reach that optimum situation yet." The questions are why should this be the case, and why are the two pairs of schools apparently so different? Further scrutiny of the interview responses may help to shed some light on this, but they in themselves are not really sufficient to give substantive answers. It is also necessary to have visited the schools, and to have met the head-teachers and staff of the schools to have a real feel for the relationships within them. This outcome had not been predicted, and whilst it is of interest it is a phenomenon which may be investigated at a later date. Finally, and as a result of this study it has been possible to identify a number of key themes from the findings common to all the schools which are clearly supported by the outcomes of the Hargreaves(1995) tool, and/or the interview data.

1) **'The majority of the teachers appear to perceive that the present culture across the schools is that of a 'hothouse'.**

One of the secondary research questions addressed by this study was to see if it was possible to identify the culture of each of the schools from the perspective of the staff using the types of culture propounded by Hargreaves(1995). This theme suggests that it has been possible within this study, and one could argue it would therefore be possible within other similar studies, to do so. There is very strong evidence to support this theme both within Table 4.5 (p114) where the strength of feeling ranges from sixty-one percent in the case of Newest to seventy-nine

percent in that of Oldest, and from the responses given by staff throughout the four schools to the question regarding how much of the type descriptor they agreed with. The extracted quotes from the taped transcripts highlighted below clearly indicate agreement across the schools.

O1 (p85) “ *I agree that we are between hothouse and welfarist*”

N2 (p93) “ *I would say it’s about seventy-five percent true...*”

M4 (p100) “ *I’ve always felt this has been the culture of a private school, although I’ve never seen myself as a ‘hothouse’ teacher.*”

Ne1 (p106) “ *I think the hothouse culture is probably typical of any independent prep school.*”

Ne2 (p106) “ *There are so many things coming in that you feel it is a hothouse.*”

Whilst acknowledging that some of the staff could not remember where they had positioned the school, or why, they were generally of the view that the description of what constitutes a ‘hothouse’ culture could be identified within the school to a greater or lesser degree. A further objective of the study was to identify any similarities or differences in the schools’ cultures. It is also evident from this theme that there is considerable synergy between the types of cultures identified in the schools, as far as they are perceived by the staff. The question as to why this should be can be addressed by considering the responses of M4 and Ne1 above who are in general agreement that the ‘hothouse’ culture is perceived as being fairly typical of private and independent prep schools anywhere. This would be of importance not only to the staff, but also to school management, when, for example, looking to relocate or recruit staff into a school.

2) **An overwhelming majority of the teachers perceive that the ‘ideal’ culture for an independent preparatory school would be a mix of the ‘hothouse’ and ‘welfarist’ cultures. (‘greenhouse’)**

This study did not set out to deliberately identify this theme, and it is therefore an unexpected, but interesting outcome. The notion of an ‘ideal’ culture for independent preparatory schools would be of considerable interest both to staff and parents alike. From the staff perspective it would enable them to identify which schools fall outside of this culture and hence may be located in either the formal or survivalist types, important if one was considering a career move to a

new school for instance. The head-teachers or management of a school would be interested by virtue of the potential for identifying early any factors or actions which may impinge upon this culture and lead to an undesired change and potentially damaging situations. Parents would be able to satisfy themselves that the school applies equally the educational and moral standards expected from the schools, since previous research (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2000) identified this as being an important factor in parental choice. From within this study there is substantial evidence to support this theme in the resultant outcome of combining the cultures as illustrated in Table 4.6 (p116), which indicates the percentage of staff placing the schools in the ideal position ranging from eighty-three percent for Newest to one-hundred percent for Oldest and Nearby. This is further evidenced by data collected in the interviews, as follows, which shows that whilst staff may have originally placed the school in the hothouse sector they would reconsider this positioning and move it toward the welfarist hence showing their preference for this mix.

N1 (p93) “ *A number of my staff say that it is one of the happiest schools they have worked in.* ”

M1 (p99) “ *Had I been given these descriptions I don't think I would have placed the school so far to the 'hothouse'. On reflection I might have moved a bit more towards the 'welfarist'.* ”

Ne3 (p106) “ *Looking at this now I would much rather go for the 'welfarist' than the 'hothouse'.* ”

3) **There is strong evidence in all four schools that staff perceive the presence of a far more 'business' like climate.**

This is an important theme since it addresses one of the secondary research questions this study set out to investigate. The perception of a school as a business by the staff has led them to believe, or at least perceive, that corporate acquisition is not in the best interests of either the school or the education of the children within it. This is an important factor since should this perception spread outside the school and parents become more aware of it then it may lead to apprehension within this group for parents to send their children there. This possibility is supported by the review of the literature where it was found that

“ Parents may perceive a school which has charitable status as being different in kind from an independent school run as a business.”

(Johnson, 1987, p79)

There is considerable evidence present within this study to support this theme. In particular the comments found when considering the responses to the interview question regarding the role of Southern Schools in the development of the culture.

O2 (p88) *“ Southern Schools doesn’t take into consideration that they are dealing with people’s lives and not just running a business.”*

N3 (p95) *“...it’s become much more business like, it’s become much more money orientated.”*

M4 (p102) *“ There’s a much more business approach to staff etc...”*

Ne4 (p110) *“ We’re becoming more business and business like, whereas before we were working solely on children’s education and moral life...”*

It is noticeable here that even in Oldest School, after ten years of ownership, this perception still holds indicating, perhaps, that either this is an issue which has not been addressed, or more likely, has not been brought to the attention of the corporate organization. This perception of the schools as a business would appear to be one of some great importance, to the staff, and whilst not explicitly highlighted, by the head-teachers, since there is evidence to support the view that financial controls are holding back the development of the schools :-

O1 (p86) *“There are restrictions in this - salary always comes into it,.....This is one of the restrictions that frustrate me, along with the lack of space.*

N1 (p95) *“Its interest is not only an educational one but also a financial one.”*

M1 (p101) *“ The Chief Executive was sat with income sheets in front him and he said “ I don’t care about this, which is income. I don’t care about this, which is expenditure. I only care about this, which is the bottom line... Southern Schools are just the holders of the purse-strings.*

- 4) **All four head-teachers are of the same perception that since acquisition corporate ownership has not had a major influence, if any, on the educational culture of the school.**

This theme has emerged as a direct result of posing the question regarding the role of Southern Schools in the development of the schools’ cultures. It addresses

one of the secondary research questions and indicates that there is no evidence to suggest that corporate acquisition of small independent preparatory schools has any impact on the culture of that school in terms of developing a corporate culture. The general perception of the head-teachers is that any role played by the organization has been very much a secondary or background one. In supporting this the head-teachers without exception voiced the view that the culture of their school was very much down to them, as evidenced in the following responses from themselves and supported, in most cases, by their staff :-

O1 (p88) “ *Each school develops its own culture...they may play a part in it, but the culture of the school is determined by the head...and that in my opinion is what really creates the culture.* ”

O2 (p88) “*The culture in the school is despite of Southern Schools not because of...* ”

N1 (p95) “ *Southern Schools has played a limited role....it has been a supportive role. I don't think in terms of developing a culture which is distinctly Southern Schools it has played a significant role.* ”

N2 (p95) “*The culture has been developed the way the head wants it..*”

M1 (p101) “ *I don't think Southern Schools have had any role in the development of the school culture...I don't know whether the school culture has changed since the takeover. I would hope that external factors are not influencing the culture of the school.* ”

M2 (p101) “*Southern Schools do not have a say in the culture of the school...*”

Ne1 (p109) “ *Southern Schools are absolutely not doing anything to change the culture of the school. All that is happening is as a result of a different method of operation, it is not through anybody's deliberate attempt.* ”

Ne3 (p110) “*Culturally since Southern Schools took over I don't think there have been any changes, none at all.* ”

This notion that the culture of organizations, in this case schools, are driven by their leadership, is not new, and simply reinforces the views of, amongst others, Stoll & Fink (1996), Schein (1997) and Furnham (1997) as discussed in Chapter 2. As for the preceding theme this is an important finding since it effectively suggests that corporate acquisition is not perceived as being a catalyst of change within the schools' educational culture.

- 5) **In three of the four schools there is strong staff perception that where money is being invested it is being spent on visual trappings of culture, the facade, rather than on the education of the children.**

This theme has emerged from interviewee responses to the question as to the role of Southern Schools. This theme has really developed out of the perception by the staff that the schools have become much more business like, since investing in the structure of an organization is perceived, by the staff, as being a business concept rather than an educational one. We can see from the interview extracts below that this perception is very evident within all the schools other than Oldest, and that staff feelings towards this run very high.

N3 (p95) “ *An awful lot of money has been spent on the school property but not in the school...there is such a consciousness of how much things cost that sometimes that comes before the needs of the children...* ”.

M4 (p102) “ *There’s been money spent- the school has changed structurally.* ”

Ne4 (p111) “*They have spent a lot of finances on promoting the school and the look of the facilities, but my argument is the focus hasn’t been on what’s important - that’s the kids in the school- and the staffing of the school.*”

Note that it is only in Oldest school that this issue was not raised. It is difficult to comment on this but one could surmise that length of corporate ownership, and newness of staff have played a role. It is evident from this that much work needs to be done post-acquisition to ensure that staff fully appreciate the objectives of the organization, and in particular the strategy behind the investment. This perception is not held by the head-teachers, who were generally in closer contact with the group, and it is perhaps their responsibility that such a perception exists among their staff. This is an important theme from the point of what factors an acquiring organization may want to take account of when moving into this area. It is clear that failure to address this issue is likely to result in a feeling of general discontent by the staff towards the take-over.

- 6) **There is an almost unanimous perception by head-teachers and their staff across all four schools that ‘corporate culture’ has not developed to any great degree. Although whether this is good or bad is in their view uncertain.**

This theme follows on from that discussed previously in 4) above. It is evident

that not only is corporate acquisition perceived to have had no impact on the educational culture of the school, it has also apparently failed to develop its own corporate culture, or identity. There is an argument within the evidence supporting this theme that whilst the perception of a developing corporate culture is negative there are clear signs that corporate identity is beginning to creep into a number of the schools' promotional activities. A number of the staff effectively support this view, even to the point of almost contradicting themselves in their responses to the question :-

O3 (p89) “ *I don't think there's enough of an overall Southern Schools culture. I'm surprised that with the number of schools they control that there isn't a sort of Southern Schools culture....There is some evidence of corporate culture...I see a role for corporate culture, there could be more sharing.* ”

N1 (p95) “ *I truthfully don't believe there is any corporate culture. I think there are elements of corporate culture, but these are not unique to Southern Schools.* ”

M4 (p102) “ *I think we feel we're of a group, but I don't think we feel we're of a corporate culture.* ”

M1 (p103) “ *I don't see any evidence of corporate culture within the group, whether it has happened by default since they appointed all the heads, I don't know.* ”

Ne3 (p110) “ *No evidence of corporate culture, there's things like print at the bottom of letters etc.* ”

The 'marketisation' of education is a field of study too broad for inclusion and discussion within this investigation. It is, however, an area that acquiring organizations may wish to address since from a business perspective 'brand recognition' is one of the marketers strongest tools. This perceived lack of a corporate culture/identity is rather surprising and one would need to question the underlying strategy behind the acquisition of the schools. If the strategy is to build a leading supplier of independent education then basic business thinking would demand the establishment of such an identity.

- 7) **There appears to be a perception among the staff in all four schools that the group do not communicate with them leading to a feeling of being unwanted.**

As for some of the preceding themes this particular theme has emerged in response to the question regarding the role of Southern Schools in developing the culture of the school. It is interesting in that whilst the overwhelming staff perception is that corporate acquisition has had little, if any, role in the development of their schools' cultures there is clear evidence that lack of communication is influencing how the organization itself is perceived by the staff. In the main this appears to have resulted in a very negative view of the group by the staff.

O2 (p88) “ *It's almost as if they don't exist...we never see them, we don't know anything about them.* ”

N3 (p93) “ *Things are not discussed, they're a fait accompli. You wonder sometimes if you've been heard.* ”

Ne1 (p109) “ *...I have more contact with the governors, and therein lies a statement of course that the governors need to make more contact with the staff and the staff with the governors.* ”

Ne2 (p110) “ *We haven't been able to speak to anyone, they haven't actually reacted to us, it just seems that we are bought-part of the school-and that's it.* ”

This is also interesting by virtue that this perception exists across all the schools irrespective of length of corporate ownership or staff service. Even relatively recent appointments voiced concern over this lack of corporate communication. This is further confused when one considers the perceptions of the head-teachers. Other than the head-teacher of Newest School (Ne1, p109) who feels that “*the perception may be wrong.*” and that “*..the governors need to make contact with the staff and the staff with the governors.*” there is no perception by the head-teachers in the other three schools that this is an issue. Ne1 (p109) further supports this by believing that “*It is all to do with perception and fact.*”

As to whose responsibility this is, one could argue that the ‘local’ management, that is the head-teachers, should shoulder a high proportion of blame.

These seven themes have enabled a clear understanding of the effects of corporate acquisition on small independent preparatory schools to be made. This now leads us on to a number of conclusions and firm recommendations for further research and other actions to be addressed and implemented as a result of this study.

5. CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

It is an important part of any study for the writer to draw together the threads of the research and to hopefully arrive at some firm conclusions based on the supportive evidence contained within the findings. To address this need this final chapter is divided into two parts. The first part (conclusions) attempts to draw some conclusions from the research and considers the degree to which the research questions have been answered. Additionally it draws further conclusions from the study which have evolved as a direct result of the research undertaken, although they may not have formed a central theme within the originally stated objectives of the study. The second part (recommendations) puts forward some firm recommendations for further research in the field of study, and as a result of the findings, makes further recommendations on how organizations contemplating the acquisition of small independent preparatory schools should consider the factors that contribute to the culture of such schools and the impact that acquisition may have upon them.

5.2 Conclusions

This study set out to investigate the following key research question :-

Does corporate acquisition of small, independent preparatory schools precipitate a change in those schools' culture or climate as perceived by the head-teachers and their staff ?

In doing so it has addressed a number of secondary research questions :-

- a) What is the 'culture' of each of the schools studied ?

The first conclusion to be drawn from this study is that it is important to understand the different forms that culture takes. It has been argued that the term 'school culture' means many things to diverse groups of people and that in identifying school culture it is necessary to give due consideration as to the perspective from which that culture is viewed, and to recognize that such an exercise is nothing more than a snapshot of the culture at the time of enquiry. Taking this into account it is evident that this study has succeeded in identifying

each school's culture specifically from the perspectives of the head-teacher and a sample of their staff. The resultant outcome from this investigation has been that all four schools have been identified as being predominantly of the 'hothouse' genre as propounded by Hargreaves (1995). This has been further substantiated by the responses from the head-teachers and their staff to interview questions. However, the evidence also suggests that this rather one-sided perception of a school's culture does not appear to be the ideal; since on reading the descriptors many of the interviewees indicated that some element of the 'welfarist' was also desirable. From this it is then possible to conclude that this mix of cultures has probably emerged in response to market demands, implying that parents send their children to a specific school based upon its ability to fulfill their high expectations of independent preparatory education. What then are the attributes and characteristics which identify such a culture, and what 'label' best defines it? Considering Hargreaves' (ibid) descriptors it is a fairly simple exercise to extract, modify and add, to those parts from 'hothouse' and 'welfarist' which the research has shown to be the main factors contributing to the ideal culture of an independent preparatory school; leading us to the following outline :-

In this culture the desire to attend equally to both the academic and pastoral care of the pupils leads to a busy school, where expectations of work and personal development are high. Teachers are generally enthusiastic and committed, with the educational philosophy being very child-centred. Whilst the climate is demanding, and can sometimes become heated, relationships between the head-teacher and the staff are seen to be democratic; developing a high level of interdependence, yet retaining a level of autonomy and individuality. Teachers are concerned equally with pupils' mastery of academic content and their pastoral well-being, nurturing them through their preparatory school years in readiness for transplanting out into the secondary sector, from seedlings to blossoming flowers.

This outline leads us to the conclusion that such a culture would be inappropriately labelled as either 'Hothouse' or 'Welfarist' and hence the need to identify a label that in a word sums up the description. As a result of considerable

deliberation over this issue the term, or label, 'Greenhouse' appears to be a more suitable alternative. One may argue that there is little difference between this label and 'Hothouse', however even a horticulturist would recognize that whilst a 'Hothouse' is the right environment for the growth of tropical plants, a 'Greenhouse' is far more appropriate for the nurturing and growth of 'tender plants'. This analogy can easily be drawn with the need for independent preparatory schools to provide such an environment as that offered by the latter of these two terms.

Is it therefore reasonable to conclude that such a 'Greenhouse' culture is generic to independent preparatory schools. This is certainly the case within this study but one has to acknowledge that further generalization over the whole sector should not be assumed, and would entail a much wider sample to substantiate such a claim. Furthermore a closer examination of the Hargreaves' technique has led to the conclusion that it is very much a broad-brush approach and has an intrinsic weakness in that it fails to take into account the subtle differences, or 'uniqueness' characteristics, of individual schools, even if the modification to a more precise grid as used in this study is implemented. It suffers, in some ways, from the same criticism which was aimed at Hofstede's (1980) earlier work into national cultures by later proponents on the subject, that there is a tendency to attempt to classify, or categorize, the whole population as if they were one, irrespective of individual variations eg. all French people are the same, which as we know they are not. This issue and recommendations for improvement are addressed in section 5.3.

- b) What, if any, are the similarities and differences between these 'cultures' ?
- We have seen from the study that there are both similarities and differences between the cultures of the schools. Even though they all fall into the hothouse/welfarist types, the degree of presence of these cultures varies to a greater or lesser extent between some of the schools. This has been evidenced, as discussed in the previous chapter, by the presence of effectively two pairs of schools where individual schools within a pair are similar to each other in many ways, but likewise, the first pair is similarly different from the second pair. It has not been possible within the limitations of this project to identify precisely the underlying reasons for this. It is however reasonable as a result of the study to

draw the conclusion that the leadership style, and relationship between the head-teacher, staff and Southern Schools, is partially responsible. Many other factors may also have contributed to this finding, such as location, size, catchment area etc but further research will be necessary before any substantiated conclusions can be reached. Further to the basic culture the study has also identified similarities within the schools on the role of the corporate organization, Southern Schools, in the development of the culture. The conclusion can be reached that while their role has not always been explicitly identified by staff in their responses, some of their statements show a majority of the view that corporate influence has been more implicit in its presence.

- c) Have the staff or head-teachers perceived any ‘cultural’ changes since each school was acquired by the group ?

This question has been much harder to address by virtue of the time that some of the schools have been part of Southern Schools, and the length of service of a number of the head-teachers and staff, where many were not present pre-acquisition. However there is sufficient evidence to allow the conclusion to be drawn that cultural change has, and probably is, still taking place, even within Oldest Preparatory school, as a direct result of acquisition. This change however does not appear to be within the educational culture of the schools; with many staff believing that their school’s culture has always been ‘hothouse/welfarist’. Contrary to this there is some evidence, especially from Nearby and Newest schools, to support the view that the culture is moving to a more formal/survivalist position, due in the main to the financial constraints being imposed upon them by the more ‘business climate’ approach taken by Southern Schools. Whilst we cannot say for certain that acquisition has been solely responsible for this change, it is reasonable to accept from the evidence that it has been a contributing factor. This is further supported by a majority view across the schools that investment in them has been targeted not at the education of the children, but at superficially improving the facade of the schools in order to make them more attractive to parents of potential pupils.

- d) Is there any perception by the staff or the head-teachers of the emergence of ‘corporate culture’ or ‘business climate’, within the schools ?

Firstly it should be acknowledged that this final question was too broad and multi-faceted in that it consists of more than one part which cannot result in a single answer. The conclusion from the study is that in the first part there is no real perceived presence of the development of a deliberate corporate culture being imposed upon the schools by Southern Schools as a direct result of acquisition. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that such a culture is emerging in the form of corporate branding and image building, eg all schools now have the group name on headed paper; although this has not necessarily caused any variance in each school's educational culture as propounded by Hargreaves (1995). There is however, very strong evidence to support the view that a more business type climate now prevails over the schools, where prior to acquisition none was perceived. That is not to say it did not exist but only that staff did not view the school as a business entity, whereas now, they do. This has been seen by the staff as a deliberate strategy of Southern Schools and is one of the major areas of concern among them. During the interviews, and informal discussions within the Staff Common Room, many comments and opinions were voiced concerning this trend, from staff of varying lengths of service covering the periods, before, during and after acquisition. A number of staff saw the advantages of 'belonging' to a corporate entity, and were disappointed to varying degrees that more had not been made of this element in school publications for example, where the benefits of sending your child to a school within such a group may be extolled. An area perhaps that organizations involved in such activity may need to consider if they wish to develop this apparent 'competitive advantage'. Whilst acknowledging this 'benefit' the majority of staff were firmly against the concept of their school, or any school, being seen and run as a business. One further conclusion is that communication between the group and the staff of the schools appears to be weak with staff commenting that they know little if anything about either Southern Schools or even the other schools in the group' leading to a lack of identity and not knowing where they are meant to be going. In some cases this may be the driving force behind the perception of those staff who feel their schools are moving towards a survivalist culture. This conclusion is supported by the claims that :-

“If there is any centre to the mystery of schools’ success, mediocrity, or failure, it lies deep within the structure of the organizational goals : whether or not they exist, how they are defined and manifested, the extent to which they are mutually shared. Indeed, the hallmark of any successful organization is a shared sense among its members about what they are trying to accomplish.”

(Rosenholtz,1989 in Stoll & Fink,1996, p92)

Has this study succeeded in answering its primary research question of :-

Does corporate acquisition of small, independent preparatory schools precipitate a change in those schools’ culture or climate as perceived by the head-teachers and their staff ?

It is clear from the evidence and the preceding conclusions that this study has gone a long way toward investigating an area not previously considered, as discussed in the review of past research into school culture outlined in Chapter 2. That review highlighted the absence of any specific research into the independent school sector in general, and the preparatory school sector specifically. To this end it must be considered that this study has been successful in adding to the field of knowledge within the specified area of research, albeit limited in its scope. Whilst previous research has not been specific to this study it is apparent that the research undertaken here, and the resultant outcomes, support the previous findings of research undertaken primarily in the state secondary sector. In answering the above question this study has clearly shown that the perception of the majority of staff working within the schools investigated is that corporate acquisition has led to the emergence of a ‘business climate’, and the beginnings of ‘corporate culture’ within the schools. Whilst the sample is small it has been shown that such change is perceived, by the staff, as being detrimental to the education of the children when compared to the culture and climate that existed prior to the acquisition.

5.3 Recommendations

The limitations of this study have led to the identification of a number of firm recommendations for further research :-

1. The investigation was undertaken on a relatively small number of independent preparatory schools forming part of a larger group. The size of the sample is insufficient to allow any generalizations in respect of the

total sector to be drawn.

The first recommendation is that further research should be undertaken over a much larger sample and should cover schools from different organizational backgrounds, that is to say schools of a charitable trust status and others that form part of other corporate groups.

2. Secondly the research has been exclusively concerned with the perception of the head-teachers and staff of the schools. The variance in culture in relation to the observer's position has been widely discussed and it is therefore further recommended that future research approach this topic from either a parental, or less probably, a pupil perspective.
3. The evidence indicates that the Hargreaves' (1995) tool has been found to be too broad and effectively separates the key factors of a successful independent preparatory school into two distinctly different cultural types. Whilst it is acknowledged that different cultures do exist it is also felt that a four type matrix leads to disparate results, and that for this sector a three type triangular approach may be more appropriate. The model below is an attempt at developing an alternative framework which could be better utilised when investigating culture in this particular sector.

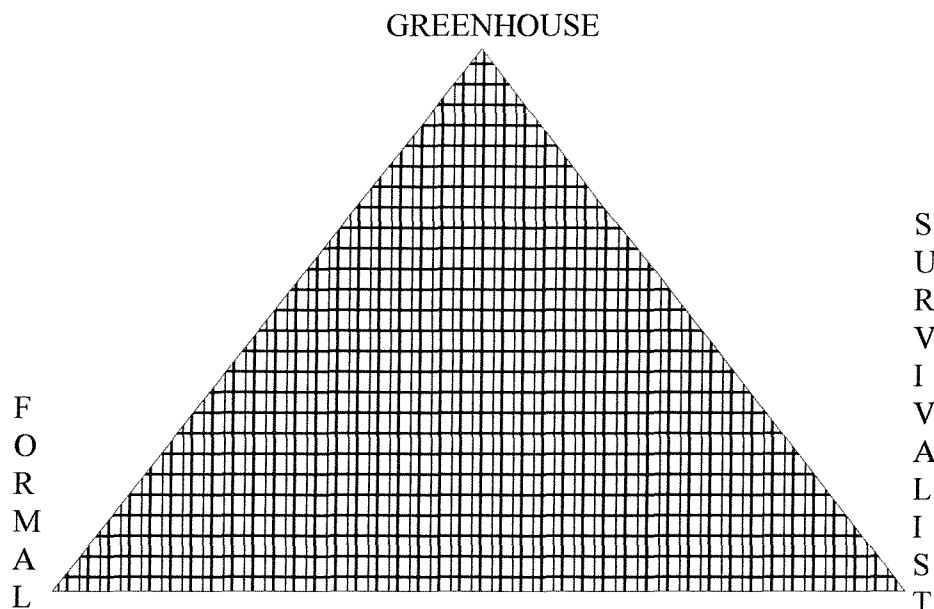


Fig 5.1 : Proposed Framework for Identifying Culture in Small Independent Preparatory Schools

The methodology for the use of such a framework would be very much in line with that of the Hargreaves (ibid) model. Descriptors etc for both the Formal and Survivalist cultures could be maintained, since the evidence suggests that these two types are still relevant within the independent preparatory school sector. However, modified descriptors for the Greenhouse culture along the lines of the one outlined on p126 would need to be developed. The data collection and analysis methods could also be retained and with a much finer grid, or mesh, the opportunity for staff to more precisely position their school's culture is present. As with any new method it is recommended that a small scale pilot be undertaken prior to any broader research to test the validity and reliability of such a model. However, it is possible here to exemplify the use of this framework by taking the results from one of the schools used in this study and transposing them onto this new grid as in Fig 5.2 below.

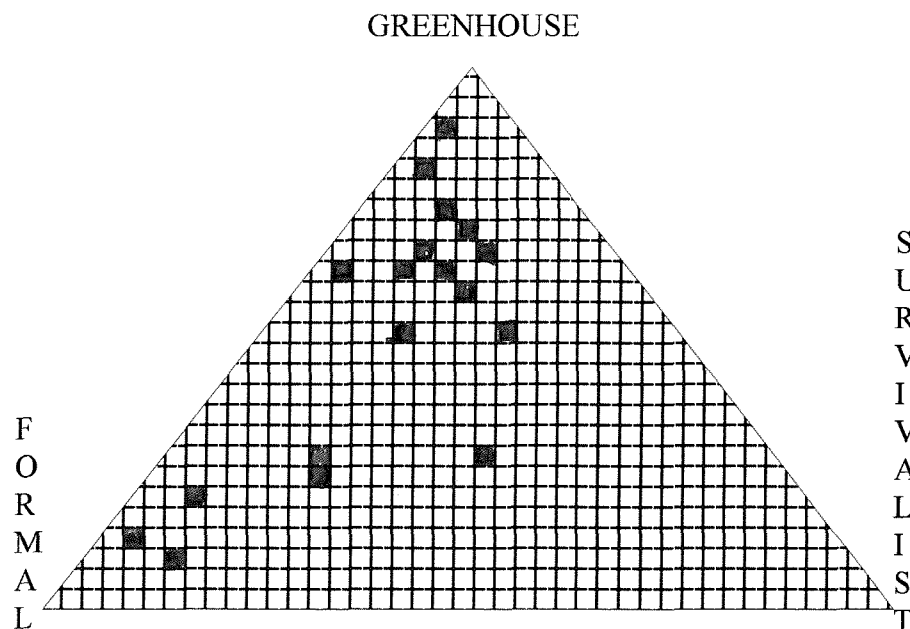


Fig 5.2 : Exemplified Framework for Identifying Culture in Small Independent Preparatory Schools

The framework has been completed using the 'present position' culture only, for the purposes of clarity, returns from Newest School. From this we can clearly see how the new 'Greenhouse' culture has been identified whilst maintaining the elements of 'Formal' and 'Survivalist' as in the original results.

4. The research has in the main been self-funded and this has imposed limitations on its breadth and depth, it is therefore a recommendation that sources of funding be identified and pursued with a view to undertaking a much deeper study leading to more definitive and generalised outcomes and conclusions.

5. In addition to the four outlined above there is one further recommendation which relates to the actions which should be implemented by corporates considering acquisition of independent preparatory schools. The study has produced much evidence to support the view that direct communications with teaching staff is an essential element of successful acquisition in this sector. It is firmly recommended that in such instances sufficient resources and effort be made available to ensure that staff do not feel that they are being acquired as part of the fixtures and fittings of the school. Winning the support of the staff will increase the chances of success and contribute to a smooth transition of ownership. It should be possible, even from this limited study, to develop a post-acquisition model which could be adopted by organizations undertaking this activity. Such a model would need to consider the critical role of the head-teacher, and the perception of the staff in respect of the school becoming more 'business' oriented. The need to devise and implement strict financial controls cannot be ignored, but it is seen as vital that the investment is perceived by the staff to be of benefit to the education of the child and not just to the fabric of the buildings. The study has shown that the culture of a school, and the way that culture is perceived and promoted (internally as well as externally), plays a major part in its success. Ignoring that culture, and/or the staff's defence of that culture, may lead to an unhappy and hence less successful venture for the acquiring organization.

Finally some words of advice for any organization contemplating the acquisition of a small independent preparatory school. They are taken from a study undertaken over twenty years ago, but which, from the evidence gathered by this research, indicate are to this day still being disregarded :-

“....culture is often not expressed and may be known without being understood. It is nonetheless real and powerful, so that the enthusiasts who unwittingly work counter-culturally will find that there is a metaphorical but solid brick wall against which they are beating their heads. Enthusiasts who pause to work out the nature of their school culture can at least begin the process of change and influence the direction of the cultural evolution, because culture can never be like a brick wall. It is living, growing and vital, able to strengthen and support the efforts of those who use it, as surely as it will frustrate the efforts of those who ignore it.”

(Torrington & Weightman, 1989, p19)

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APPENDICES

The Culture of School

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

I hope I clarified the purpose and process of the study during the presentation. If you have any further queries or concerns then please feel free to contact me.

I can be contacted on :-

Office 01703-319794
Home 01329-662388
e-mail David.Williams@solent.ac.uk

In this envelope you should find:-

an Individual Record Sheet (IRS)
a sheet describing the four types of school culture (Primary or Secondary)
a stamped addressed envelope (SAE)

The 4 digit number on the IRS is for my use only and is a code to enable me to identify the respondent and their school. This information is only available to me and is there to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for you. Only you and I know this code.

I would be grateful if you could consider how you perceive the school's culture and indicate on the IRS :-

where you see the school today
where you would ideally like to see the school
the direction you believe the school is actually moving

please indicate these by use of the symbols as outlined in the Key.

Once completed I would be grateful if you could return the IRS and culture description to me in the SAE provided.

THANK YOU

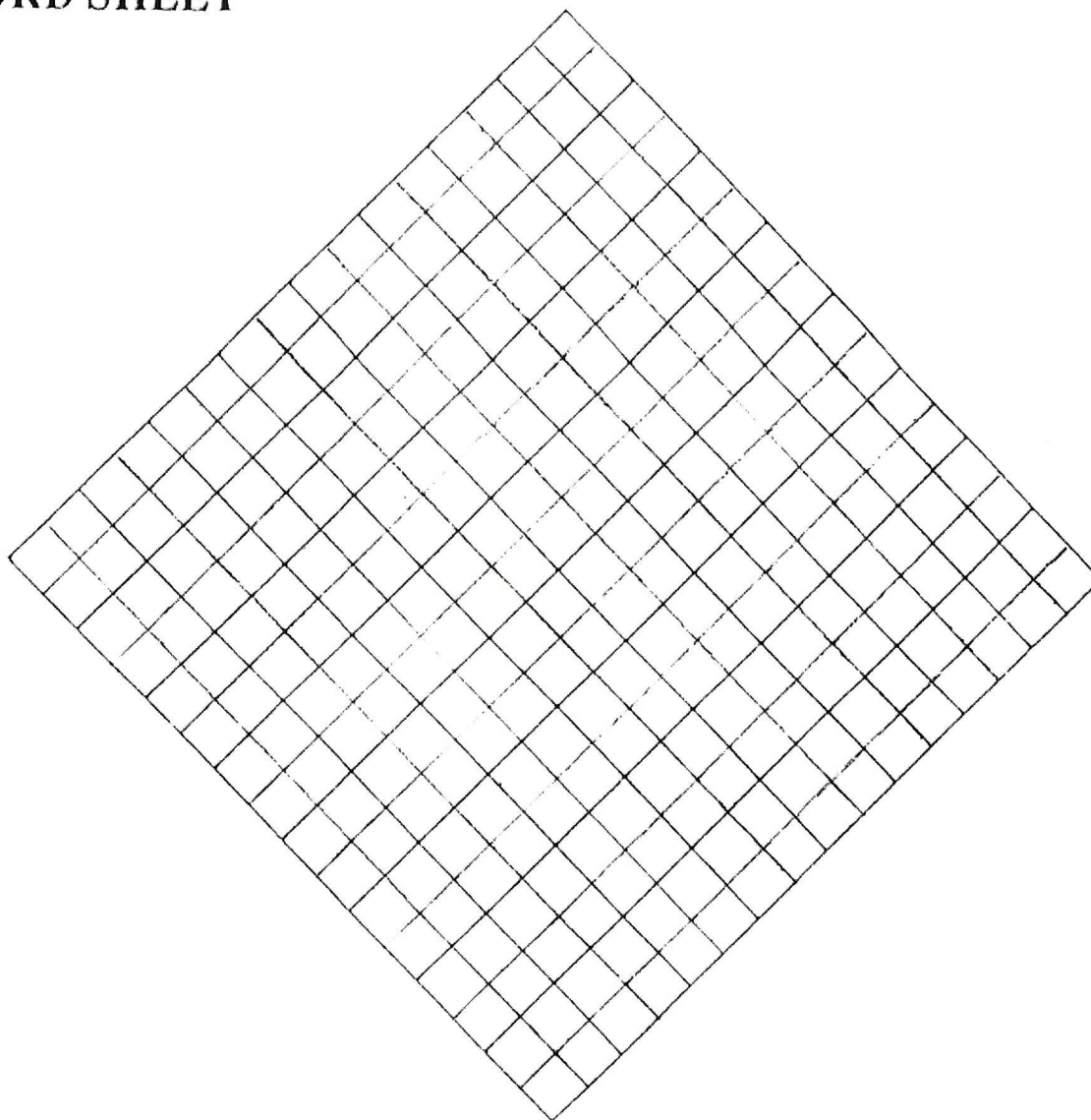
David Williams

INDIVIDUAL RECORD SHEET

YELLOW

GREEN

BLUE



PINK

Y

Present position

Where it is going - in which direction

PREPARATORY SCHOOL

Ours is a really friendly school and we believe in people getting on, whether it's staff with staff, teachers with pupils, or the kids among themselves. Nobody gives of their best unless they feel valued and wanted - so that's where our educational philosophy begins. Social development is as important as academic development and what doesn't get noticed in formal assessment we hope gets reflected in our social skills work and in pupil's records of achievement. Of course, some pupils have lots of problems at home and though we obviously can't solve all of those we can't just ignore them either. It's a caring school and the staff are cared about as well as the kids

Our philosophy is to educate the whole child, not just the bits that fit the school. Of course, we accept that tests matter and there's quite a bit of pressure on pupils to give of their best. But we also believe that the social and emotional side of youngsters needs to be developed too, and every teacher is involved in pastoral care as well as the academic side of teaching. You could describe relationships as close - we're quite a close staff and that spills over to pupils too. Team spirit is part of the ethos and there's not much room for loners. You have to give one hundred percent here : teaching is emotionally as well as intellectually draining, so we all need the holidays to recharge ourselves for the next term.

It's no soft option being a teacher here. It's OK if you're a strong sort of person with lots of self-confidence. If you're not, well it can be hard controlling the kids and getting any work out of some classes. I can't say I'm really happy about the direction the school's taking and morale in the staffroom isn't what it might be. I get by, and generally keep myself to myself. After all, teaching's just a job and you have to have your own private life as well. I don't think the place gets the best out of me, and to be honest if the school were inspected tomorrow and they saw us as we really are, we'd get a bad report. The trouble is I don't really think there's much chance of any major improvements for teachers or kids without a very radical shake-up.

We regard ourselves as a well-disciplined sort of school, one that sets store on traditional values. The head runs the place as something of a 'tight ship' with high expectations of us teachers. There's a strong emphasis on pupil learning and we're expected to do well in our assessment and testing, and everybody's very proud when we do. We also like to do well in sports and PE, which is another important aspect of achievement. We expect pupils to be fairly independent and not to be molycoddled. We're clear what the school stands for and what we're about, so we are naturally rather suspicious of trendy ideas, and put more trust in what's been shown to work best through past experience.

Interview Questions - Oldest Preparatory School

1. Why did you place the present position of the school as you did ?
2. How much of the description do you agree with ?
3. What role/part do you consider you have played in developing the culture of the school ?
4. What role/part do you consider the head/staff have played in developing the culture of the school ?
5. Do you consider that Southern Schools has influenced the development of the school culture ?
6. Do you know anything about the culture of the other three schools participating in the study ?
7. Do you see similarities between the culture of your school and the others ?

APPENDIX 4b

Interview Questions - Nearby, Midway & Newest Preparatory Schools

1. How much of the description do you agree with ?
2. What role/part do you consider you have played in developing the culture of the school ?
3. What role/part do you consider the head/staff have played in developing the culture of the school ?
4. Do you consider that Southern Schools has influenced the development of the school culture ?
5. Do you see yourself/the head as a head-teacher or a business manager ?
6. Do you know anything about the culture of the other three schools participating in the study ?
7. Do you see similarities between the culture of your school and the others ?

FORMAL SCHOOL CULTURE

The school is high in instrumental domain (social control), with exceptional pressure on students to achieve learning goals (including exam performance), and perhaps athletic prowess, but with weak social cohesion between staff and students. School life is orderly, scheduled, disciplined. Within the work ethic no time is wasted : interference with instrumental goal achievement is ruthlessly excised. Homework is regularly set and marked : tests are common. To those who succeed in the school's goals, there are prizes and prestige. Expectations are high, with low toleration for those who do not live up to them. To staff the head-teacher appears cold and distant, even authoritarian; to students, staff appear aloof, strict and unapproachable. Each side displays little warmth, whilst valuing institutional loyalty. Social support for students comes from informal peer groups that tend, because of students' socio-emotional isolation from teachers, to be strong and influential, whether pro-school or anti-school. The tone is custodial : in hard forms (a military academy) it could be described as coercive; in softer versions (the grammar school) as a 'tight ship' fostering 'traditional values', reflecting the institutional inheritance from the nineteenth century.

WELFARIST SCHOOL CULTURE

The school is relaxed, carefree, cosy. It places high emphasis on informal, friendly teacher-student relations. The focus is on individual student development within a nurturing environment. The educational philosophy is child-centred and relations between are held to be 'democratic'. With the aversion to social controls, work pressure is low; academic goals are easily neglected and become displaced by social cohesion goals of social adjustment and life skills. In this undemanding climate of contentment, truancy and delinquency rates are low. The 'child-centred' primary school or the 'caring' inner-city secondary school with a strong pastoral system exemplify this type: staff ask whether they are primarily a teacher concerned with the mastery of academic content, or primarily a social worker of sorts concerned with pastoral care. In this culture the students are happy at the time but in later life look back on their experience with resentment at the teachers' failure to drive them hard enough.

HOTHOUSE SCHOOL CULTURE

In this culture the high instrumental and expressive emphasis creates a frenetic school. All are under pressure to participate actively in a full range of school life. Expectations of both work and personal development are high. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed, being pedagogical experimenters and innovators. In this pervasive intimacy, everyone seems to be under surveillance and control. Teachers and students experience anxiety about failing to achieve instrumental goals and about intrusions into privacy with a consequent reduction in independence, autonomy and individuality. It is a culture that is not overtly coercive or tyrannical: social control is more likely to be exercised over members by challenge and emotional blackmail than by threat of punishment. Since such high control and high cohesion create a sense of institutional oppression, members sometimes feel like 'inmates'.

SURVIVALIST SCHOOL CULTURE

This is a culture where both social control and social cohesion are exceptionally weak. For both teachers and students the school is close to breakdown - a classic 'at risk' situation. Social relations are poor, teachers striving to maintain basic control and allowing pupils to avoid academic work in exchange for not engaging in misconduct. Lessons move at a leisurely pace; little time or effort is given to academic task. Teachers feel 'on their own', unsupported by the head-teacher and colleagues in curriculum planning and classroom controls: they manage each lesson as best they can. Life is lived a day at a time. Many students feel alienated from their work which bores them, but there are no compensations in warm relationships with their teachers, who enjoy little professional satisfaction. Delinquency and truancy rates are high, as is staff absenteeism, especially of the occasional kind. The ethos is one of insecurity, hopelessness and low morale.

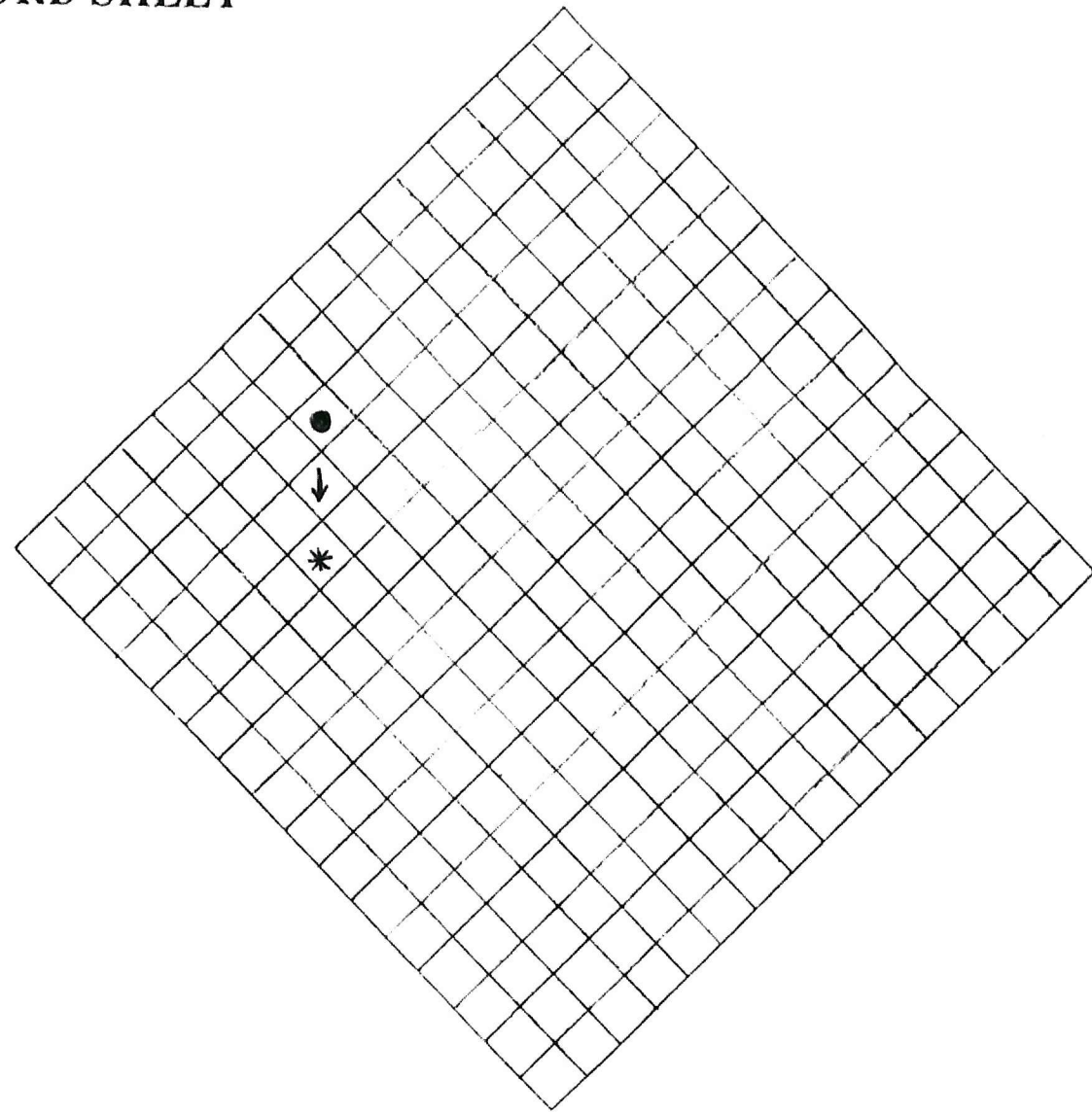
INDIVIDUAL RECORD SHEET

YELLOW

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BLUE

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KEY

Present position

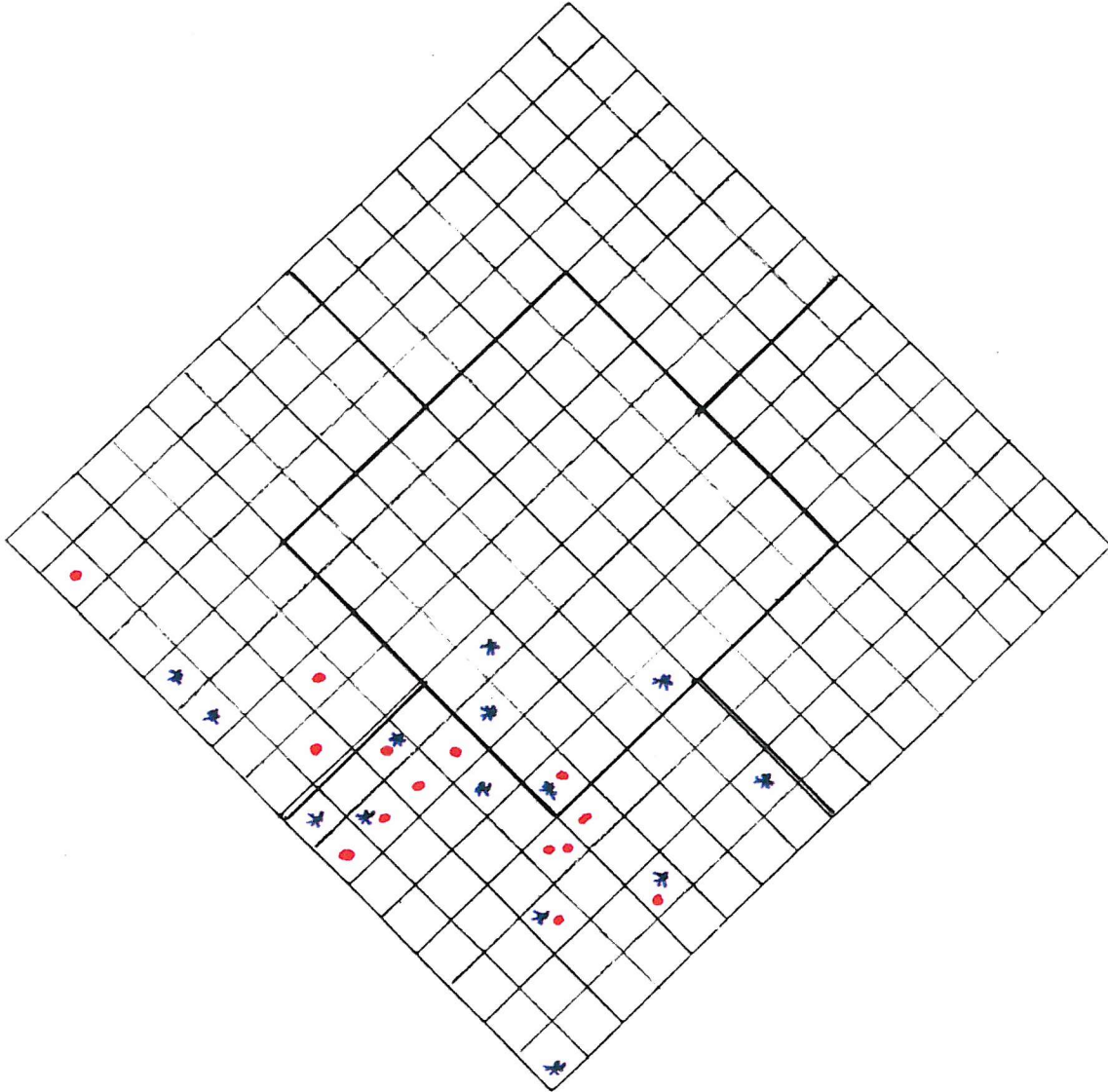
Where it is going - in which direction

YELLOW

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KEY

● Present position

Where it is going - in which direction

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