

EDITORIAL

THOSE WHO WOULD LEAD...

Mark Deacon

This edition of the Buckingham Journal is focussed on Leadership and Management. Whilst curating this edition I have been struck by the realisation that this edition could have been focussed on Change Management.

All of the contributors to this edition of the Buckingham Journal are either reporting on or observing seismic changes in the way schools are organised, led and managed. Sometimes change is strategic and well-planned at other times change is chaotic and a response to a situation.

I recall in the early 2000s whilst working in school senior leadership I said that I would vote for any party who promised to leave education alone for five years, that teachers would make any system however imperfect work. At the time we had revised OFSTED frameworks, SEAL, ECM, new vocational qualifications, Leadership Incentive Grant, new progress measures and Building Schools for the Future.

Schools are complex organisations, like a Tangram puzzle, change in one area immediately puts pressure onto another. Perhaps the biggest area of stress is staff. Leading people through change is a skill all of its own. For a school to thrive leaders do need to be able to take staff with them on whatever journey the school is on.

We have two reflections from senior leaders. Stuart McLaughlin a recently retired long serving head traces the changes which he has experienced throughout a long career moving through the traditional career structure to heading up an Academy in a MAT. Mark Ducker finished up in a role which didn't even exist at the outset of his career. For both of these leaders there was an element of having to work the job out as they went along, within organisations which were doing the same. In different ways these leaders trace the importance of developing and maintaining key relationships through the turbulence of change.

A feature of developing relationships for both McLaughlin and Ducker has been getting the right support, from the right people at the right time. This has meant building relationships with the right people external to the organisation, it has also meant recognising that there is a role to be filled and then finding the right person to fulfil that role.

We then need to reflect on the Ian Craig's article. There have been many quasi-philosophical discussions on the differences between leadership and management

EDITORIAL

and as Craig observes management has tended to take second place to leadership. Leadership is presented as the sparkling, inspirational and visionary role whilst management follows behind making sure that the paperwork is done. Without management leadership is emasculated, someone has to make sure that the chairs are out for parent's evening! So where do we want management to reside? In the heads office? Does it belong to the school business manager?

Craig offers an inspiring defence of and a case for rehabilitation of the term management presenting a dynamic model of leadership and management which are linked by the process of administration. In a world where schools often have a business manager sitting within the senior leadership team, do we also need an administrator acting as the 'push rod' for the team.

There is an open question as to whether or not the manager needs to be a professional educator. When I worked in Maine, USA, admittedly many years ago high schools were led and managed by a cadre made up of teachers who dealt with issues of pedagogy and practice whilst the business of the school, finances, compliance, data, etc., were dealt with by professional managers. Not unlike the university sector where there is a general clear division of role between the academic and management teams.

Mick Waters in his article makes the point that there is a tension in schools leadership. Heads may well have responsibility for budgets, safeguarding, GDPR, etc., and be expected to offer leadership of pedagogy with school leaders leading and developing practice. A brief survey of NPQH syllabi shows the range of expertise that head needs to carry:

- set clear goals and communicate shared values that improve classroom and school culture
- transform pupils' knowledge, capabilities and beliefs about learning
- create a fair and structured approach to learning and testing
- establish a safe and positive environment for pupils
- support colleagues to meet individual needs and make sure all pupils have access to a rich curriculum
- lead school-wide professional development for staff
- establish good financial, human and educational resource management
- make and act on evidence-informed decisions
- work well with parents, carers, other schools and the wider community
- lead by example, be accountable for decisions and make sure staff know their professional responsibilities.

Ambition institutes www.ambition.org.uk/programme/npqh accessed 28/1/22

At the risk of revisiting a hoary old debate it is necessary to question whether or not some of these statements can be taught or developed. It is also an open question as to whether there is a muddle here between leadership and management: looking after resources and finances is arguably a different skill set to create a 'safe and positive environment'. Maybe this list is in fact two roles and we need to take care not of Ian Craigs plea for a return to good management.

Tim Brighouse's article compliments that of Waters and takes on the issues around establishing the right culture within an organisation. It is arguable that establishing a positive culture does require the development of a number of personal attributes which heads need to express, perhaps even exaggerate as they seek to build culture.

Domini Bingham brings the notion of managing at a time of rapid and forced change right up to date. Up to this point all the leadership and management of schools going through change which is discussed in the journal has been in some ways strategic and spread over periods of months and years. The Covid-19 pandemic was a period of rapid and forced change. Bingham has set out the toll that has taken on Leadership. There was no established practice to draw on and as colleagues sought guidance undoubtedly many leaders felt they were failing when they were in the Sea of Unknowing together with everyone else. This has clearly led to considerable leadership fall out and we do well to note Bingham's conclusions.

Schools are communities and communities have leaders. The Head must put a stamp on a community which sets direction, establishes culture and enables success. For that they are held to account.