

The Positives of Headship

From Matthew Clark, Primary Executive HT for Tenax School's Trust



We are living through some of the most challenging circumstances of our professional and personal lives. The decisions which we take as school leaders are always complex, they are made at speed, and potentially have significant consequences. In the current context it has been all too easy to construct a negative narrative about what it means to be a headteacher, which certainly doesn't capture all of my experience or indeed those of heads that I work with. Being a headteacher remains for me a deeply positive and fulfilling role for reasons which I hope to set out below:

Community Builder

Headteachers hold a pivotal place in their school, and local, community. We have the potential to impact on the lives of our pupils, staff, families and our neighbours in a positive way. By the things we say and do, we have the potential to help others and serve others. Perhaps at this time more than any other in our generational memory we need to find ways to build up our community which has been fractured both by the pandemic and by some divisive social issues. Ipsos MORI (2020) found 85% of people trust teachers to tell the truth. This capacity is a privilege – it requires hard decisions and often hard work – but to enable a child with additional needs to access a much-needed intervention or support a family as they search for housing, can positively impact the lives of others. Headteachers and teachers model relationships – ever important in enabling children to see alternative models to those they might see in their own home or more widely in social media and a materialist world

Head teacher

Headteachers usually sit at the top of their school's organisational structure. As such they have the ability to empower others and encourage others to take risks and enable improvement. We also are the Head teacher of all of the educational professionals in our schools. This position enables us to facilitate opportunities for our colleagues to develop professionally. It is exciting now to be in a position where as a head 'teacher' we have a secure body of professional expertise to identify and lead our teams towards. One might argue that this significantly enhances our opportunities for instructional leadership which is what the name of the role implies. There has never been a

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better time to access high quality, evidence-based, professional development. The Kent Teaching School Hub offers access to all the major National Professional Qualifications, and a pathway for teachers to grow from their initial training all the way through to Headship. Currently the development is available at no cost to schools and is centred on the principles of the most effective development recommended by the [EEF](#) in its latest report.

Lifelong Learner

I'm still a teacher after 24 years because I have never stopped learning. A career in the classroom has enabled me to work abroad in Singapore and The Netherlands, and in a range of teaching and leadership roles in London and Kent. Each experience has led to new opportunity and learning. I have thrived on these opportunities and have been prepared to re-evaluate my pedagogy and opinions about what makes for great teaching and great learning. I believe that as a profession we are working within particularly fertile ground being able to access evidence-based "best bets" for success through the Core Content Framework, Early Career Framework and the curricula for the National Professional Qualifications. In addition, the Chartered College is doing an effective job ensuring teaching receives the recognition it deserves as a profession.

Visioner

Headteachers are the people within schools who have the opportunity to help shape and share the process of establishing a vision. Behind this, and the school's values, pupils, staff and families can align and pursue improvement. I have found establishing a vision for education in school and then securing the support of others to refine it, and then implementing the plans required to realise it, to be one of the most satisfying achievements of my career. The vision is key to success in schools. As Stephen Covey (2004) suggests "the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing".

Chief Perseverer

I have a coffee mug which reminds me that there is no job description for Headship – because Headteachers in some people's eyes become superheroes! There are national standards and job descriptions for Heads and the breadth and complexity of the role is clear for anyone who takes time to read them. One aspect of the role that isn't always apparent is the need to bring a sense of relentless optimism and tenacity to each day. Our pupils and staff teams look to us to never give up, and to fight on when things go wrong – which,

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inevitably, they do from time to time. As my time as a Headteacher has gone on, and I have come through what seemed like insurmountable challenges, I have come to realise I have a stronger resilience than I initially believed. As I've learned more, gained more expertise, dealt with more problems and increased my self-efficacy, my capacity to face up to the challenges has also grown. Interestingly, candidates who are joining us on the Kent Teaching School Hub's NPQH programme, run with Cardinal Vaughan School and the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership and the Catholic Education Service, nearly all cited "resilience" as one of the current biggest challenges effecting their school's culture.

Collaborator

Headship can be lonely at times, but as individual leaders focusing on our schools we absolutely must collaborate and look outwards in order to survive, but also thrive. We must collaborate and network. This can be through established face to face groups, for example, through your Trust, local authority, diocese, or local Headteachers group. Headteachers in Kent, for example, benefit from the Kent Association of Headteachers a grassroots group of Heads who support each other no matter whether they lead a community school, Church school or academy. Clearly, we can look outwards more widely – the ResearchEd community and twitter – all provide an opportunity to connect with, support and learn from others. The research backs up the importance of collaboration ([Stoll, 2015](#)).

I hope these six positives of Headship chime with you as you consider taking the leap into what Vic Goddard rightly describes as the "Best Job in the World" – or apply to undertake the fully funded NPQH with us at the Kent Teaching School Hub. Perhaps you are already a headteacher and would cite other positives.