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**Inspiring leaders:  
improving children's lives**

# Go for it

## Reasons to be a headteacher





There is no question that being a headteacher is hard work. But it can also be **hugely stimulating**, **personally challenging** and **intellectually fulfilling**.

If you're a deputy, assistant head or middle leader thinking about going for headship this booklet will give you an insight into why people choose to do the job.

Serving headteachers from different contexts highlight what they enjoy about their unique role and why, despite the well-documented challenges, they remain passionate about the work they do.

There's also information about what to do if you want to progress to headship.

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**Iain Gilmour**, Isambard Brunel Junior School

We all say we enter education to make a difference and  
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# 1

## Reason one: **Help children and young people reach their potential**

People come into teaching because they enjoy working with children and shaping young minds. It's the fear that they will lose that contact with youngsters and relinquish their teaching and learning responsibilities that can deter many of those who have the ability to lead a school.

Yet, when asked why they enjoy the role, one of the greatest motivating factors often cited by serving heads in research for NCSL is the capacity to help children and young people to reach their potential. The scope to improve the life chances of children and young people is one of the singular joys of the job.

As a headteacher leading the whole school community, you will have an extended sphere of influence compared to your previous roles. You will be in a position to respond to a greater number of children, and a much wider spectrum of their needs.

Today, this is truer than ever. The role of headteacher is changing rapidly and the potential to influence children's opportunities for the better by working with others within and beyond the school gates is now greatly increased.





**Iain Gilmour**

Isambard Brunel Junior School, Portsmouth

**Iain is in his first year as headteacher.**

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**We all say we enter education to make a difference and in headship you get the ultimate chance.**

As a teacher I could influence 30 children: as a head it's 250 children plus the members of staff and all their future classes. I am passionate about education and how schools can work and this is my chance to put my money where my mouth is. The relationship is obviously different from being a teacher but I make sure I visit every class every day and the children without fail want to show me their work, ask me how my family is and tell me their news.

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I got a taste of headship as a deputy. My head was appointed to run two schools so for a year I was effectively an acting headteacher for half of each week. Without a doubt this was invaluable experience and meant that after only four years of being a deputy, I was ready for my own school.

The choice of school was very important too. I sent for five application packs and visited three schools before finding the one that felt right for me: a school where I felt comfortable, where I recognised the type of children who went there and where I believed I could make a difference.

For me there is never a boring moment and every day brings something different – both in terms of challenges and rewards.

On one day recently I spoke to a parent about their behaviourally challenging child not going on a year group trip, counselled a member of staff whose father is seriously ill and was given a fairy cake by a Year 5 boy.

It can be frustrating and annoying and distracting but I do revel in the sheer variety of tasks that I have to deal with and the huge sense of satisfaction I get when I have.

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Dave Vero, Milfield Community First School

Headship is a very rewarding job for those who want to  
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**Dave Vero**

Milfield Community First School, Northumberland

**Dave has been a headteacher for just over a year.**

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**As a head your influence goes beyond the school boundary and, to me, that's one of the great bonuses of the job.**

I had a very good education myself and one of the things that drives me as a head is the desire for everyone to have the same outstanding opportunities that I enjoyed. This is true not only for the pupils, parents and the staff in the school but others in the community as well.

Where I live and work, there are fewer options for people in both work and education but I am actually in a position to do something about that because I am responsible for shaping the learning environment that the school provides for everyone who has contact with us. For instance, last year we ran a beginners' ICT course for adults and it was so successful that we are now running a longer course. This has linked in nicely with the work we have been doing with the e-Learning Foundation to provide laptops for all the pupils and free internet access for their families.

Headship is a very rewarding job for those who want to help, influence and encourage the lives of others. To see what one has achieved at the end of a day, week, term or year is very satisfying and often quite amazing. To know that much of that is a direct result of the work you have put in is quite humbling. There are many highs and successes, as well as frustrations and disappointments but the positives far outweigh any negatives.

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# 2

Reason two:

## Work in partnership with the community

Headteachers today have the chance to play a major role in their communities, more so than ever before. For some, it is this added dimension that makes the job so appealing.

Extended schools and the Every Child Matters agenda are having a profound effect on the headteacher role. As schools stay open from early morning into the evening, they are becoming genuinely communal spaces, hosting breakfast and after-school clubs, adult education classes, acting as venues for local meetings and events, and hosting activities and services run by other agencies.

It puts the headteacher at the heart of the community and at the centre of services available for children and families. They are opening their doors to parents, families and local people who may have no direct link with the school but for whom it represents a vital facility.

In many ways, heads are not only serving the community more effectively. They are also helping to reinvigorate it.

# 3

Reason three:

## **Develop your staff and leadership team**

Developing staff and a leadership team is an aspect of headship which is expanding. It's becoming an increasingly important part of the role as the distributed leadership model becomes more widespread. The opportunity to bring on new leaders, identify talent, give staff at all levels the opportunities to grow and to develop new skills can be immensely satisfying.

When you become a head your own professional horizons are also widened. Being responsible for a school involves working with a wider range of adults – not only the staff and leadership team, but also school improvement partners, governors, parents and the local authority. There is increasing involvement with other agencies concerned with children and young people's services and with schools, colleges and other partners under initiatives such as Building Schools for the Future and the 14-19 reforms.

Many heads also work on policy development at local and national level, through NCSL and its Leadership Network, professional associations, and other national agencies.





**Sue Hyland**

Houghton Kepier Sports College, Houghton Le Spring

**Sue has been in post for eight years. It is her second headship.**

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**I never actually made the decision to become a head – when I was deputy I was put in the position of acting head. Once I started doing the job I really loved it and once I was in a position to apply for the post permanently I did so and was successful. So it was a sort of ‘happy accident’ but one I’ve never regretted. It’s not until you have a chance to do the job that you really appreciate how fulfilling it can be, despite the demands.**

One of the big positives for me is the part a head can play in developing staff. It’s something that gives me great satisfaction. We put a really strong emphasis on CPD at school and almost

all the teaching staff are doing an NCSL programme of some kind, a MA or working towards some qualification. Remodelling work has meant bringing in many more support staff into new roles such as cover supervisors and year managers, and it has really made a difference to all the staff. I always encourage staff to be ambitious and when someone gets promoted or moves to a more senior job elsewhere, there’s a deep sense of personal satisfaction to me in the knowledge that we have helped that individual to blossom.

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Another aspect of my job is working with the leadership team. We have a good team spirit, share ideas and have a good laugh together. Although you’re the head, that sense of collegiate support is important. It can be ‘lonely at the top’ but you get a sense of team spirit in a good leadership team.

I get a terrific buzz from being a head. There are so many different aspects to it that there is never a dull moment. The job can be exactly what you make it.

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Sue Hyland, Houghton Kesper Sports College

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Jane Kent

Northchapel Primary School, West Sussex

Jane has been a headteacher for three years.

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**It was always my ambition to be a head. I wanted the leadership role because it enables you to take responsibility for the ethos of the whole school, to put your vision into action.**

As a young teacher, I sometimes got frustrated when I could see a solution to a problem or had a new idea but I didn't have the power to implement it myself. Or if I did, it would be limited to a specific area – a subject across the school, perhaps, or a single initiative.

But as a head you automatically impact on everything in school, even if you haven't set out to do so. It's a huge responsibility – one decision can impact on everything and your very presence is sending out messages about your personal philosophies and priorities all the time.

But it means that the moment you step into headship, you have the power to change things – and far from standing in your way, people expect you to do it!

In my case, it meant being able to implement my vision for everyone in the school community to be aware of their own accountability and responsibility for the learning taking place. This includes children with regard to their own learning and that of their peers, teaching and support teams, governors, and parents – all as learners, all as teachers, all as facilitators. I'm just beginning to understand the multitude of complexities within that vision and the strategies that might be needed to carry it through – the more I do the more I see there is to know.

But it's one of the things that, for me, makes being a head a hugely creative job and highly diverse. It is also very humbling and very fulfilling. I really wouldn't do anything else.

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# 4

Reason four:

## See your vision for the school come to life

Headship gives opportunities to have an extensive influence on the school, its pupils, staff and community. There is an enormous sense of satisfaction in being able to share your vision and lead a team to put it into practice, shaping teaching and learning in the way you believe is right for the school. It's one of the things serving heads pinpoint as a major motivator.

Many also cite the great sense of personal achievement they gain from their work. Research by the College shows that, whether new to the job or highly experienced, heads see that sense of fulfilment as one of the most important aspects of the job.

And one thing virtually all headteachers will agree on is that, whether they are in charge of a small rural primary or an inner-city secondary, no two days are the same. Every day is different and brings fresh challenges and rewards.



# Just as there are different routes to headship, the role itself is **varied and flexible**. It's not a case of one size fits all. You can determine which one is right for your **skills and experience**.

Headship is changing. Multi agency settings, extended schools, federations and co-headships are just some of the new contexts for headship.

To progress to the role, you may choose to apply to Fast Track, the accelerated development programme for teachers in the early years of their careers. It provides coaching and mentoring to help teachers take on a senior leadership role.

[www.ncsl.org.uk/fasttrack](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/fasttrack)

You can also apply to Future Leaders, an intensive two-year programme currently operating in London.

[www.future-leaders.org.uk](http://www.future-leaders.org.uk)

Alternatively, you may choose to progress by actively seeking more opportunities for professional development. Take a proactive approach to developing leadership capability. Look at ways of developing your leadership potential within the school and volunteer to lead projects or to join a working group. These can give you hands on leadership experience and a taste of what you may wish to do in the future.

Such experience may also help you gather the evidence you need to apply for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH), the mandatory qualification for first-time heads.

There are two application rounds for the programme each year, and details are on the website at [www.ncsl.org.uk/npqh](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/npqh).

You'll also find a diagnostic tool that will help you determine whether you're ready to apply for the programme.

If you do progress to headship, there is a range of support you can draw on, including NCSL's Leadership Network, and Early Headship Provision (EHP). EHP is NCSL's contribution to new headteachers' leadership learning, and provides personalised learning for new headteachers over a three-year period. All new, first-time headteachers and acting headteachers can register for a flexible grant of £1,300 to use on an extensive range of leadership learning activities, a place on the New Visions programme, and support from providers. Details are available at [www.ncsl.org.uk/ehp](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/ehp).

We want to wish you every success with your career, whichever direction you choose to take.

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Jane Kent, Northchapel Primary School

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**It is very humbling and very fulfilling.**  
I wouldn't do anything else.

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