

Keep your head

Nearly a quarter of headteachers are aged over 55 and are expected to retire in the next few years so what contribution can co-headship arrangements make to forestalling the predicted leadership shortage?

Nicola Allan, a primary co-head for the last six years, has examined the challenges in a research associateship with NCSL. She led a recent talk2learn discussion and online seminar on the issue with school leaders.

Key points raised were:

- the challenges role-sharing presents to individuals
- the potential of co-headship to open up capacity in schools and the wider system
- local authority and governor attitudes

Helen Maxwell, a deputy headteacher in a special school in the North West, saw positive and negative sides to co-headship.

"This is the best of both worlds for a new head to learn the trade and for an existing headteacher to head off to retirement." But how can someone who has had been in the position suddenly begin to share with someone else?"

Nicola said that while co-heads often selected each other, they could also be chosen to work together for the first time.

"If the interview process is rigorous then it should be possible to select two people with similar ethos and values. *I think that much rests on the desire of both partners to make it work,*" she said.

Allan Scarlett, a co-head in the East Riding of Yorkshire, described how co-headship was opening up capacity in his school and in the wider system.

"The deputy will be co-head for the two days I am not in school. I am learning through being a facilitator, able to bring back an extra dimension to our school by using protocols in staff meetings and SIP planning days. It has re-energised the deputy and he is now considering the possibility of going on to headship."

One headteacher was keen to hear how to overcome governor and local authority resistance to the idea.



"I have tried to initiate co-headship but have met considerable reluctance; it all came to nothing with the governors citing local authority advice that there may be managerial difficulties in the future. *My deputy and I have worked to an outstanding level over the past six years, with leadership and management identified as outstanding in the schools' first inspection in 2007.* How can we progress morally, ethically and professionally to shared headship?"

Nicola said the experience demonstrated the importance of securing support for co-headship from governors and the local authority.

"A good honest debate can clear up misconceptions and change opinions." I know of governors in schools where co-headship has worked who have offered their advice to governors who are concerned about what it means for their school."

Phil Butterworth, a co-head in Gloucester, had managed to overcome similar reservations.

"Initially, our local authority was very sceptical and its message to governors was on your heads be it. *There has been a complete about turn; they are now fully behind the idea and it is positively promoted.* I felt our governors were very brave at the time but their faith has been repaid with *continued school success both in the popularity of our school and an outstanding Ofsted that focused on co-headship* as an issue."

If you are not yet a member of talk2learn and would like to join, more information is available at www.ncsl.org.uk/onlinecommunities.