

## Successful heads, hidden secrets

**What's the secret of a successful headteacher?  
Good quality relationships with staff, according to  
Tim Brighouse, a theory he elaborated on in his  
recent talk2learn hotseat.**

Professor Brighouse, Chief Advisor to London Schools and Visiting Professor at the Institute of Education, listed six key tasks frequently undertaken by successful headteachers (see box).

Simon Carson, a newly-appointed assistant headteacher, agreed wholeheartedly that actively seeking improvement in staff was of paramount importance. It means being creative about finding time for staff—teaching and non-teaching alike—to develop their skills and to collaborate, he said. "Doing that is fun and rewarding: to see an NQT lead the professional development of an established curriculum leader is to see real professional development and dialogue in action."

Matthew Pike, a new headteacher from Leicestershire, explained his own approach to the task of enlarging the school's vision by reading widely: "Subscribing to Ofsted e-mail alerts allows you to 'extend the vision' with new material. It prompts debate and ideas... I have enjoyed reading and summarising the 2020 vision report and will be able to hand over seven sides of A4 to my leadership team, rather than the full 50."

"Reading and reflection are vital for headteachers, Tim Brighouse agreed—"and if you share something with colleagues it increases intellectual curiosity and energy, especially if you put an item on the staff meeting from time-to-time."

Deborah Sheppard, a headteacher of languages from Norfolk, pointed out that building quality relationships is a more difficult task to fulfil for a new headteacher working with staff who are resistant to new ways of working:

"The assumption is going to be that the established staff know the context better and should, therefore influence the direction of the school more fully than a headteacher might wish. I guess you have to be prepared to upset a few people if you wish to make changes."



Tim Brighouse's suggestion that good headteachers need to be 'first in, last out' was challenged by some: "I see no reason for the leader of an organisation to be the one that puts in the most hours," said Dave Vero, a Northumberland headteacher. "It is the quality of the time you put in that is important surely, not the quantity."

Asked whether schools could be led effectively by people from a non-teaching background, Professor Brighouse admitted he was not convinced of the case:

"I don't believe that it is likely that someone without a teaching background is going to be able to win the respect of staff when the going gets tough... It may happen one day but it will be the exception rather than the rule."

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