

Managing the business of school

The creation of the school business manager (SBM) or bursar role has given office staff the chance to spread their wings and make a deeper, more active contribution to the running of a school. But, in an especially impassioned discussion on the subject in talk2learn, many contributors argued that the role is widely undervalued.

Primary SBMs in particular feel their potential goes unexplored.

Margaret Richards said: "My headteacher is constantly met with astonished reactions when discussing my role with other primary headteachers, either because they would not contemplate delegating such responsibility to a member of support staff or because they were unaware of the role at all."

Much dissatisfaction was focused on local authorities for the pay and other restrictions they impose on the SBM role, which undermines its credibility.

"I do think there is a reluctance to see us as professionals in the same way as teachers," said one contributor from a special school. "Our authority is only just recognising that SBMs exist but this doesn't seem to have reached HR. They seem determined to play down the level of responsibility an SBM has."

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Lyn Burton, a bursar in a large primary school, said their contribution could only be maximised if the senior management team was genuinely supportive.

"My vision has always been to be able to take on the responsibility of the non-teaching aspects of the school to enable the headteacher and other senior managers to focus on teaching and learning. This can only be done if the senior management team is willing to delegate these areas of responsibility."



Also SBMs have a specific role to play in easing the burden on the headteacher, as many contributors underlined.

"My headteacher, who came to our school a year ago, is really focused on getting the standards of literacy and numeracy raised and therefore hasn't got the time to spend on managing many other aspects of the school," Jane Fletcher said. "The SBM is ideal to get on with managing all the non-teaching tasks."

Finally, there was an overwhelming cry from the majority of contributors for the job title to be clarified. "The title is important," said one 'office manager'. "Until we all share the same title it is difficult for those outside of education to easily identify our role or think of us as one profession."

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