Finding, developing and keeping great headteachers
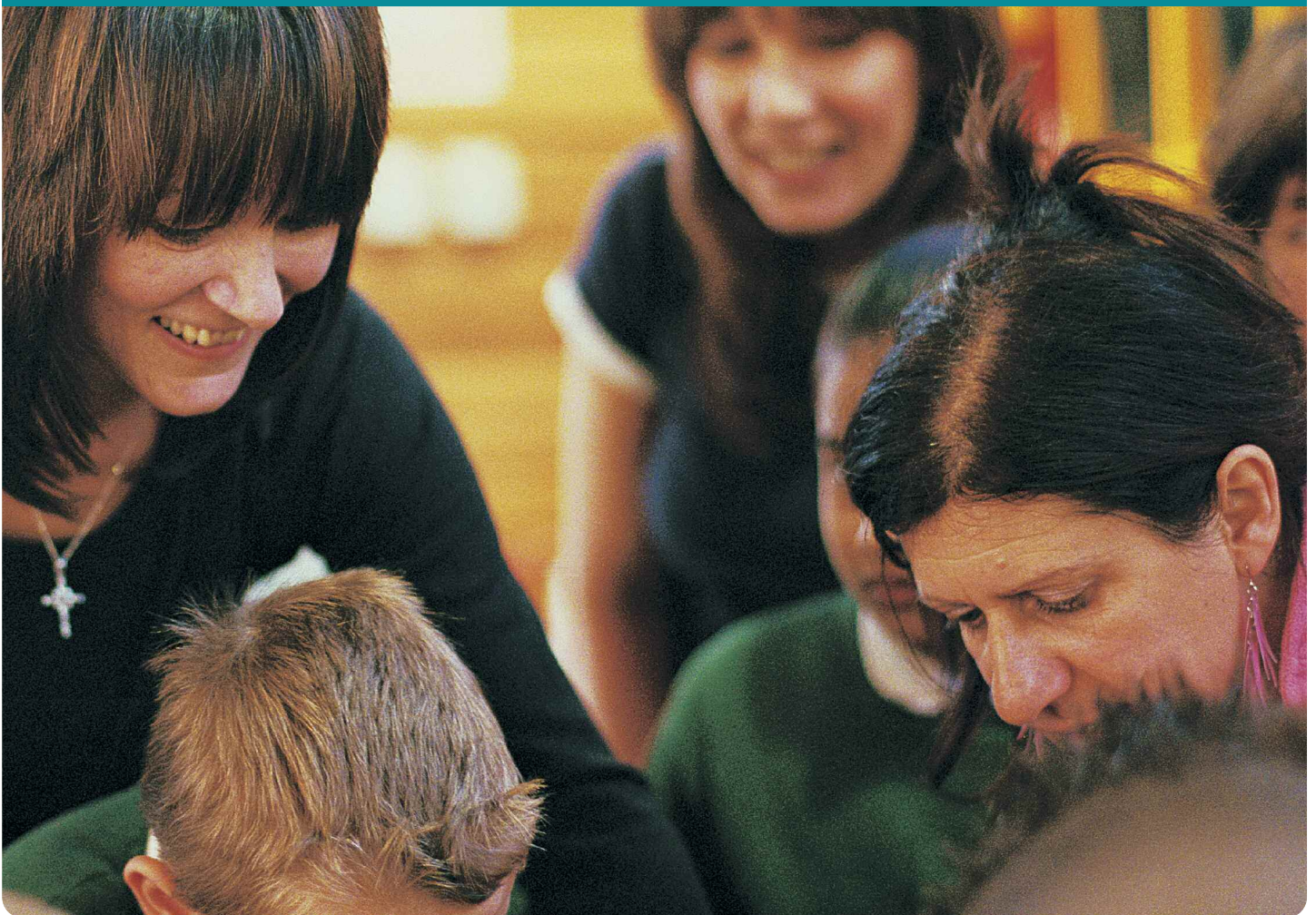
Succession planning A toolkit for governors

A joint initiative with the National Governors' Association, Co-ordinators of Governor Services and National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services.

Introduction

This toolkit has been put together to help governing bodies take a practical approach to recruiting, developing and keeping headteachers. It will help you to work with your local authority or diocese if appropriate, and other governors and schools in your area, so that you have the leaders you need over the coming years.

It is part of every governing body's statutory responsibility to ensure that their school is well-led. Nationally, schools are facing significant challenges in recruiting and retaining good headteachers. Locally, the picture varies considerably, and you will need to respond in the most appropriate way.

Governing bodies also have a strategic role to play in growing leaders and creating the conditions where leadership can flourish. And it can be their most enduring legacy. Leadership development is key to school improvement, as investment in leadership at all levels in a school will pay dividends in pupil achievement.

Some schools already have well-developed plans to ensure that leadership arrangements are sustainable and responsive to the changing requirements of the school. Others are just starting out and considering how to go about it. Whatever stage your school is at, these resources can help.

This introductory guide provides a self-evaluation framework that will help you identify the priorities for action. In each of the four supporting modules you will be directed to a range of support materials that can help you tackle the issues that the self-evaluation has highlighted for your school.

Whatever the size of your leadership team, you have a clear interest, and indeed a responsibility, to ensure that your school continues to be well led by the right people. It's important to keep your leadership planning activity in proportion to your leadership needs and circumstances, and this toolkit is intended to help you get started rather than prescribe an approach.

Suggestions for using the toolkit

This toolkit is made up of four modules designed to help you assess the progress of your school in four key areas. Each of these has a part to play in helping you to secure the right leadership for your school in the future. Securing good leadership throughout your school in the future requires preparation and planning now.

Each module focuses on a different building block, and includes a brief introduction to the topic, supporting information and an action checklist. The action checklist within each module is designed to lead to the creation of an action plan for your school.

The modules will give you a clear picture of how much you already know and do in that particular area and enable you to define your priorities.

An example of the toolkit in action

The steps below show how a governing body might use the toolkit to develop an action plan in partnership with the headteacher:

Step 1 - Introduce toolkit

Introduce the toolkit to your governing body at the next meeting

Step 2 - Discuss toolkit

Discuss the tookit and agree to ask an appropriate working group to identify priorities

Step 3 - Identify priorities

Using the toolkit, identify two priority modules and generate a set of actions based on these. Assign and agree the action, timeframe and process for feeding back. Identify where further support is needed, for example, from your local authority or diocese. If the headteacher is not on the working group, share and discuss the action plan with him or her

Step 4 - Review progress

The working group meets again to discuss progress and recommend actions, making reference to the toolkit and wider resources

Step 5 - Feed back to governing body

The working group feeds back on progress with action planning, challenges faced, and future priorities

Step 6 - Develop and embed

Governing body continues to implement and review activities according to the priorities for local context

Models of leadership

Recruiting headteachers

Leadership planning

Developing leadership talent

Retaining headteachers

How do we establish our school's priorities?

Your priority areas will depend on your school's own unique set of circumstances. Answering the questions in the grid should give you an indication of how well you feel your governing body and your school is approaching each aspect and will help you decide where your priorities lie.

Use the following traffic light system to categorise each question:

● Yes, this is true   ● Yes, this is partly true   ● No, this is not true

Your priority areas will be those that contain the most red and amber responses.

Have a look at the relevant modules, and work through the checklists to identify short and longer-term actions and resources to support you with these activities. By recording these on the action plan, you can build up your own, tailored leadership plan for your school. Eventually, you should aim to integrate your leadership planning priorities and actions into the wider annual school planning cycle and documentation, rather than maintaining a stand-alone plan.

Leadership planning priorities

Module	● Yes, this is true	● Yes, this is partly true	● No, this is not true
Recruiting headteachers			
– Do we know how long our current head will remain in post? Do we know what his or her plans are?			
– If our head resigned would we be in a strong position to mount an immediate recruitment campaign?			
– Have members of the governing body had recruitment training – including Safer Recruitment?			
– Do we have a thorough induction programme for new headteachers?			
– Are we familiar with the main factors that attract candidates to apply for headship roles?			
Retaining headteachers			
– Can we clearly state the things that motivate our headteacher and do we put effort into responding to these motivators?			
– When looking at our school, do we know what things frustrate our headteacher?			
– Do we know how our headteacher views their work-life balance and what support he or she needs?			
– Do we understand the criteria for phased retirement and have we communicated the opportunities to our headteacher?			
– Do we encourage our headteacher to work beyond the school eg as a school improvement partner (SIP) or in collaboration with other schools?			
Developing leadership talent			
– How do we currently identify talent in our school? Is there a structured system?			
– Are we offering specific development opportunities to attract, retain and develop those with the potential to be future leaders?			
– Do potential future leaders know we want to invest in them? Do we see the promotion of talented staff to leadership roles in other schools as a success?			
– Do our senior leaders devote significant time and care to nurturing future leaders?			
– Do our senior leaders offer a positive role-model of distributed leadership, and do they manage their work-life balance?			
Models of leadership			
– Have we considered revising the leadership model for our school for the coming years?			
– Do we know how one of these models could help us find, develop and keep good headteachers?			
– Have we considered the benefits, both to us and to others, of extending the responsibility of our headteacher beyond the school?			
– Do we know if establishing a jobshare would help encourage interest from leaders who would otherwise not consider a full-time headship role?			
– Have we considered collaborating with other schools to help us build on our strengths and tackle shared challenges?			

The National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services is committed to excellence and dedicated to inclusiveness. We exist to develop and inspire great leaders of schools, early years settings and children's services. We share the same ambition – to make a positive difference to the lives of children and young people.

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A joint initiative with

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