

Retaining headteachers

Succession planning A planning guide for governors

Resource



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

In some cases, the best way to secure leadership in a school in the short term is for the current headteacher to stay in post, and so governing bodies may need to consider how to keep the good headteachers they already have. This is especially important in a context where a headteacher may be considering early retirement or a career change. As governors you need to be asking yourselves, "What can we do to create conditions that encourage experienced leaders to remain in our schools or within the system?"

Why we need to retain good leaders

Many local authorities and dioceses are working to build the supply of good leaders by identifying and developing those with leadership potential. But it is also important to consider ways of retaining existing talented school leaders. Not only will retention reduce the number of vacant leadership posts in the school system, but it will also ensure that the talent of experienced headteachers remains available to support others.

As a result, some schools are exploring options to retain talented and experienced headteachers. They have asked their headteacher to remain in role, and this has been achieved by accommodating significant changes. This means that the school has continuity of leadership, and the headteacher can carry on doing the job they love, but on terms they find satisfactory to their professional aspirations and life choices.

This will mean making the job attractive and stimulating enough to keep a headteacher engaged. It may also mean affording them professional development opportunities or the chance to gain experience outside the school on secondments or as advisors to local or national bodies.

Ensuring your school leaders enjoy a reasonable work-life balance also comes into play here. The most dedicated heads are liable to become jaded by the pressures of the job and the effect it has on their family and personal lives. Enabling the head to share leadership responsibilities with other senior leaders is one way to ease the strain, as well as being a good professional development opportunity for those aspiring to leadership. But the right strategy for work-life balance has to be tailored to the needs of the individual and the best interests of the school.

What retention methods could we consider?

The following examples of headteacher retention are quotes taken from the interactive online resource, the issue of retention:

Phased retirement

"I was head of a school for 12 years taking it from having serious weaknesses to being rated as 'good'. I was then recruited to lead another school in similar circumstances and raise its performance. After four years at the second school I decided it was time to take early retirement and informed the governors of my intentions. Their reaction was to offer me phased retirement in the form of a two-year part-time contract as a consultant acting in the role of headteacher. This enabled me to remain in post while a suitable replacement was appointed and ensured a smooth transition. I was able to reduce my workload and receive some pension as well as my salary."

New challenges

"Having been head of a successful secondary school for five years I reached a point where I felt I could do more for other young people in the area. When a local school was struggling I felt a moral imperative to help out for the benefit of all the children. The difficulty would be to fulfil my current leadership role as well as taking on the new challenge. The solution was to work with the head of the school in special measures to create a distributed leadership model. I continued to lead my original school three days a week as principal with a talented deputy taking the headship role in my absence. The other two days I spent in the other school as executive principal."

Flexibility

"As head I led my school from a position of serious weakness to a period of stability. I found the role challenging and energising, but after a number of years I realised that it had taken over my life completely and I was not able to be a good mother to my young child. I decided to resign and move out of the school system. However the governors offered me the option to work at home one day a week so that I could take my child to school and pick him up on that day. I was still a full-time head but the increased flexibility was exactly right for my needs at that point in time and enabled me to continue in post."

Action checklist: Retaining headteachers

Use this checklist to identify suggested short and longer-term actions. Then transfer them to your action plan and refer to the resources overleaf for more help.

Questions	Short-term actions	Longer-term actions
Can we clearly state the things that motivate our headteacher and do we put effort into responding to these motivators?	<p>As part of a conversation to find out why your headteacher may consider leaving, complete the 'reasons to stay' survey within Retaining school leaders with your head and prioritise areas for action based on the results.</p> <p>Review the online interactive guide The issue of retention.</p>	<p>To sustain your headteachers' personal motivation, initiate an annual discussion about their future expectations and development goals.</p> <p>Things to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - options for professional and personal development opportunities - offering flexible or part time working or phased retirement as part of broader leadership delegation - increasing the challenge through extension of the role, for example, becoming a school improvement partner (SIP)
When looking at our school, do we know what things frustrate our headteacher?	<p>Complete the 'reasons to stay' survey within the Retaining school leaders with your head and prioritise areas for action based on the results.</p> <p>Identify factors that motivate and demotivate your head and discuss how these may be tackled.</p> <p>Read Section 3 and 6 of Retaining school leaders to identify what some of these motivators and demotivators may be.</p>	<p>Formalise this discussion by making it part of the annual appraisal of the headteachers' performance.</p> <p>Identify one or two key points of dissatisfaction and agree how they can be addressed.</p>
Do we know how our headteacher views their work-life balance and what support he or she needs?	<p>Consult with your head on his or her work-life balance and discuss what help they would like.</p> <p>Encourage the effective delegation of responsibility through distributed leadership principles.</p> <p>Is your head still teaching? Is this right for him or her and for your school?</p>	<p>Contact your local authority, and diocese if appropriate, to discuss additional resources eg the appointment of a school business manager.</p> <p>Review work-life balance arrangements regularly; what suits your head one year may not be appropriate for the long-term.</p>
Do we understand the criteria for phased retirement and have we communicated the opportunities to our headteacher?	<p>Contact Teachers' Pensions to gain an understanding of the new pensions flexibilities and how these could help.</p> <p>Discuss phased retirement opportunities with your headteacher.</p>	<p>Encourage the head to share leadership responsibility with other senior leaders. Review National College's resources on distributed leadership.</p>
Do we encourage our headteacher to work beyond the school eg as a school improvement partner (SIP) or in collaboration with other schools?	<p>Contact your local authority, and diocese if appropriate, to discuss the opportunities available in your local area.</p> <p>Consult with your headteacher to understand whether or not they would consider a leadership role that may involve activities beyond the school.</p>	<p>Negotiate with your local authority, and diocese if appropriate, to support your head in taking a wider leadership role beyond the school. This may involve further consideration of the leadership model for the school.</p> <p>Regularly discuss with your head the opportunities to grow and develop in their leadership role.</p>

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