

MANAGING STAFF WELLBEING & WORKLOAD

Six ways to develop leadership and retain staff

How can you keep good teachers and leaders without limiting their career aspirations? **Josephine Smith** offers strategies to engage, develop and retain staff.

As school leaders we want our staff to spread best practice, transferring their skills to other settings if they wish. A turnover of staff in a school is healthy with new ideas and fresh perspectives helping keep a school up to date and avoiding complacency. On the other hand, we are caught in the predicament of wanting the staff we invested in, those we have trained and mentored, encouraged and nurtured, to stay in our schools. They are often the most talented and well respected colleagues who have much to give.

So how can you keep good staff without limiting their career aspirations? In schools where it is hard to recruit how can you grow your own future middle and senior leaders? And in schools where there isn't the budget for increasing the cost of leadership roles, how do you ensure you give staff the opportunity to take on additional responsibility and keep them interested and engaged?

1. Continual personalised professional development (CPPD)

Smart schools concentrate hard on ensuring that there are a variety of personalised pathways which enable staff to feel that their own personal development is invested in.

The smaller the school, the harder this is to facilitate as a stand-alone institution. Increasingly schools access professional development opportunities as part of collaborative working, perhaps within a teaching school alliance or as part of a multi-academy trust (MAT).



In-school CPPD programmes

These should focus on school specific challenges. In a high achieving girls' secondary school, for example, training for staff on developing learners who are prepared to take risks in their learning, even if that means getting things wrong occasionally, would be a good focus. In a different school setting cross-curricular literacy and numeracy development might benefit the majority of staff. Schools should use their own expertise to develop less experienced staff, share the outcomes of in-school research or give training on school based systems. The school ought to have a training focus that links with its own school improvement priorities.

2. Teaching School Alliance/MAT/collaborative programmes

Alliances or collaborations are likely to be better placed to deliver cost effective development programmes that suit individuals or small groups of staff each year in a school. You only have to look online to see the range of programmes available to staff at different points in their career: NQT induction, middle leadership programmes, specific training for teachers of particular subjects, support staff development and leadership programmes all feature.

These programmes often appear expensive at first but a lot are offered as part of membership arrangements and give participants the chance to network with other colleagues, often at a similar career point to them, from other settings. Such programmes instill confidence and colleagues return to school and try out new ideas or decide that the course has reaffirmed their own good practice. They often take place over a series of months allowing colleagues to develop professionally over time.

3. National programmes

Some of the programmes mentioned above may be accredited or financially supported by the National College for Teaching and Leadership. Most alliances also act as licensees for nationally recognised programmes such as the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) or National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML).



Keep an eye out for new national programmes and don't discount them as too expensive. Put some of your CPD budget aside each year and have a set of criteria for application to make these opportunities to be earned rather than given.

4. Opportunities to develop

As well as offering CPD participation, schools committed to giving colleagues the chance to develop will constantly look for leadership opportunities in school to involve staff who demonstrate that they are ready. This could be through encouraging them to lead on research projects in school, working with pupils outside of their specific subject area, working in coaching pairs, or delivering training to others. This requires some planning ahead and your annual consideration of opportunities coming up.

A defined mentoring programme for staff looking for first steps into middle management is also an attractive proposition for less experienced staff considering their own development. Using established middle leaders to coach or mentor them both in calendared slots and informally, as the need arises, is good for retention and also for succession planning.

Try this idea for middle leaders looking for steps into senior leadership

Take an area for school development: for example, introducing an improved rewards and sanctions system.

A group of around 15-20 interested staff could be involved in the wider working party to consider revisions to the existing system with perhaps five exemplar models from other schools considered as starting points.

You might ask five colleagues to chair smaller working groups who then consider the pros and cons of each model before reporting back to the group. This meeting could be chaired by the senior leader responsible for the success of the review or an aspirant and experienced middle leader looking at next steps.



5. Clear routes to leadership

Looking out for opportunities to internally promote colleagues inevitably gets harder as you go up the school hierarchy and the positions become fewer in number.

A solution is to give staff the chance to deputise for the person in the role above them in practical, small ways each week. For example, an assistant head could run a staff briefing when the head and deputy are out, or the head of English or maths could be invited to take on some of the responsibilities of assistant heads for a period of time.

What will be hard is paying colleagues for this deputising. You need to create a culture where this isn't always expected and is seen by all as a professional development opportunity rather than a new role. Sometimes giving a colleague additional non-contact time to take on a whole school role is more possible than a pay rise (though this depends on teaching capacity in your school). As senior teams get squeezed due to budget constraints, it is more common to see subject leaders taking on whole school roles with titles like associate assistant headteacher. Many schools make these one or two year unpaid secondments.

A member of staff who applies for a secondment and doesn't get the position can feel more limited by their existing role in school than previously and may feel prompted to look for a position elsewhere. Be prepared to explain in quite clear terms why they weren't successful and try to find ways to provide them with some other opportunity soon. Think too about what might happen when a secondment ends. Will your member of staff be satisfied returning to their previous role or can you keep creating something new?

6. Real responsibility

Though titles, pay rises and organisational recognition are key elements of career progression, personal pride goes a long way towards job satisfaction.

Providing staff with real responsibilities, genuine chances to lead and to see real outcomes of taking responsibility is important. Be willing for staff to get things wrong and learn through supported experience; trust your staff and allow them to take risks.



By doing this you will create a climate where staff are supportive of each other as they develop, prospective staff want to work at your school and successful staff feel it's worth staying around.