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How to Succeed in Small-School Headship: A Reflection

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Abstract

This thesis is based on a six-year period of my first headship in a small village school. Through my story, I have investigated skills, attributes and knowledge that are required to 'succeed' in the endeavour of a small-school headship.

I explain my approach to the research through a personal memoir and how this will draw out the learning. Then, Part One of this work positions my time as a headteacher in the wider educational context by examining the history of education from the Education Reform Act 1988 through to the coalition government of 2010.

Part Two tells my story from the start of my headship in January 2006 through to March of 2011. Through these reflections, I draw out key skills, attributes and knowledge that have helped me to develop and 'succeed' as a small-school headteacher. I then draw upon a focused learning journal from April of 2011 to March 2012 and examine a series of 'critical incidents'. Each incident uses a key stakeholder group in order to consider their role in the life of the headteacher and examine how the learning from the earlier reflections is applied and developed through interactions with these groups.

I conclude with a set of seven 'motifs' for successful small-school headship, drawing together the learning from my story, followed by a brief examination of how my claims speak with scholarly leadership research.

Contents

Acknowledgements **Page 1**

Abstract **Page 2**

Contents **Page 3**

Figures, Photographs and Tables **Page 5**

Introduction **Page 6**

- The Thesis Page 8

Chapter One **Page 10**

- Methodology: A Personal Reflective Memoir Page 10
- Ethical Considerations Page 19
- The Method Page 20
- Thesis Outline Page 22

Part One:

Chapter Two **Page 24**

- Setting the Scene Page 24
- 1988 – The Conservative Government: Margaret Thatcher Page 25
- 1990 – The Conservative Government: John Major Page 30
- 1997 – New Labour: Tony Blair and Gordon Brown Page 32
- 2010 – Coalition: David Cameron Page 38
- Timelines Page 44

Part Two:

Introduction **Page 46**

Chapter Three **Page 56**

- Section One: January 2006 – December 2006 Page 56
- Section Two: January 2007 – December 2007 Page 79
- Section Three: January 2008 – March 2011 Page 112
  - 2008 Page 112
  - 2009 Page 127
  - 2010 Page 133
  - 2011 Page 139

Chapter Four **Page 142**

- Preface Page 142
- Section One: Governors and Staff Page 151
- Section Two: Diocese Page 166
- Section Three: Local Authority Page 172
- Section Four: Children Page 176
- Section Five: Parents Page 179
- Section Six: Community Page 186

Conclusions **Page 195**

- Be Thoughtful Page 196
- Be Curious Page 197
- Be Prepared Page 198
- Be Determined Page 198
- Be Generous Page 199
- Be Fully Committed Page 201
- Be Yourself Page 203

Conclusions and Leadership Theory **Page 205**

Final Summary **Page 212**

Postscript **Page 216**

References **Page 221**

Figures, Photographs and Tables

Figures

Figure 1: Slide from Interview Presentation Page 6

Figure 2: Floor Plan of Kirk Ireton Primary 2007 Page 59

Figure 3: Floor Plan of Kirk Ireton Primary 2008 Page 114

Figure 4: Screenshot of Headteacher Task List Page 144

Figure 5: Venn Diagram of Skills, Attributes and Knowledge Page 146

Figure 6: List of Stakeholder Groups Page 148

Figure 7: Parent Questionnaire Overview Data Page 181

Photographs

Photograph 1: Pages from the School Journal Page 51

Photograph 2: Kirk Ireton Church of England Primary School Page 56

Photograph 3: School Children in Nairobi Page 120

Photograph 4: Marathon-in-a-Month Launch Page 129

Photograph 5: Flying Kites on the Village Field Page 135

Photograph 6: Glastonbury Festival Programme 2017 Page 200

Photograph 7: Thank-You Card Page 214

Tables

Table 1: List of Skills, Attributes and Knowledge Page 55

Table 2: List of Skills, Attributes and Knowledge Page 78

Table 3: List of Skills, Attributes and Knowledge Page 111

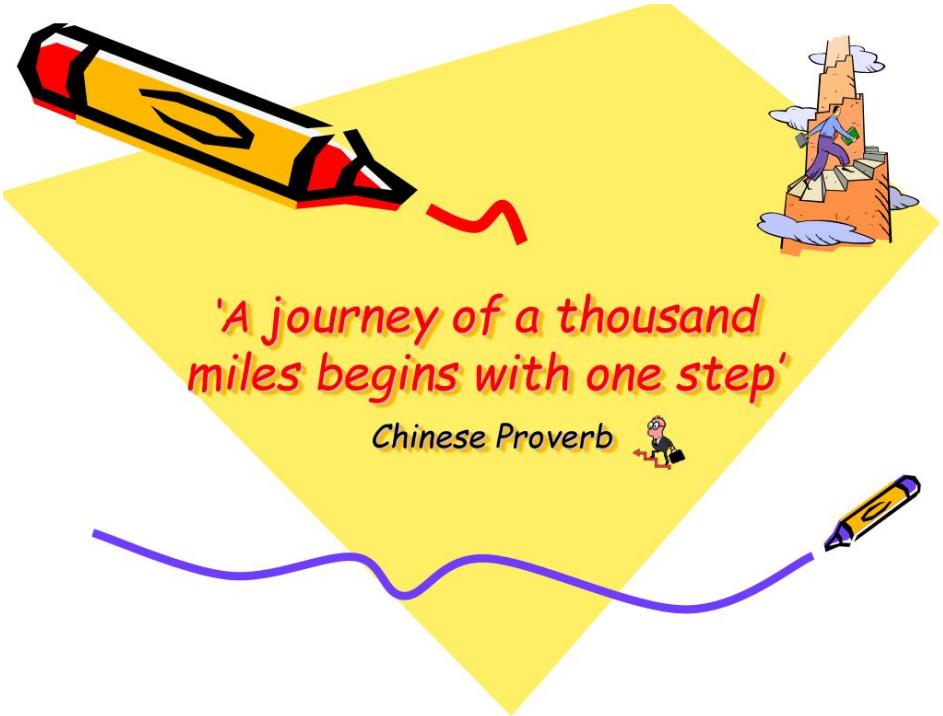
Table 4: List of Skills, Attributes and Knowledge Page 141

Introduction

This thesis is focused on the everyday life of one small-school headteacher and what can be learnt from it. As the data was collected and reflected upon it became clear that I would be able to draw key characteristics and learning points for success[1] in small-school headship (as well as other headships and leadership roles).

In the interview process for the job at Kirk Ireton C of E Primary School, I used Figure 1 in my Powerpoint presentation:

Figure 1:



[1] I will examine what 'success' means to me throughout the thesis.

I had no idea how prescient this image would be and the steep learning curve I was about to embark upon. I have now been in post (although my role has evolved in that time) for over twelve years and am still learning more on a daily basis, but it is not the exponential growth that I experienced in the earlier parts of my career and that will be examined through this thesis.

The purpose of this work is to examine why I have not only survived in the highly challenging role of a primary Church school village headteacher, but also why I appear to have thrived in it and to have 'succeeded'. I will examine what I have learnt in my journey through headship and how this relates to a bank of skills, attributes and knowledge that have been important in making me an 'effective' leader. The small school headteacher, like the "middle manager" (Blandford, 1997) has to juggle the role of teacher alongside both being a manager and the leader and it is thus important to understand the job and its requirements. My ultimate goal is to use the results of this thesis to support prospective leaders, particularly headteachers of small schools, in focusing their energies and their training in order to manage the challenges of the role. The application of my professional and research knowledge is important because:

> Middle managers may find it difficult to adapt to their new position – that of manager and teacher. It is helpful to try and identify the knowledge and understanding, skills and abilities required for each, and then place yourself in the role of teacher and manager (Blandford, 1997:16).

This thesis supports a better understanding of the complexities of the small-school headteacher's role.

The Thesis:

Following an examination of my methodology, the personal memoir, and ethical considerations in Chapter One, this thesis is split into two parts. It also has a separate conclusion which brings my memoir into conversation with the leadership literatures.

Part One, Chapter Two sets the scene, concentrating on the history of the educational landscape since 1988 and how the politics of the successive governments have shaped that. This landscape is important to help understand the context of the working environment that is a key element of Part Two of the thesis.

Part Two sets about telling the story of my first six years of headship in a small village school. Following a short introduction, Chapter Three covers the first five years of headship. Chapter Three is split into three sections, with the first two each covering a calendar year and the third section taking in the following three years. In Chapter Four, a period of around a year is examined in detail through the use of a learning journal that I wrote during that time. Chapter Four is split into sections that are not governed by time but each takes one of the key stakeholder groups that the small school headteacher is likely to interact with and examines them in more detail though 'critical incidents'.

A number of people are discussed but no names will be mentioned. This anonymity is partly for privacy, but mostly because the focus remains on me and my role. The focus on me is not the result of some innate narcissism (although I'm sure some might disagree), but because to discover truths about the role of headship and how I have been 'successful' in the small school setting, that is where the focus needs to be.

In this thesis I will mention my development over the years being aided by the annual Leadership Conference and the most recent one included the following quote, "You cannot add value to anyone else's life until you've added enough value to your own" (Dudley, 2017). This view about looking after yourself is an important part of my outlook in general. To be an effective leader, partner, parent or whatever other role you may be undertaking, you need to look after yourself first. To some extent, this work is a manifestation of these views and therefore work-life balance and the importance of a life outside of headship will be considered as integral to the headteacher's work.

The conclusion presents seven core motifs that sum up the ways to survive and maybe even thrive in the headship of a small school followed by an examination of these motifs in the context of wider leadership theory.

It is useful to note that in 2012 I took on a second small school. Although the second school is not within the period covered in Part Two, there is mention of it in Chapter Two and so it is helpful to understand that context.

Chapter One

Methodology: A Personal Reflective Memoir

This thesis is written as a 'personal memoir'. It is important to acknowledge from the start that everything that follows is within that context: "It cannot be *the* record of *the* past… Memoir is *a* record" (Larson 2007:19) – this work is *my* truth and any knowledge claims must be viewed within that framework.

This thesis is a work that is underpinned by my experiences as a small school[2] headteacher, focusing on the first six years in that role, starting in January 2006. In any school community, there will be many stories and versions of events and although I have worked hard to ensure my reflections take account of the views of others these are still my stories and they are told from the perspective of the most 'powerful' member of the organisation.

My research as a personal memoir sits in the interpretivist tradition. I am not looking for causes or a firm 'truth', but rather to provide an account of everyday experience which give the texture, flavour and feeling of the life of a headteacher. My decision to take on an interpretivist approach by telling my own story leads back to the work of Jack Sheffield and "Teacher, Teacher" (2004), which is often cited as one of the best reference points for learning

[2] The Department for Education describes any school with less than 220 pupils as 'small'. This thesis uses the term as it is understood in Derbyshire, meaning less than 100 pupils.

about the life of the headteacher in the small-school or rural setting. Sheffield's book was not written as a research piece or a thesis, but rather more a memoir, providing a narrative in the first-person based on real-life experiences. Despite this, it still provides genuine 'insider' insight into the daily pressures and experiences of the headteacher and how they are handled.

We can also think of Wolcott and his seminal book, "The man in the principal's office" (2003). Wolcott's work is not dissimilar to my own in that he aims to present the everyday reality of headship. However, even though Walcott spent a year researching his topic, his is still an outsider view. Walcott has the benefit of a critical dispassionate observer allowing him to see the 'story' from the perspective of other actors in the organisation, however, there are disadvantages to this approach in that, no matter how thorough the research, there is no comparison to actually living the life of the headteacher. There are things that only a headteacher will know that even a relatively long-term researcher in their school will not.

> Insider research, in whatever research tradition it is undertaken, is not only valid and useful but also provides important information about what organizations are really like, which traditional approaches may not be able to uncover (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007:72).

The ability to reflect over time and to be able to watch a headteacher evolve in their role over a longer period is simply no longer practical for anyone other than the headteacher themselves and, as this thesis will show, even that presents a considerable challenge due to the time commitments.

There are, of course, disadvantages to practitioner research which uses a personal memoir approach. There are difficulties in achieving a critical distance and this can leave the research open to criticism from other actors involved – as has been the case for Stubbs following the publication of her "Ahead of the Class" (2003). It is impossible in an interpretivist approach to escape the reality that there may be those who do not agree with the recount or interpretation of events. However, concerns around solipsism, critical distance and the experiences of those that have published memoirs and insider narratives have shaped my approach to this thesis. I will describe the reflexive approach I took in detail in the 'Method' section later in this chapter alongside 'Ethical Considerations' which are also highly pertinent in this type of research.

Another issue with writing a personal memoir about 'success' is that it could be viewed as an account of a 'hero-head', similar to the work of Stubbs, and this is something I want to avoid. Although this thesis is about 'succeeding' in small-school headship, it is important to clarify that I do not mean personal success; rather that the school with which I was charged remains effective for the stakeholders – especially the children. I am not attempting to make lofty claims about 'success' – this is not a thesis about a hero-head and I do not adhere to or promote that model of leadership. The personal success element is, for me, simply a sense of doing a 'good' job and generally surviving – I will reflect on my recognition that at times 'good enough' is what leadership needs to be later in the thesis. When I took the post I received a letter from the Chair of Governors at the school which included the following:

> I am sure that with your very evident energy and enthusiasm, you will bring new opportunities and ideas which the children, staff, parents and governors will greatly value over the coming years.

If I have managed to meet at least some of this expectation, then I would like to think that my headship has been at least partly 'successful' – the rest of this thesis will examine whether or not that has been the case. I continue to put the term 'success' in quotation marks to show that I understand that the term is contentious and subject to multiple interpretations, not the least of which comes from policy-makers anxious to find positive news stories.

I have constructed my memoir with the aid of journals, emails and other documentation from the period that I am examining; I am aware that the work is nevertheless an idiosyncratic recollection of my past. Some may suggest that without a competing view that might refute of refashion or deepen the tale it is only *my* truth. However, this does not mean the memoir is without rigour or value, simply that it must be recognised within its own constraints. The work that follows is still, "Systematic, intentional inquiry" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993:23):

> By systematic, we refer primarily to ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record. Systematic also refers to ordered ways of recollecting, rethinking, and analysing… events for which there may be only partial or unwritten records. By intentional, we signal that teacher research is an activity that is planned rather than spontaneous... By inquiry, we suggest that teacher research stems from or generates questions and reflects teacher's desires to make sense of their experiences (1993:24).

By locating this thesis in the tradition of practitioner research I aim to avoid accusations of potential narcissism. It is important to make sure that creating a personal memoir does not focus solely, "on the self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in" (Bollough & Pinnegar, 2001:15).

Taking a memoir approach might end up being interesting, but ultimately lacking the analysis needed to gain a deeper learning that can be shared. Throughout the research process I have therefore worked to distance myself from the data I generated; by choosing to focus on a six-year time period at the start of my headship (a tenure now over twelve years) I am able to look back at someone who, at times, I do not recognise anymore. This distance of time has made it much easier to be critical and to treat myself as the subject of the research, taking on as objective a view to the events of the time period as possible.

> An autobiographical narrative approach is highly suited to educational research… how a researcher's personal narrative… can act as a source of privileged knowledge… personal experience methods can be used on a variety of topics relevant to teaching and the field of education in order to expand knowledge (Hamdan, 2012:585).

This thesis recognises that, "Grassroots efforts in action research and other forms of practitioner research have highlighted the importance of educators' own understanding of their practice" (Noffke in Anderson, Herr and Nihlen, 2007:ix). This thesis presents my own practice of 'sense-making' moderated by critical reflection, systematic study and reading. Ravitch (2014:5) states that, "Practitioner research is undertaken by practitioners who seek to improve our

own practice, and perhaps that of our colleagues", and this clearly ties in with my own aims to find learning points from my reflections.

As a memoir, my work is autobiographical and this can raise concerns for trustworthiness as it relies on:

> Memory (as) the key-element of autobiographical research. It is an essential characteristic of the narrator and component for narration. It is a component with which the researcher works in order to (re)construct elements of analysis that may help in understanding the object of the study (Menna Barreto Abrahao, 2012:30).

I have the advantage of both a learning journal and a school journal to anchor my memory, but I am aware that there remains a need for criticality in order to gain the best learning from my memoir. Of course, although I am aiming to provide the reader with an accurate 'version' of events to underpin the learning points, as Menna Barreto Abrahao (2012:38) states:

> This makes the narrative of a life as a different kind, since the narrator and the researcher are not concerned with the "truth" in the sense of the close relationship between the events narrated and the reality. Rather, the interest here is with the significance of these events to the narrator, at the time of the narration, and as affected by their meaning.

The argument for meaningfulness is reinforced by Loxley and Seery (in Sikes and Potts, 2008:15) who assert that:

> Central to this view is the notion that it is not so much the veracity of the 'truth claims' which are important, but who is making them and their ability to legitimise this privileged position.

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) offer a set of "guidelines" for "self-study forms" and I have used nine of these to provide a benchmark for this thesis:

1. *Autobiographical self-studies should ring true and enable connection.*
2. *Self-studies should promote insight and interpretation.*
3. *Autobiographical self-study research must engage history forthrightly and the author must take an honest stand.*

These first three challenges are at the core of what I aim to achieve through this work. By focusing on my own story, it is much easier to remain true and since much of this work has been part of my professional life for so long, it has often been shared with colleagues before. Having reflected both with myself and with others about many of the events in this thesis over the past twelve years of headship, there will be a connection with, and also a real focus on, both insight and interpretation. By being self-critical throughout, I am engaging with my history in an honest way, which will be seen throughout Chapter Three in particular.

4. *Autobiographical self-studies in teacher education are about the problems and issues that make someone an educator.*
5. *Authentic voice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the scholarly standing of a biographical self-study.*
6. *The autobiographical self-study researcher has an ineluctable obligation to seek to improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other.*

One of the core aims of this thesis is to provide learning that can be utilised by other headteachers and leaders and it is only likely that this will succeed if those practitioners are able to recognise the "authentic voice". One way that this

recognition will happen is through the shared understanding of problems and issues that are commonplace and will 'strike a chord' with other practitioners.

7. *Powerful autobiographical self-studies portray character development and include dramatic action.*
8. *Quality autobiographical self-studies attend carefully to persons in context or setting*

The work in Chapters Three and Four show character development and, although my life as a headteacher could hardly be described as the plot to an action movie, there is certainly dramatic action. Where this, alongside thinking to "attend carefully to persons in context or setting", cause the need for a pause for thought is with the ethical quandaries of this style of study. I will return to ethical consideration at the end of this section.

9. *Quality autobiographical self-studies offer fresh perspectives on established truths.*

I make no pretence that much in this work has been written about before, but this is a fresh perspective from the small school, and the learning is framed in a way that works for me as a headteacher and should therefore again "enable connection" with other practitioners. By taking some of the learning points and positioning them within existing research, there is an opportunity to see events and practices in new light and therefore for fresh learning to occur.

The narrative approach is "useful only in the extent that it opens up a deeper view of life in familiar contexts" (Clough, 2002:8). I aim for my memoir to strike a clear chord with those in education, leadership or who work in small schools.

This aim will be achieved by analysing the narrative for learning and themes that may support others in their own journeys.

> The stories we tell about our lives and ourselves can play an important role in the ways in which we can learn from our lives. Such learning, in turn, can be important for the ways in which we live our lives.
>
> Narrative learning is not simply learning from the stories we tell about our lives and ourselves. It is learning that happens 'in' and 'through' the narration (Goodson, Biesta, Tedder et al., 2010:1-2).

The work in the third and fourth chapters of this thesis focuses on the learning weaving through the narrative, both as it happens and how it interplays with learning and development in the future.

> At its best narrative learning provides a suitable model for learning through the life-course, for the development of a nuanced and flexible response to the challenges and changes which life brings (Goodson et al., 2010:132).

The narrative is used to draw out learning points throughout Chapter Three, Chapter Four is focused on how that learning is applied and is used in order to find success, particularly in the interactions with stakeholders.

I set the scene in Chapter Two which helps to ‘locate’ the story:

> The life history can be seen as the 'triangulate' created from the original life story by employing documentary and oral data on historical context and other oral testimonies... By bringing in these data, a more comprehensive commentary on the historical context can be collaboratively developed. The life storyteller, in collaborating on the elaboration of the historical context, begins to place or 'locate' his or her life story in a particular time and place (Goodson, 2013:37).

The rest of this work should “triangulate”, aiming to create a “life story” that resonates with leaders or potential leaders in the education sector.

Ethical Considerations:

> Research from the inside, can raise issues for relationships, can give rise to ethical dilemmas and, what is more, can provoke personal questioning and uncertainties which may be uncomfortable and difficult to deal with (Sikes and Potts, 2008:5).

The clear ethical dilemma of my work is that I cannot tell my story without relating it to my interactions with others, providing details of their actions, words and professional lives. The dilemma is exacerbated by the very nature of what I am studying – the role of a small-school headteacher – as it means that there are relatively few children and adults that are involved over a six-year period. As a result of the small numbers, it can be easy for a reader with some knowledge of me, my school or the community it is in, to know who is being discussed despite no individuals being named anywhere in my work.

The quandary is that it would be impossible to tell my story without considering the role of others within it. To this end, I have undertaken two significant tasks in order to take account of the possibility of ‘harm’ being caused to others by this work. The first has been to review everyone who is mentioned in this thesis and to either retell that element of the story in more general terms or to ensure that there is nothing that could be deemed as ‘harmful’ to that person or to my relationships with them. The other major action I have taken is to approach all

stakeholders to ask permission for them to be used. Each stakeholder has seen the sections of this thesis where they are mentioned and checking that they are satisfied the work to be honest and not causing them 'harm'.

There is one key actor in the thesis who I am unable to get consent from, but they are key to some of the learning points. As a result, I have made sure those sections are kept in isolation so that in the final published version of this thesis the identifying details will be removed.

The Method:

The foundations of my approach, particularly in Chapter Four, "utilize journal writing as a way to capture… day-to-day reflections and encounters" (Anderson et al., 2007:61). In my journey towards the creation of this thesis, I wrote a journal about my day-to-day working life over the course of a year to see what I might learn from it. Although I had always considered myself to be a reflective practitioner, writing the journal really helped to structure those reflections because that allowed me to start seeing themes in what I was writing and provided me with a clearer view of what I actually 'do' as a headteacher on a daily basis.

Initially I had thought that the journal would provide me with a set of data that could be analysed in a number of ways that would fulfil a thesis proposition but although I have done a text-based analysis of my musings in order to identify

what the key themes were during that period, the journal actually pushed me towards understanding my role in a whole new way. The journal led me to realise that through recollection, reflection and narrative, I could tell a 'story', framed by the educational landscape over the past twenty years. This personal memoir would not only be of interest to me, but also to anyone who wanted to know more about the role of the small-school headteacher; where success was to be found, what characteristics were needed (either already there or to be honed and developed), how the role could affect an individual on a personal level and what, if anything, could be revealed about the overall attributes that have made me survive in a challenging environment for over twelve years at the time of writing.

The method of reviewing the journal, particularly as there was a lengthy gap between the period documented and the reflection upon it, also supported a critical distance. The potential disadvantage of this approach is the possibly that history is rewritten. The interpretivist approach can never get away from these concerns altogether, but I have treated the thesis as if the journal was written by someone else. At times this has been an easy task as upon return to my own writing, there have been a number of the experiences that I can barely recognise myself in, having developed as a person and especially as a professional since then.

As the journaling method developed, I realised that I had inadvertently been creating a similar log of the key events of my time as headteacher through the

school journal and this has become a key part of my method as it provided a guide to the timeline presented in Chapter Three. I will explain how the two journals were used within the relevant chapters.

Thesis Outline:

The main narrative portion of this thesis, Part Two, is structured in the following way:

- Chapter Three works through the period from January 2006 through to 2011, using the school journal to create a timeline to identify learning points within the context of the events happening during that period. This chapter is where:

  > By means of the narrative, people remember what has happened, place experience in a sequence, find possible implications for this and play with the chain of events that build individual and social lives (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2002:102).

  Within Chapter Three, learning points will be developed through 'break-out boxes' which I will explain in more detail in the introduction to Part Two.

- Chapter Four uses my learning journal to refine how the learning is used in practice and how the time of the small school headteacher is spent.

> School principals construct narratives within the context of their school communities, personal backgrounds and historical settings, and these narratives are armed, rejected, negotiated or even revised through interactions with others in the internal and external communities with whom they work (Crow, Day and Møller, 2016:9).

Chapter Four is very much framed around the "interactions with others" that are such a key feature in the life of a small school headteacher.

The thesis will then offer conclusions based on the narrative and the learning that is drawn out, identifying key motifs to support leadership development.

The following Part One, Chapter Two is about setting the scene and although it is based around a factual timeline, the motivations and ramifications of some of the history on small schools are my own view on them. I know, through years of discussion, that these views will strike a chord with many other practitioners, particularly other small-school headteachers, but it is important to recognise that even the following 'timeline' of events is still within the framework of my personal memoir.

PART ONE

Chapter Two

Setting the Scene:

In my twelve years of headship there have been many changes in national, regional and local policy within education. In twenty years as a qualified teacher, there have been even more. To set the context in terms of helping to understand the current role of a headteacher, particularly in a small school, it is important to go back a little further again. Education has been a political football for a very long time in England, but many educationalists and those who research in the field suggest a key point, following at least a decade of political wrangling moving towards it, when the landscape changed significantly in education and had a particular impact on small schools and their leaders.

In this chapter, I will explore the changes in the national context from that key point – the introduction of the National Curriculum and Local Management of Schools via the Education Reform Act of 1988. As I move through key periods of political, and therefore educational, change I will also look at how these policies affected the local context and how small schools, particularly within Derbyshire where I work, were and are being affected. This period can be summed up as:

> An intensification of the work; increased accountability and public exposure; and the leadership and management of externally driven changes, as well as internal priorities (Southworth, 2008:416-417).

1988 – The Conservative Government under Margaret Thatcher[3]:

To get a better sense of the set up and daily life of the small school prior to the sea-change brought in by the 1988 Education Reform Act, it is worth watching the French documentary film "Être et Avoir" (2002). The film shows a traditional rural school with one teacher (and therefore, by default, the headteacher) leading a mixed-age class of pupils through their primary education. The teacher is concerned with the daily delivery of a largely un-prescribed curriculum and the personal needs of his pupils as they prepare to move to secondary school. Reviewing the limited literature for English small schools leads to a similar picture, as portrayed by the works of Gervaise Phinn and Jack Sheffield's "Teacher teacher" (2004). Sheffield relates tales as the headteacher of a small village school[4] which focus on the day to day dealings with irate parents (2004:18), "an' we want you to do somethin' about it, 'cause we don't want no effin' in our 'ouse.", and of course the pupils (2004:320), "can I 'ave some more beef 'n' sewage pudding please?".

[3] Education Secretaries of State: Kenneth Baker 1986-1989, John MacGregor 1989-1990, Kenneth Clarke 1990-1992.
[4] 80 pupils in September 1977 (2004:17).

The managerial and administerial aspects of the role were rather more removed, although no less irritating than today (2004:57):

> County Hall sent representatives of the new grounds maintenance scheme to inform me of the enforced retirement of Mr George Hardisty, School Groundsman, at the end of the month when he reaches the age of 65. The school governors supported the HT's letter of complaint.

The Education Reform Act didn't remove any of the day to day aspects of the headteacher's role, but it added new responsibilities that changed the overall post forever and very quickly the headteacher became manager more than ever before. In particular, the introduction of Local Management of Schools (LMS) drastically evolved the role of the head teacher and governors[5].

> The head was no longer an educationalist but an institutional manager. S/he now had to learn about recruitment and selection procedures, employment law, health and safety legislation, buildings maintenance etc. (Gillard, 2011).

As is still the case for the current (2018) Conservative government, the drive in 1988 was to push power to schools and away from Local Authorities[6]. However, the small rural school was never fully considered and therefore the impact on them, their communities and particularly their leaders, was immense. In Derbyshire, the local authority worked to protect small schools as only a relatively small budget was devolved directly to schools. All services were

[5] The accountability framework for governors came in much later than for headteachers, at least as monitored by Ofsted.
[6] Which are now being systematically dismantled via the academies agenda and the introduction of Multi-Academy Trusts.

provided directly e.g. catering, maintenance, capital works, budget management etc. Nonetheless, the headteacher was suddenly much more of a 'manager' than they had ever been and in the small school there was no-one else to undertake the associated responsibilities. As a result, meetings with the local authority, and their various departments, became a more prominent part of the life of the small school leader. Today I am much more responsible for budget matters and all the associated work such as maintenance and staffing structures than a 1980s headteacher and this will be seen throughout Chapter Three.

Another key aspect of the 1988 Education Reform Act was the introduction of a National Curriculum and, more specifically, the establishment of the curriculum and assessment councils. The Act was the start of the data-driven accountability framework as it established what would be tested, measured and monitored by the forthcoming Ofsted[7]. This combination of the new curriculum and the accountability measures was to change the face of English education dramatically.

The 1988 Act created the framework for a "basic curriculum" which was to be taught in all state schools: it included three "core subjects" of English, maths and science and six "foundation" subjects of geography, history, music, technology, art and physical education (P.E.) as well as a framework for the delivery of religious education (R.E.). This curriculum will not sound very

[7] The Office for Standards in Education.

different to anyone educated in a British school prior to the 1988 Act[8], but what differed was the introduction of "attainment targets", which laid out the knowledge, skills and understanding that pupils needed to achieve by the end of each key stage[9]. "Programmes of study" – dictating what was to be taught to each year group – were created. For religious education, schools were to begin each day with an "act of collective worship", generally containing themes "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character"[10].

The year group approach taken to the National Curriculum created an instant problem for small primary schools where children were mostly taught in mixed-age classes, often with four year groups together. Trying to follow a prescribed curriculum that would require four different science topics, for instance, was simply not possible and so long-terms plans had to be designed by each school to work within their setting whilst still providing the required coverage prescribed by the new curriculum.

> The Conservatives' approach to reform during this period was based on an uneasy combination of centralisation and devolution, coalescing around the weakening and dismantling of local education authority (LEA) influence and teacher autonomy (Ball, 2017:14).

[8] I attended a state primary school in Northern Ireland between 1980 and 1987.
[9] Also introduced by the act – Key Stage One ending at the end of the academic year where pupils turned seven and Key Stage Two ending when pupils had turned eleven and were set to attend secondary school.
[10] Again, this was not necessarily a significant change for the majority of schools, and certainly not small rural schools, but it again created an accountability framework as overseen by SACRE (standing advisory council on religious education), which each Local Education Authority was bound to create. These consisted of representatives of religious groups, the Church of England, teachers and the local authority.

Whereas the supposed ethos of the Education Reform Act of 1988 was about giving powers directly to schools rather than Local Education Authorities[11], the creation of the National Curriculum Council (NCC) and the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC) seemed to contradict this. Members of these councils would be appointed by the Secretary of State, giving central government a considerable say in the running of state schools from that point on[12], particularly in the delivery and content of what children were actually taught. The NCC's role was to review the curriculum, carry out programmes of research and development, publish and disseminate information relating to the curriculum and, perhaps crucially, perform "such ancillary activities as the Secretary of State may direct" (Education Reform Act, 1988:12). SEAC's role was of a similar ilk but related directly to examinations and assessment and it was to ensure that moderation of assessment was in place, once again entrenching the accountability framework that would form so much of the educational landscape for the coming decades.

As can already be seen, the changes introduced in the 1988 act were to have a profound effect on state school education for years to come "it opened up opportunities for further reforms that served to 'soften up' or weaken the

[11] A policy enunciated by Kenneth Baker when he spoke to the October 1986 Conservative Party Conference and stated, "it is crucial for parents to understand where power in the education system lies. Our Education Bill radically changes the composition of school governing bodies. It gives these bodies new powers and responsibilities. We will end the dominance of the local authority and its political appointees."

[12] Once again, in an echo of the current (2018) situation where the drive to give schools 'autonomy' by removing the power of the local authority involves putting the same responsibilities into the hands of unelected Regional Schools Commissioners appointed directly by the Secretary of State.

embedded assumptions of the welfare and public service model of education" (Ball, 2017:14). It is therefore important to follow the national picture much further to fully appreciate how small schools would have to adapt and evolve.

1990 – The Conservative Government under John Major[13]:

When the Thatcher era ended and John Major became prime minister in November 1990, the education system experienced declining investment which had a direct effect on the ability of local authorities to protect small schools. Public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP had reached a high point of 6.5 per cent in 1975-6 under Callaghan's government. By 1983-4 it had fallen to 5.3 per cent and it remained below that level under both Thatcher and Major. By 1993-4 capital spending on schools was less than half what it had been in the mid-1970s (Glennerster, 1998:37). It was in this period that the Derbyshire local authority closed a number of its small schools and in Kirk Ireton's secondary school catchment area two primary schools were lost in the early 1990s. However, the long-term impact of this cull in Derbyshire was not so challenging for those small schools which survived as a firm commitment was then made to protect them, mainly through the block funding aspect of the budget formula designed by the local authority[14].

[13] Education Secretaries of State: Kenneth Clarke 1990-1992, John Patten 1992-1994, Gillian Shephard 1994-1995.

[14] Something which is now threatened by the proposed National Funding Formula. At the time of writing, the DFE has just announced that it proposes to 'protect' 1200 rural small schools through 'sparsity' funding – neither of my schools are on this list.

Another key aspect of education policy during this period was the introduction of Ofsted via the 1992 Education (Schools) Act which soon became, "a major part of English school life" (Elliot, 2012:1). For small schools, the new inspection regime exacerbated the potential for demise as parents were being actively encouraged to choose schools outside of their normal catchment area. The judgement of inspectors could thus threaten schools where numbers were already low. The threat from a weak Ofsted report has not changed in the intervening years as the pupil driven aspect of school funding[15] puts all schools, but particularly small schools, at risk[16].

In small schools, an Ofsted inspection meant one inspector undertaking the whole inspection process which led to a considerable fear of the power of that individual to impact on the long-term prospects of the school and the staff within it. For many small schools, the pressure of the Ofsted inspection was not the end as a 'Church School' inspection would follow within six-weeks if the

[15] In Derbyshire one pupil without any additional needs or funding attracts approximately £2500 per year, which in my schools can easily equate to 1% or more of total budget.

[16] The impact of a strong or weak Ofsted judgement can be seen simply by looking at the two schools I currently run. At Kirk Ireton there were 39 pupils when I arrived. Within eight months, the school was inspected and received an 'Outstanding' judgement (Ofsted, 2006) and within two years had a roll of 59. At Carsington, the school had gone from 'Outstanding', to 'Satisfactory' and then into the new 'Requires Improvement' category in November 2012 (Ofsted, 2012). The school was projected to start the 2015/16 academic year with only 23 pupils during this period but following the re-inspection in November 2014 (Ofsted, 2014) which graded the school as 'Good' with an 'Outstanding' judgement for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) the school started the 2015/16 year with 36 pupils and currently (2018) 42.

school was a Church of England School. The 'Church' inspection was designed to measure the 'Distinctiveness as a Church School'[17].

Policy-led disruption continued apace as schools tried to keep up. In small schools policy change was always more of a challenge as the flexibility and skill sets in a small team are harder to change. Indeed, "Primary schools have consistently been reported to be the least ready to take advantage of policy initiatives, particularly in terms of social and material capacity." (Earley, Higham, Allen et al., 2012:110). The period covered in this chapter would see changes towards results driven teaching and repeated changes to curriculum and assessment alongside decentralisation of budgets (Day, 2003:6). In small schools this level of policy churn and pace of change has been exceptionally difficult to manage.

1997 – New Labour under Tony Blair and Gordon Brown[18]:

The next significant change for education was to come in 1997 as eighteen years of conservative rule gave way to 'New Labour' under Tony Blair. The change in government coincided with my own entry into the system, qualifying as a primary school teacher in July 1998. Although many hoped that

[17] Following the later decision to exempt 'Outstanding' schools from routine OFSTED inspection, the link between the inspections was removed and the National Society put its own timetable in place to ensure all Church of England and Methodist schools were re-inspected within a five-year window.

[18] Education Secretaries of State: David Blunkett 1997-2001, Estelle Morris 2001-2002, Charles Clarke 2002-2004, Ruth Kelly 2005-2006, Alan Johnson 2006-2007, Ed Balls (Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families) 2007-2010.

government change would mark an improvement to the working lives of schools and teachers it simply ushered in a new set of priorities which continued to drive change.

One of the first impacts of Labour's 'Education, education, education' policy was the decision to make it illegal to have a planned class size of more than thirty pupils if any of those pupils were of infant age[19]. The mandate to reduce class numbers for infants had a considerable impact in many schools of all sizes as in some areas pupils were being taught in class sizes of over forty[20]. The change came via the 1997 Education (Schools) Act which also introduced the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, which would lead to the teaching of what became known as the 'Literacy Hour' and 'Numeracy Hour'. The same bill also introduced targets and performance tables and the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers[21].

As the Labour government moved forward with its policies, the junior education minister, Stephen Byers, began 'naming and shaming' 'failing schools'. Although Byers' rhetoric was directed more at secondary schools, the effect on the education environment was clear – a high-stakes system where

[19] From Reception Year to Year Two (ages 4-7).
[20] It had a considerable personal impact for me as Derby City was awarded £1million to tackle the class sizes in the city, many of which were into the forties. This money was used for the 'Derby Drive' where 70 new infant teachers were recruited through a pool interview. This was my route into the profession, being allocated to a large city infant school once I had completed my Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).
[21] Commonly known as NPQH.

many schools and headteachers were driven to focus on a narrow definition of pupil ‘progress’ and follow a rigid curriculum which standardised delivery:

> Whereas the Tories had told teachers what to teach, New Labour now told them how to teach it: the 'Literacy Hour' (and later, the 'Numeracy Hour') spelt out content and teaching methods in enormous detail (Gillard, 2011).

New teachers were losing the ability to be creative as literacy and numeracy were delivered in primary schools almost to a script. I was fortunate in this period to find my first job via ‘The Derby Drive’ and I was even more fortunate to find myself in a school with high standards where the headteacher chose to ignore the push for a rigid literacy and numeracy curriculum and continued to teach in the ways that had garnered success at the school for many years. The headteacher’s standpoint may have been one of the most important formative experiences of my teaching (and latterly leadership) career. Through the headteacher’s decision I saw that as long as the outcomes were effective you could choose what to do. When I became a headteacher this lesson remained at the forefront of my mind, particularly with policy changes, “Putting into place a system which rewards those who successfully comply with government directives” (Day, 2003:6).

Another key aspect of government policy in this period was the introduction of academies, where failing schools could be taken out of local authority control. Although this policy had little or no effect on small rural schools at the time, it

was the beginnings of an agenda which would ultimately be a major issue for local authorities and therefore the small schools under their control.

The next shift that did impact on small schools, as they continued to mostly have headteachers with a timetabled teaching commitment, was the 2001 white paper "Schools – Achieving Success" that led to the 2002 Education Act. The Act furthered the decentralisation of funding so that at least 85% of the school's budget was controlled by the headteacher/governing body. Small school headteachers inevitably moved more and more into the role of manager as dealing with finance fell to them. Small schools mostly didn't have a full-time secretary, never mind a bursar or business manager[22].

The next change that would burden all schools would be the introduction of PPA (planning, preparation and assessment time) which all teachers were to be entitled to[23]. Once again, the lack of flexibility in small schools meant that many headteachers saw their timetabled teaching commitment increase and because part of their week was already non-contact time for management tasks they had to find more hours somewhere else. By the time I started headship, the school required three-and-a-quarter days of teaching from the headteacher. Even this commitment was only as a result of the previous headteacher being

[22] When I arrived at Kirk Ireton, the school secretary had a contract for 16 hours per week, and as more of the changes outlined in this chapter took effect, we moved to 30 hours, which had a huge impact on the budget but was the only way that the leadership of the school could see that things could be run effectively.
[23] The equivalent of 10% of timetabled teaching commitment would be non-contact time.

prudent with the budget as she had recently been teaching as much as 4 days per week to keep the school from going into deficit. Curtis' (2010) work investigating Leicestershire primary schools saw a varied approach to the impact of PPA but with a theme of the many challenges that it created for school leaders. In small schools, the options for how to approach PPA were much more limited, particularly in terms of who could cover the time.

Although extra money was working its way into school budgets during this period, PPA negated much of that. The government did, however, plough considerable funds into capital works for schools. Small schools benefited from Devolved Formula Capital (DFC) as the block sum for each establishment was set at over £20000 per year plus a small amount per pupil (£5). This funding could equate to well over 10% of the normal budget. The money was ring-fenced for capital works and was then loosened to allow spending on curriculum computer hardware. This financial generosity was not to last, but at Kirk Ireton it built a £50000 extension (see Chapter Three) and went towards plans for an £80000 mezzanine floor that had to be abandoned when the funding was cut to around £4000 per year. In October 2007 Alastair Darling announced a 2.8 percent real terms increase for the education budget and for most schools this was probably the last piece of good news on a budgetary note, up to and including the present day.

The changes throughout the rest of the years of the Labour government had varying degrees of impact on small schools but were, in the main, minor

irritations – dictates on food policies, further tinkering and interference with methods of teaching and the curriculum[24] and a continued fear of the impact of Ofsted, which in no way diminished in this period[25]. For a small number of schools, of which Kirk Ireton was one, there was some good news from Ofsted – a change in the inspection framework. The new framework meant that good or outstanding schools would have longer between inspections. A further change meant all outstanding schools were then made statutorily exempt from 'routine inspection', thus removing at least some of the general feeling that the sword of Damocles was always hanging over schools.

Had Labour won the following election a new national curriculum, following the Rose Review (2009), would have resulted. The curriculum was published and materials were put into schools, along with an extra training (INSET) day in the academic year prior to its supposed introduction in September 2011. Sadly, the writing was on the wall that if Labour lost power, so their skills-based curriculum would be lost. The shadow education secretary, Michael Gove (2008), said that a Conservative government would reinstate "traditional" styles of "fact-based" lessons. Gove condemned "pupil-centred learning" theories which had gained support in the 1960s for "dethroning" the teacher:

[24] Synthetic phonics and one-to-one tuition being a couple of examples.

[25] Perhaps this was best summed up by the effect on the development of school leadership in England when, in September 2006, the General Teaching Council reported that schools in England were facing a leadership crisis with only 4 per cent of teachers wanting to become heads within the next five years. At the same time, more than a third of head teachers said they were planning to retire by 2011 (Smither, 2006). The National College for School Leadership (2010) also reported figures nearer the end of the decade that for 2009 showed 22% of schools had to re-advertise a headteacher post after failing to recruit on the first occasion and this figure increased to 24.59% for small schools.

> It is an approach to education that has been called progressive, but in fact is anything but. It privileges temporary relevance over a permanent body of knowledge which should be passed on from generation to generation ... We need to tackle this misplaced ideology wherever it occurs.

The profession would have no idea what was about to hit it[26].

2010 – Coalition under David Cameron[27]:

In 2010, following an inconclusive general election, a new coalition government was formed from the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats, paving the way for Michael Gove to take up position as Secretary of State for Education[28]. This government's priority was to bring down the deficit by reducing expenditure on public services; this had a very direct impact on all schools and small schools were not exempt.

[26] By 2009 Gove was promising to destroy the "educational establishment" he claimed was responsible for "dumbing down" schools. He told the Conservative Party conference that he would side-line local authorities, scrap the curriculum agency, sack the worst head teachers, have fewer Ofsted inspections for good schools, encourage competitive sports, and insist on traditional values in the classroom, with former soldiers imposing discipline and pupils expected to wear ties. The state monopoly over schools would be abolished by allowing every school the chance to become an independent academy with greater control over the curriculum, the pay of teachers and the organisation of the school day.

[27] Education Secretaries of State: Michael Gove 2010-2014, Nicky Morgan 2014-2015.

[28] As a purely personal aside, I found myself stood in a lift with Mr Gove just prior to his first major speech to the profession at the annual school leadership conference in Birmingham in June 2010. I wished him good luck and told him I was looking forward to what he had to say. I suspect this conversation would be a little different if I were to find myself in the same position today.

Aside from the freeze on public servant salaries, Gove was in no mind to take his time with education reforms and so the profession entered a period of significant, rapid and disruptive change. The first policy, pushed from the very start, was encouragement for all schools to become academies, removing them from Local Authority (LA) control with the Academies Act 2010 removing LA power to veto their decision. The New Labour government had compulsorily opened 203 academies from 'failing schools' and planned to increase that number to 400 but Gove was determined to go much further. In his first month as education secretary, he wrote to all primary and secondary schools in England inviting them to 'convert' to academies.

In some areas the push for academies would have a rapid and severe effect as local authorities became unviable if too many of their schools opted for academy status. In Derbyshire this effect was barely noticed, with far less than the national average of secondary schools choosing to convert. Within three years of the policy being introduced only two Derbyshire primary schools converted. Although academies offered "autonomy to operate in areas such as hiring and pay of teachers, schools admissions (subject to national rules), curriculum (subject to some conditions), and decisions about the length of the school day and term" (Eyles, Machin and McNally, 2016:3) the reasons for the lack of change in Derbyshire were partly to do with the high proportion of small schools, but also the good relationships and long-standing belief in the quality of Derbyshire as a local authority. The coalition government also created the

ability for stakeholders to create and open 'Free-Schools', although in Derbyshire there are no examples of this at the time of writing.

The Church of England sought to benefit from the expansion of the academies programme. Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, who had previously accused the coalition government of pursuing education policies "for which no one voted", told a heads' conference that "the Church of England will be quite conceivably the largest sponsor and provider of secondary education in this country, which is a rather startling and breath-taking proposal" (Marley, 2011). Williams' statement led to an important change in Derbyshire (including the Derby City LA) that would have little initial impact but is now starting to have a more significant effect. The Derby Diocesan Board of Education (DDBE), cognisant of the fact that a number of its schools within Derby City were at risk of forced academisation, set up a Multi-Academy Trust that has now recruited a number of schools, including a small school within my own cluster. Some of these schools were not at risk from the DfE or Ofsted – but the influence and effectiveness of the local authority diminishes further as a result.

In Derbyshire it is still the financial changes since 2010 that have undermined the Local Authority's ability to continue supporting small schools. As money was being removed from Local Authorities, a new stream of funding started to come directly to schools that could have a huge impact on each school's individual budget. The 'Pupil Premium', introduced in 2010, was initially £900 per child eligible for free school meals. By the 2014/15 academic year this figure had

risen to a basic £1300 with more available for children in care and also a smaller amount for any pupils who came from families in the armed forces. Small schools were rather less likely than big inner city urban schools to benefit due to their demographics, although clearly this varies by area. At the time of writing, Kirk Ireton has an income from pupil premium of £10400 for the current academic year whereas Carsington Primary, my second small school, has no funding at all. For schools that are of a similar size, this is clearly a huge difference (Kirk Ireton's amount equates to 5% of overall budget share).

Michael Gove's changes went far further than finance and the introduction of academies. He made it clear that he was determined to reform every aspect of the curriculum and examinations. One of his first actions was to scrap the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA)[29], which had been created in 2008 when the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority was split into the QCDA and Ofqual, the watchdog for exam standards. The move to scrap these agencies was far from just a money-saving device as it paved the way for an entirely new curriculum, finally introduced in September 2014. The new curriculum would prove to be an extremely divisive topic between the profession and government, the tensions between which had started to escalate from the moment the coalition government came to power.

[29] The coalition government were determined to remove 'quangos' and as many agencies as they could to slim down the service. At least part of the rationale for this was to cut costs, with the BBC (Richardson, 2010) reporting that the move to cut the QCDA would save around £8 million.

Disputes between the teacher unions and the coalition government about conditions of service began in the autumn of 2010 when the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) asked schools that were considering academy status to guarantee that their teachers would continue to work under national pay and conditions. In response, academies minister Lord Hill told the schools to ignore the NASUWT's demands. Then, in January 2011, the government announced it would raise teachers' retirement age, replace the final-salary scheme with career averages, and increase employee contributions. Several teacher unions – including the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) – started discussing strike action. The inclusion of the NAHT is significant as it had long been a very moderate union and had never moved to strike action in its century-old existence. The rhetoric between government and profession became increasingly antagonistic and ultimately strike action became many teachers' choice of response[30].

All of this industrial action might have been destabilising enough for the profession, but further statements from Mr Gove about speeding up the process to sack teachers and leaders did little to improve morale or help professionals to concentrate on anything other than trying to tick the right boxes in order to survive the next Ofsted inspection. Christine Gilbert, who had

[30] It is important, given that this thesis focuses on me as a headteacher, that I clarify I have, as yet, never taken part in a strike action (although I have been affiliated to unions throughout my career that have called for it). I have also worked in a number of schools where other staff and teaching colleagues have gone on strike. For me this is because I have not yet felt the rationale to be strong enough to overcome my desire to educate the pupils in my care. Even as such a moderate within the profession, there are some 'lines in the sand' which current policy is crossing that might well see me follow a union call to take further action.

steadily rebuilt the relationship between Ofsted and the profession, resigned as head of Ofsted in June 2011 and was replaced by Sir Michael Wilshaw. Shortly after taking up post, Wilshaw set out a raft of new policies, including plans to condemn schools which gave teachers automatic pay rises, to comment on teachers' dress and demeanour, to abolish the 'satisfactory' rating for schools, and to check heads' judgements on individual teachers. Following Wilshaw's taking up of post in January 2012, his predecessor was quoted as saying that teacher morale was at "rock bottom" (Boffey, 2012). Morale certainly became more and more of an issue with union-led surveys of school leaders showing that more than a third were so disillusioned with what was happening that they were actively planning to resign in a 2012 survey (Boffey, 2012).

Change continued on all fronts and although, by its launch in September 2014, the new primary curriculum had changed somewhat from its initial incarnation, morale was not improved as the requirements of what was 'expected' of primary age children in English and Maths ratcheted up. The newly developed 'Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling'[31] area became a tested aspect of the curriculum. Another 'bonus' for signing up to the academies agenda was that the National Curriculum would not apply, although I have yet to visit a school in Derbyshire, including two of its academies, that aren't following the vast majority of it anyway. The data collected in SATs tests rely heavily on the English

[31] Although it is not the DfE's preferred moniker, the profession has adopted this as SPAG, rarely said out loud without at least a hint of venom.

and maths that are prescribed in 143 of the 201 pages of the curriculum document[32], making it unlikely for any school to opt out.

For small schools, in a considerable echo of the problems faced following the 1988 Education Act, teachers were back to trying to understand how they could deliver a history programme of study that was meant to be taught chronologically to Key Stage Two pupils year on year, but where children were taught alongside up to 3 other year groups. Once again, timetabling, long term plans and bespoke programmes of study had to be created to meet the needs of each individual setting.

Timelines:

This policy signposting brings us to the point where this thesis will end (2012) in terms of analysing my time as a small school headteacher. Since 2012 change has continued apace, with the profession ever more at odds with policy makers, local authorities in decline, schools looking to the future with little or no certainty and small schools wondering where they will be left, if and when the storm finally dies down. When it comes to the period from 2010 onwards in particular, this chapter barely scratches the surface of the turmoil experienced by both the profession in general and by individual schools and school leaders.

[32] Perhaps showing the level that the rest of the curriculum matters in terms of the DFE and Ofsted and how, sadly, many schools design their teaching and timetabling. Art and design, as an example, gets a page and a half (The National Curriculum, 2013).

The information covered in this chapter is intended to set a strong sense of the context that I have been working through as a headteacher in the last decade.

It is clear from the policy overview, and without delving into the day to day pressures and challenges of school leadership which the rest of this thesis will cover, that a certain combination of skills, knowledge and what Day and Sammons (2016) refer to as 'traits'[33], are needed by a headteacher. The purpose of the remainder of this thesis is examine my own role in detail and to draw out aspects of that combination, to consider what I have learnt and what has made me carry on when there are others who have chosen not to or had that choice forced upon them[34]. The aim of this is to find, within the national and local context that I have described in this chapter, what it is that has helped me to 'succeed' over the past twelve years of school leadership.

[33] I have chosen to use the word 'attributes' within this thesis.

[34] Three headteachers (one in an acting capacity) that I worked under as a teacher have left the profession in my time as a headteacher and none of these have been through their own choices. A fourth headteacher is currently off work for the foreseeable future.

PART TWO

Introduction:

The day I created the first draft of this chapter started fairly normally. It was a Monday and I arrived around 8.15am at Kirk Ireton and did some 'people time' with the staff who were there. I then mopped up some weekend emails that I hadn't got around to due to a busy couple of days at home[35]. Once the parents were all in, I then left to go to the local secondary school for a 'Team Around the Family' (TAF)[36] meeting before heading back to meet with the new 'head of academy' at the other nearby secondary school[37]. During lunch, which involved some more people time, discussions about lighting for the Christmas play and an attempt to keep on top of a few more emails, I transferred down to Carsington & Hopton Primary – even allowing five minutes at home to grab something to eat when picking up the car[38]. At Carsington, I sorted out a couple of IT issues, did a bit more people time, before being summoned back to Kirk Ireton because of a behavioural/safeguarding concern that needed more attention than just that of the senior teacher who had been dealing with it.

[35] Although I will discuss family life as part of being a headteacher, I will avoid the fact that I currently have 3 children at Kirk Ireton. Having children at the school does sometimes make my day even more odd. On the day in question I ended up travelling between schools partly because of the behaviour issue about to be mentioned, but also because my second daughter was feeling ill and I needed to go and give her some medicine.

[36] These are meetings triggered by safeguarding concerns relating to the welfare of a child or children and generally involve parents and any agencies that are currently involved with the family such as health, education, social care etc.

[37] Not Kirk Ireton's catchment school, but where around half our children go.

[38] As will become clear later, I now live in the village of Kirk Ireton, within about 100 metres of the school.

None of this sounds unlike the life of many heads (barring the IT issues possibly), but then I had to head back out again as we'd had a call from a local farmer who stores some stage blocks (no idea why) and had agreed to let us use them for our Christmas production. As the light was fading (it was mid-November) I was slipping around a mud-caked farm track, where the blocks had been left for me to collect, in a suit, as I had no idea at the start of the day that this is where I would end up. It occurred to me on the drive back to school for the second run with muddy stage blocks wedged into the boot of the car that this wasn't a bad way to introduce my role as a small school headteacher!

The following chapter essentially picks up where my master's dissertation (Johnston, 2005) left off. I wrote about the journey from class teacher to senior management (there is still a dearth of research covering this transition) which ultimately turned out to be quite a brief period in my career. I became an Acting Deputy on a secondment in April of 2004, which became a permanent Assistant headteacher post in September of the same year[39]. After completing my MA and applying for the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) in the summer of 2005, I applied for two headship posts and was interviewed for Kirk Ireton and got the job. This period of senior management may sound brisk – because it was. My original plan had been to apply for headships during the autumn term, get feedback and learn from that, then interviews in the spring term in order to learn from that process and then apply for everything in the

[39] The school restructured to remove the deputy post and have two assistant headteachers instead as a means to save money.

summer term fully ready to be successful. As it turned out, I was in post by January 2006, in at the deep end, but ready for the challenge. This experience probably should have taught me that no matter what you plan, headship is ready to test and surprise at any moment.

I am using 'story-telling' as a way to find learning about leadership. This chapter will have aspects of both of Schon's (1983) reflection-on-action – reflecting on what has happened after the event – and reflection-in-action – being aware of what you are doing whilst doing it.

The purpose of this part of the thesis is to provide a timeline of key events in the first 6 years of my time as the headteacher of a small village school. I use reflection-on-action in order to identify some of the skills, attributes and knowledge that have kept me in role and successful a further 6 years later. Using timelines to identify significant events are a regular feature of research on topics as varied as doping in elite sport (Todd and Todd, 2001), media streams (Brotherton, Bhalodia and Abowd, 1998) and compulsive hoarding (Grisham, Frost, Steketee et al., 2006). None of the aforementioned are overly pertinent to my own experiences, but they exemplify that timelines are useful in drawing out the themes, attributes and learning points which, in this thesis, will provide information about successful small-school headship.

Adriansen (2012:40-41) writes about "life history research" and uses a variety of vocabulary to describe the sort of timeline I will work through in this chapter,

from “Timeline or lifeline interviews” to “Learning journey interviews”. Although Adriansen doesn’t discuss undertaking the process on yourself, her arguments (2012:44) are pertinent:

> A learning journey is the learning process experienced during time. In principle, the journey can be any course or learning process at school or elsewhere. For the learning journey interview to work, the interviewee has to be able to reflect on the events and be able to relate to learning aspects.

As part of the preparation for this section the thesis, I have spoken to many of my team about things that they remember as key events over the years. In doing so I have explained the purpose of my thesis. In my explanation, I mention the premise that I am a ‘successful’ headteacher and am immediately a little embarrassed by this definition.

The dictionary (1996:825) defines “Successful” as “having a favourable outcome” or “having attained fame, wealth, or position”, so I suppose at least on my own terms, I am successful in that I remain in the job I wanted and continue to want. There are many studies about successful school leadership e.g. Day and Sammons (2016), but the external view is that: my original school has been graded as ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted since six months into my tenure; I have been an Associate School Improvement Partner and latterly Associate School Improvement Advisor; designated a Local Leader of Education and Professional Partner; provide governor training for the Local Authority and am in demand providing Headteacher Performance Management external advice. I took on a second school that was deemed to be 'failing' by the Local Authority

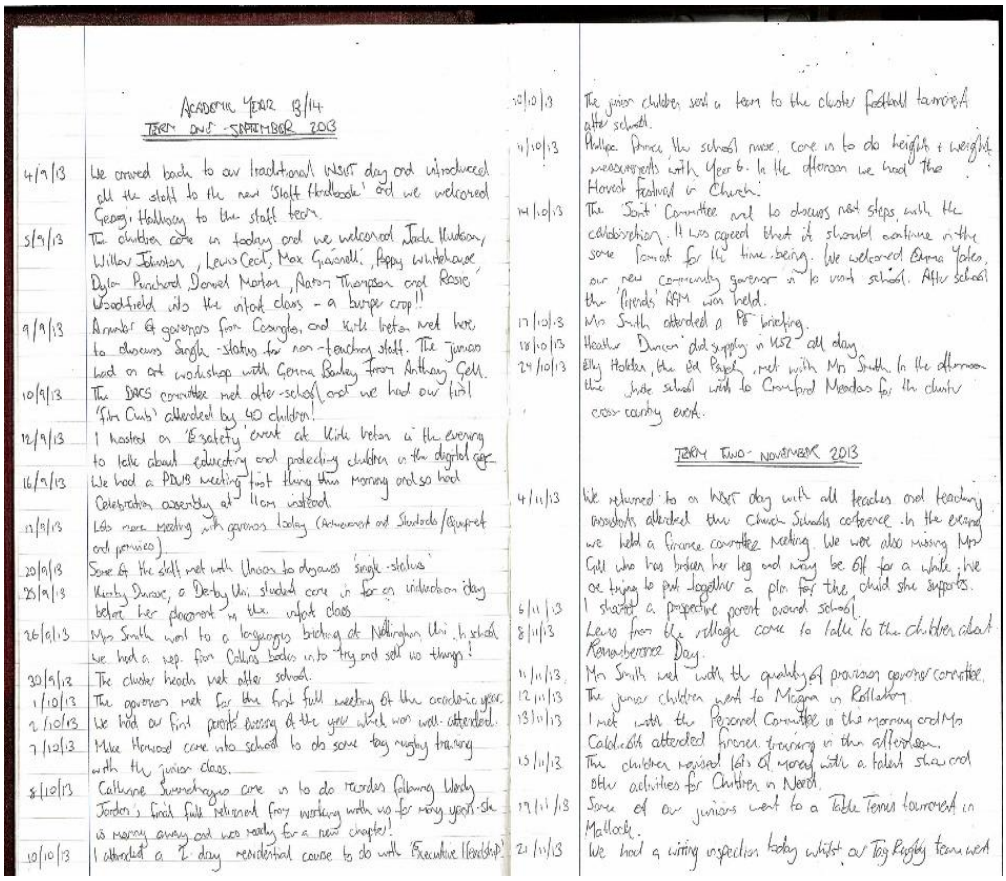
in 2012 which is now graded as ‘Good’ with an ‘Outstanding’ Early Years and I have recently been designated a National Leader of Education and my original school a National Support School. Written like this, it all looks good, but I suppose that in talking to my own staff, I wonder as to whether they see me as successful as they are more involved in the day to day than all of these headlines that seem to suggest ‘success’.

The next two Chapters will pick apart ‘success’, as I look in detail at key events, relationships and interactions both internally and externally. I recognise at the outset of this investigation how important the team are in creating ‘success’. For me at least, the idea of the ‘hero head’ just doesn’t work effectively as:

> The creation of such a dependency model does not build on the capacity of others, does not promote succession planning and, so history tells us, the effects do not last much beyond the tenure of the particular 'charismatic' principal (Gurr and Day, 2014:196)

At Kirk Ireton, everything that has happened over the years has been supported by a team of people (mostly) pulling in the same direction with the same goals.

In Chapter Four, I use my twelve-month learning journal to identify key issues in headship and how I spend a lot of my time day to day and the interactions with stakeholders. Chapter Three uses the school journals (see **Photograph 1**) as my main source of information for the timeline.



Academic Year 13/14

TERM ONE - SEPTEMBER 2013

4/9/13 We crossed back to our traditional INSET day and introduced all the staff to the new 'Staff Handbook' and we welcomed Georgi Hallsworth to the staff team.

5/9/13 The children came in today and we welcomed Jade Hudson, Willow Johnston, Lewis Cecil, Max Gasnell, Poppy Whitehouse, Dylan Pinchard, Daniel Morton, Aaron Thompson and Rosie Woodfield into the infant class - a bumper crop!!

9/9/13 A number of governors from Cowgate and Kirk Ireton met here to discuss Single-Status for non-teaching staff. The juniors had an art workshop with Gemma Bailey from Anthony Gell.

10/9/13 The DACS committee met after-school and we had our first 'Film Club' attended by 40 children.

12/9/13 I hosted an E-safety event at Kirk Ireton in the evening to talk about educating and protecting children in the digital age.

16/9/13 We had a PTFA meeting first thing this morning and so had Celebration assembly at 11am instead.

17/9/13 Lots more meeting with governors today (Achievement and Standards/Curriculum and personnel).

20/9/13 Some of the staff met with Unison to discuss 'Single-Status'.

23/9/13 Kirsty Durose, a Derby Uni student came in for an induction day before her placement in the infant class.

26/9/13 Mrs Smith went to a languages briefing at Nottingham Uni. In school we had a rep. from Collins books in to try and sell us things!

30/9/13 The cluster heads met after school.

1/10/13 The governors met for the first full meeting of the academic year.

2/10/13 We held our first parents' evening of the year which was well-attended.

7/10/13 Mike Harwood came into school to do some tag rugby training with the junior class.

8/10/13 Catherine Swanborough came in to do recorder following Wendy Jordan's final full lesson of Foxy working with us for many years. She is moving away and was ready for a new chapter!

10/10/13 I attended a 2-day residential course to do with 'Executive Headship'.

11/10/13 The junior children sent a team to the cluster football tournament after school.

14/10/13 Phillipa Prince the school nurse came in to do height + weight measurements with Year 6. In the afternoon we had the Harvest Festival in Church.

The Joint Committee met to discuss next steps with the celebration. It was agreed that it should continue in the same format for the time being. We welcomed Emma Yates, our new community governor in to visit school. After school the 'Friends' AGM was held.

17/10/13 Mrs Smith attended a PE briefing.

18/10/13 Heather Duncan did supply in KS2 all day.

24/10/13 Elly Holder, the Ed Psych, met with Mrs Smith in the afternoon then Jade school with to Cromford Meadows for the cluster cross country event.

TERM TWO - NOVEMBER 2013

4/11/13 We returned to an INSET day with all teachers and teaching assistants attended the Church Schools conference. In the evening we held a Finance committee meeting. We were also missing Mrs Gill who has broken her leg and may be off for a while; we are trying to put together a plan for the child she supports.

6/11/13 I started a prospective parent evening school.

8/11/13 Laura from the village came to talk to the children about Remembrance Day.

11/11/13 Mrs Smith met with the quality of provision governor committee.

12/11/13 The junior children went to Magna in Rotherham.

13/11/13 I met with the Personnel Committee in the morning and Mrs Caldecott attended Finance training in the afternoon.

15/11/13 The children received lots of merits with a token shared other activities for Children in Need.

19/11/13 Some of our juniors went to a Table Tennis tournament in Matlock.

21/11/13 We had a writing inspection today whilst our Tag Rugby team went

Photograph 1: School Journal April 1987 – April 2013
The school has the journals from the mid-1800s. The one used for this chapter has now been completed and a new one started.

From 1862 onwards the keeping of school journals (or log books) was a legal requirement:

> Head teachers were required to keep a log book or day to day record of events in their school from 1862. The content of these log books can include: information about pupil attendance and factors which affected attendance, such as extreme weather, local epidemics or children helping with the harvest; the visits of inspectors; timetables and the subjects taught; building problems; particular cases of bad behaviour; celebratory events; and teaching staff. During the Second World War, they also include information about evacuation. The amount of information recorded does vary according to particular head teachers and some log books are much fuller in their daily entries than others (Staffordshire, 2009).

Keeping a journal stopped being a requirement long before my headship, but was continued at Kirk Ireton[40]. These journals had been handwritten since the school opened in 1887 and so I didn't feel like I could stop updating them, despite my intense dislike for handwriting[41]. I considered typing journal entries and sticking them in, but this just didn't seem **'right'** somehow and so I have kept it up to date ever since. Sometimes this journaling gets done relatively regularly (each half-term) and at times ends up needing a year and a half of updates; this is important as the further away I get between journal update and event, the more I am reliant on what got written in the school diary[42], whereas the regular updates are more likely to include smaller incidents and interactions with the children from memory.

Although my arrival at Carsington comes after the events researched in this thesis, whilst on the topic of school journals I wanted to mention the situation when I became headteacher there in 2012. I was hopeful that the journal was not in place as it was an onerous job that I didn't enjoy. What I found was the first entry by one of my predecessors on his first day as headteacher – following the traditional format of "I, *insert name here*, am the new headteacher etc." and then the writing just stopped. If the head had signed off with an explanation of it not being a legal document any longer, then I could have happily left it, but as it was, I felt **duty bound** to restart it with a brief overview

[40] Although it is difficult to track down where, there is a reference to it being at the discretion of the school in a 1991 circular.
[41] Being a left-hander, handwriting has never been something I have enjoyed and the electronic era has saved me from having to use it very often.
[42] This has been kept electronically for the vast majority of my time as headteacher.

of what had happened in the intervening eight years and then returning to the traditional format. I'm glad I did, as both journals have been useful in preparing this thesis, not only through the listings of key events and incidents, but also because there are times when I have written a more personal response and this is helpful for reflection.

Already, I have identified some key words (which are highlighted in bold and will be throughout the following chapter) and concepts within my writing that I would like to explore. Each of these concepts will be considered in depth aside from the main text and the first example is on the following page. By reviewing the text and going deeper into the things I have identified as being important I will consider whether they should ultimately be seen as something that have contributed, hindered, or are vital to being a successful headteacher. Within this chapter introduction already the terms **'right'** and '**duty bound'** can be grouped together for consideration under the banner of **'moral compass'**.

The following is the first example of the 'break-out boxes' that I use throughout Chapter Three in order to take key learning points from the narrative and examine them in more depth. In Chapter Four, these learning points will be brought together in the context of interactions with stakeholders in order to develop my reflections further.

Moral compass:

The **moral compass** is vital for effective and successful leadership but it is a subjective thing to define. My guiding principle has always been that I am doing what is 'right' for the children and the school. Although even terminology such as 'right' is open to considerable debate, I am choosing to work on the basis that practitioners will have a similar viewpoint to my own. The viewpoint being that the headteacher is always doing their very best in order to provide a high-quality education and experience to help children fulfil their potential, enjoy their future lives and be happy and prosperous citizens.

> The most reliable guide at the principal's disposal may be the "moral compass" upon which the individual has learned to rely (Larsen and Derrington, 2012:2).

My own **moral compass** has been formed through my experiences and I will freely admit that I do have some firmly held views about how things should be done such as the support and recognition of a work-life balance in my staff. This view is something that was formed whilst working for a headteacher who, despite their desire to do the very best for the children, rarely showed the same care for staff, merely seeing them as vessels to support the pupils and whose existence beyond that requirement was not the headteacher's concern.

In a wider context it is useful to give a little bit of background to help the reader frame how my **moral compass** may have come to be formed. I come from Northern Ireland and lived and was educated there until the end of my undergraduate degree at the age of 20. This background may be fairly important as it is a country with some considerable social issues and as a child (one of five) of well-educated and liberal parents with little or no political or religious convictions, I developed certain views fairly early on in life, mainly by having negative experiences and making a firm commitment to myself to learn from these and not repeat them with others.

I also find my moral compass continues to develop and to interact with people and experiences as I go, such as an early experience in my headship whereby I was about to throw out the old wooden chair that was being used as the teacher's chair in my infant classroom. I found the longstanding midday supervisor outraged by this as it was traditionally 'the headteacher's chair'. Although this didn't actually change the fact that I'd happily still throw the chair away, I recalibrated my **moral compass** to take better account of traditions and how they are held dear by others. The chair remains to this day and I find myself defending the space it takes up to staff as no-one who now works at the school has been there long enough to see it as something other than a chair – but I know that there are still those in the community who value it and therefore so do I.

> A shared sense of ethical norms within their school and external communities. Their (headteachers') ethical values pervaded all aspects of their schools' policies and practices (Day, 2005:284).

At the end of each section, I will update the table below to show all of the skills, attributes and knowledge that have been identified. The 'Cross References' column lists the skills, attributes and knowledge from elsewhere in the thesis so as to highlight the many links between everything that the headteacher is drawing upon:

Table 1:

Skill/Attribute/Knowledge	First mentioned in	Cross References
Moral compass	Part 2, An Introduction	Openness/Honesty, Instinct/Inner voice, Difficult conversation, Wangling, Being true to yourself, Having fun, Not forgetting what it's all about

Now that I have provided an introduction to some of the source materials for this section of the thesis and exemplified the layout we return to early 2006 at Kirk Ireton.

Chapter Three

Section One: "Hitting the Ground Running" January 2006 – December 2006



Photograph 2: Kirk Ireton C of E Primary School, 2006
The view from Main Street, with the blue doors leading to the office on the left and the infant class on the right.

From the outset, it is worth saying that I was **lucky** to have landed in such a well-run school, given that I was just applying for whatever was available within a sensible commuting distance[43]. The school had been graded 'Very Good' under the seven point scale that Ofsted was using at the inspection in 2001 and the longstanding headteacher had also been very prudent with the budget, leaving me with more administrative time and less of a teaching burden than might be expected in a school of 39 pupils, along with a reasonable budget surplus. This is not to say it wasn't a challenge from the start – there are no easy headships – but I fully accept that there was a lot in my favour as a first time headteacher.

[43] Kirk Ireton was around a 35-45 minute drive from where I lived at the time, depending on traffic.

Luck:

Luck is somewhat indefinable, although the more I do this job, the more I recognise there are, in my view, two types of what people tend to refer to as 'luck'. The first is the sort of luck that involves things over which you have genuinely no control, such as finding a five pound note blowing in the wind. The second is where things seem to go well for no obviously attributable factor and therefore are labelled as 'lucky'. Even just reflecting on this chapter, I almost assigned the fact that I got a job in such a 'healthy' school to the former, but I wouldn't have been so keen to get it and make such an effort at interview if I hadn't visited the school and thought so highly of it even on first impression. As time goes on, the more the systems you put in place and the relationships you build create 'luck'. However, it remains easy to assign things to being something that is beyond your control, as I'm sure this works both ways when things are not working and it can be easier to consider some aspects of that as 'unlucky'. On the assumption that you need luck to succeed as a headteacher, it is important to give a lot of credence to how you create your own, both in the near future and in the longer term.

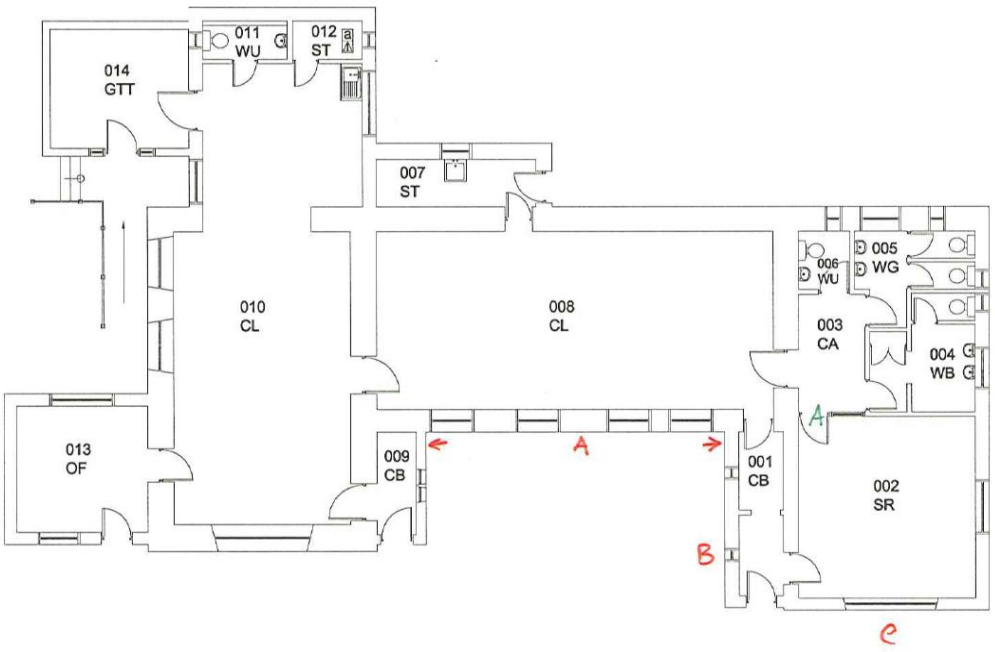
Also in my favour, and I suspect a huge contributing factor to my long-term ability to manage in headship, was my settled personal life. I had been with my partner since 2001 and had been married since 2004, lived in a nice home and had a 'life' outside of work[44]. I was a member of a choir in Nottingham, played football once a week with friends (although was overweight and generally unfit[45]). My wife and I had no children and had specifically agreed not to try until I hit 30, which was still 7 months away. I had also been appointed a magistrate in 2004 and was enjoying this and the different viewpoint it provided (another place in my life where reflection was a key feature)[46]. For my first year of headship I kept my magistrate duties to Saturdays and holidays

[44] See **Family Life** in Section 3.
[45] See **Personal Fitness** in Section 3.
[46] See **Different Perspectives** in Section 2.

only, then from 2007 I returned to my original set up of one day per month during term time, an arrangement that I still maintain.

Kirk Ireton is a village in the Derbyshire Dales with just over 200 houses within the village and the surrounding countryside. The school has a catchment area of a half-mile radius and has traditionally populated itself mostly from this catchment with a small number of children coming from beyond the village. The school is unusual in the Derbyshire Dales locality in that most of the other local small schools (of which there are nine feeding the same secondary school) are more reliant on numbers from outside their own area, sometimes putting them into direct competition with each other. Whilst Kirk Ireton is not immune to the pressures of maintaining a strong reputation, in my time this has not been a particular issue, and indeed the reputation from the 2006 Ofsted onward (discussed later in this section) has been strong enough that it helps to sell houses in the village. The houses tend to sell to families with young children which is also good for the village in general, something that I will explore further in a Chapter Four when looking at the various school stakeholders. When I was appointed the school had a small office that had been added as an extension in 2000, two classrooms, a staff toilet, girls' and boys' toilets and a 'common room' that was the old school office and had become a spread out space for the junior class. **Figure 2** includes the 'Sensory Room' at 014GTT which will be mentioned as we move into 2007, but was not in place when I arrived at the school.

Figure 2:



The infant classroom (010CL) includes the old kitchen area which by 2006 was being used as a wet-play area so that the reception children could have a sand-pit and wet-play. The change in usage was during the period that the school was trying to adapt itself to the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage[47]. The school has a single cubicle toilet (011 WU) in the infant area and had a small lean-to (007 ST) at the back of the junior class (008 CL) with a sink and a small amount of storage with a door leading to the rear of the school which would take you to the village field – an area that will come up in this chapter and the next.

In my first year as headteacher, I had a 0.6 classroom commitment (three days) as well as a session of PPA (preparation, planning and assessment time) cover.

[47] Although this came in formally in 2008, there were already expectations coming in for what reception age children were entitled to, something which presented a challenge to small schools with mixed-age classes.

I found this enormously difficult to manage, although the fact that this was also the period that I was trying to 'learn' the role of headteacher may have been a factor. At the end of 2006, I was able to utilise our finances to reduce teaching to 0.4 plus the PPA time, which made a significant difference to my ability to manage the workload; the single most important factor that kept me at the school in the long-term. This particular reduction was more significant than going from 0.8 to 0.6[48] as it not only reduced my classroom time, but it meant that I was no longer the majority teacher for the class and was able to devolve class management responsibilities to the job-share teacher. The journal provides numerous references in 2006 as to how the job was difficult to balance with an example being, "11.10.06: (The supply teacher) covered KS1 all day to allow me some much needed time to catch up on paperwork".

Key to managing the level of classroom commitment is that I had, early in my time at Kirk Ireton, realised that a **decision** had to be made about the balance between my role as a teacher and my role as headteacher/manager, two very different roles by the time I took up post in 2006 (see Chapter One).

[48] Something my predecessor had done as she had started at the school with that level of classroom commitment. There are schools in Derbyshire where 0.8 is still the headteacher commitment or even more.

Decisiveness:

One of the reasons that I attribute things to **luck** is that I am, by nature, fairly **decisive**. Therefore there may be times that I move forward so swiftly once a decision has been made, that I no longer store all of the rationale behind that decision, meaning that on a fairly surface-level reflection, it is easy to attribute things that went well to **luck**.

Being **decisive** is an important skill but it is something that needs to be balanced with my own preferred collaborative approach to leadership and that holds its own challenges:

> The challenges of collaborative decision-making are well known. There is no doubt that making decisions together takes more time than deciding alone. Some people (both leaders and group members) feel it is an abrogation of responsibility: there is a view that 'you should decide; that's your job'. Perhaps the biggest challenge is having the skills and patience to use collaborative decision-making in the workplace. Listening and hearing and taking note are not always the same thing. Having agreed processes for the conduct of meetings and discussions takes time and skill, too (Wildy, 2012:2).

This quote chimes with how I have always tried to lead, even in the early years of my headship, but in a small school there is a limit to how much you can collaborate, or whether people even want you to. I've never particularly found the "that's your job" mentality in my teams, but I have found at least some reluctance to be overly involved in the responsibility of decision-making.

Collaborative or not, being **decisive** has always been a key skill in my role. There is so much to juggle as a small school headteacher that to either delay decision-making or to be excessive in the time taken to make decisions would immediately impact on the effectiveness of leadership.

My decision was to try and be the best headteacher I could be and settle for 'good enough' in my role as teacher. This decision never sat well, even though I believed (and still do) that it was the right approach. Levitin (2015:4) refers to Herbert Simon's neologism 'satisficing':

> Simon wanted a word to describe not getting the very best option but one that was good enough. For things that don't matter critically, we make a choice that satisfies us and is deemed sufficient… Satisficing is one of the foundations of productive human behaviour.

"Satisfycing" is as close a definition as to what I did in this instance although it was never a decision that fully satisfied, possibly as involving the children's education made it more critical. On the days I was in the classroom I was always feeling guilty that the children were not getting as good a deal as they might with someone who was only employed as their teacher. The children still got some 'good' teaching with me, but I always knew it wasn't at the standard I had set myself as a classroom teacher[49]. Even in this early phase of my headteacher career, possibly spurred on by the constant stream of parents and governors telling me how important it was that the headteacher taught the children, I was quite open with my feelings about the set up and was regularly heard to state my claim that I could be headteacher of two schools with no teaching better than I could be the headteacher of one with a classroom commitment. Many years later, this **openness** may have led to a big change in both my career and the direction of the school[50].

[49] Although I have already covered **morality**, what was created in this instance was a clash of moral imperatives which is what made the decision so difficulty and why it ultimately never sat well.
[50] See Postscript.

Openness/Honesty:

> On the one hand, we do not come into the world naturally endowed with honesty as we are with reliable sight or hearing; on the other, while the Nicomachean Ethics is given to some comparison of virtue with skill acquisition, it is not clear that we acquire honesty by practicing our ''honesty skills'' as we might become good archers by practicing those of archery. Rather, honesty would appear to be a kind of outlook or attitude more along the lines of intellectual curiosity or open-mindedness than a faculty or skill. (Carr 2014:9)

To suggest **honesty** is 'a kind of outlook' chimes with the way I approach it, including my putting it alongside **openness** as an attribute. I am certainly influenced by my Northern Irish background where culturally there is a stereotype that we 'call a spade a spade'. I am also from a large family (five children) where we were not brought up to keep our feelings or thoughts to ourselves – for better or worse.

The upshot of my general belief in being as **open and honest** as I can possibly be is that although there are times that people disagree or do not like what I am saying, they at least know it is the truth as I see it, which engenders respect between the headteacher and stakeholders.

A major event in 2006 was an Ofsted inspection in September which came just two days after we had returned from the summer break. The journal reflects, "7.9.06: Having started the year positive that we were going to achieve a lot, everything got put on hold by the dreaded OFSTED phone call!". The school still only had an initial effort at the Ofsted 'SEF' (self-evaluation form) online that had been introduced a year earlier. On the SEF, that my predecessor had started, were gradings of the school as 'Good' in all areas, but by the time the inspector came, I had been there for just over 8 months and was convinced we were better than that[51]. The pupil attainment and progress data was strong,

[51] By this point the Ofsted framework had a 4 point scale: 1 – Outstanding, 2 – Good, 3 – Satisfactory and 4 – Inadequate, split into either serious weaknesses or special measures.

teaching was always of a high-quality and the personal development of the children was superb (at least in my view).

I remember the Ofsted well as I decided we would go for the 'Outstanding' grade and I set my stall out by greeting the inspector with, "Outstanding morning, isn't it?" which could have been spectacularly misjudged, but turned out to set the tone well for the day. As a small school it was only one inspector so it was very busy from the moment the phone call came and especially when he arrived the following week (we got more notice than the current regime gives). I asked the inspector if I should teach as normal and he had said "yes", but within about an hour of arrival it became abundantly clear this wasn't workable and so we got cover in to free me up for the rest of the day. Ultimately, we were graded 'Outstanding', although a slight disappointment was that we remained 'Good' for teaching and learning, which was simply due to our inability to demonstrate we had recorded enough lesson observations. We argued that the outcomes were judged outstanding, so how could teaching be anything else, but the inspector wouldn't put that in the report without further evidence[52].

In **hindsight**, this day may have been one of the most important ones in my twelve-year tenure at the school as it meant that we then went more than a

[52] It is unusual that a school has an 'Outcomes for Pupils' judgement that differs from the 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment' judgement.

decade without an inspection due to good timing and the decision latterly to make 'Outstanding' schools free from 'Routine inspection':

> Maintained primary and secondary schools and academies that were judged to be outstanding in their overall effectiveness at their most recent section 5 inspection are exempt from inspection under section 5. They can only be inspected under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. This exemption also applies to academy converter schools where the overall effectiveness of the predecessor school was outstanding at its most recent section 5 inspection. (Ofsted, 2016:6)

Hindsight:

Once again we see reflection as a key factor and this is where **hindsight** fits in as it has been an invaluable tool in my success as a headteacher for a long time. Interestingly, **hindsight** is something that came up in a '360 review' that I had to undertake as part of a course as an 'executive headteacher' relatively recently and there were questions in that review about my ability to reflect. The questions were scored very positively, except for some commentary about not being so self-aware 'in the moment'; this is something I have come to recognise and adapt a little more. I do use reflection and learning about myself in day-to-day interactions, but it does seem that the more familiar I am with people, the more likely I am to drop that guard of constant and ongoing reflection and just be 'me', whereas after the event I will go away and think over what has been said and done in considerable detail.

I would like to focus on the **hindsight** idea and how important that is for making a success of small-school headship. As my year-long learning journal makes very clear, the vast majority of my time is spent interacting with people and therefore constantly learning from previous experience, and sometimes mistakes, is vital. Hindsight is not just about thinking not to do something again, or to repeat something that was successful, but to actually take apart key incidents and experiences in detail and consider what would happen if a variable had changed. The reflective approach also engenders a mental reminder to think everything through in detail in advance.

Throughout most of my time at Kirk Ireton the school has not had the spectre of Ofsted looming which has let us choose the way we teach and to continue acting as professionals rather than cowing to the most recent DfE diktats. This

freedom in approach is an example of my **pragmatism** which will be a theme and learning point throughout the rest of this thesis.

Pragmatism:

Pragmatism has been the attribute that has served me best over my time as a headteacher. When I refer to 'pragmatism' I don't want to delve too deeply into the philosophical roots of Peirce (1878:286) and his pragmatic maxim:

> Consider the practical effects of the objects of your conception. Then, your conception of those effects is the whole of your conception of the object.

but rather think of a more simplistic **pragmatism** in that where I can, I will seek the path, solution or decision that is most likely to be effective in practice, taking account of stakeholder reaction versus desired outcome. Potter (2000:244) defines **pragmatism** as:

> A philosophy advocating that we should make our decisions concerning procedures, explanations and knowledge on the basis of their practical successes.

Pragmatism sometimes requires a level of compromise with what I would like to happen, but if nothing happens because of a fixed belief that something must be done in a certain way to achieve a very specific outcome then no result is generally a less preferable outcome than a result that is not perfect. There are very few absolutes in the role of headteachers and I'm certainly not a leader who shies from making a difficult or unpopular decision if it is required. However, most of the time a more pragmatic approach has worked well for me.

A biannual event at the school took place for the second time soon after the inspection – my performance management review[53]. For headteachers, this review involves a panel of governors and the annual review is accompanied by an external advisor who the governors have appointed to support them in making decisions about the headteacher's progress towards targets[54]. There

[53] Each year would have a full annual review with an external advisor and a mid-year review with the panel of governors on their own.
[54] Although this is often at the suggestion of the headteacher, at this point, mine was the advisor the school had been using previously and I didn't feel I could object.

had been an abbreviated cycle in my first year as the governors had set targets at the point that would normally have been a mid-year review (due to my January start at the school) but we still met in the autumn to bring things back in line[55]. This meeting was extremely positive, and also unusual, as on the back of the Ofsted I was given a double pay increase, rather than the normal single point on the pay scale[56]. Through the performance management protocols, reflection was put in place as part of my relationship with key school stakeholders. The chair of the committee, once we had finished the 'formal' part of the meeting and the external advisor had left, suggested that behind closed doors we talked about how things were going for me. It is only now that I look back that I realise this may only have worked so effectively on the back of the highly positive inspection. The conversation was wide-ranging and set the tone for the biannual meetings so that they included a bit of 'state-of-the-union' but in a **trusting and confidential environment**. Through this **honest and open** approach we were able, over the years, to talk about where I felt I was personally, how my career was shaping up and how I would like to do a

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Fortunately he was an excellent advisor who was robust and challenging but engaged well with both parties at the meeting. The school journal entry refers to the first meeting with, "After school (the advisor) joined the governors and set my performance management targets for the rest of the year" and I note that I wrote this as 'we' intimating the positive relationships that were in place even early on. In 2008 when the School Improvement Partner (SIP) system came into place, this advisor was replaced with the SIP as external advice came as part of the package. Since that came to an end, I have always had some input into who does the external advice.

[55] The Headteacher Performance Management cycle has to be completed (legally) by the 31st December each year.

[56] The journal says, "25.9.06: I had my PM review with the personnel committee… this was very positive".

doctorate[57]. The performance management meeting was also the first place that I started to espouse the view that I would be a better headteacher to two schools with no teaching commitment than trying to teach in one. One of the governors on the committee at that time became a governor at Carsington which would prove highly influential five years later. Ultimately, the review provided an excellent point to reflect and hear how others felt things were going, providing the sort of '360' review that is often so lacking in the education environment.

Creating a trusting and confidential environment:

It would be easy to write an entire thesis on 'trust' and it is something I have always taken an interest in developing my own understanding of. I was heavily influenced by the work of Covey (2006) after I heard him speak at an educational leadership conference early into my time as a headteacher and in particular his work on 'The Speed of Trust' and how that makes business environments so much more efficient and effective.

> Trust is a pre-requisite for the progressive and effective distribution of leadership. It is closely associated with a positive school ethos, improved conditions for teaching and learning, enhanced sense of teacher classroom autonomy and sustained improvement in pupil behaviour, engagement and outcomes (Day, Sammons, Hopkins et al., 2009:189).

In 2006 **trust** needed to be built between the new headteacher and the stakeholders and the work to create that started straight away. The main way that I built strong relationships, and **trust** through those, was to ensure that for staff they knew that their personal/family lives were valued. I made sure no-one missed a child's nativity or similar, which for most school staff was very different to the way they had experienced the work environment in the past. This is not to say anything negative about my predecessor at Kirk Ireton, rather that no-one in teaching expects to be given any sort of leave during term-time. With other stakeholders, creating **trust** was much more about one-to-one relationship building, giving time as much as I possibly could and having an 'open-door' policy at the school.

[57] And as a result of that conversation in 2007 I received full financial backing from the school.

The upshot of the Ofsted was a school that already had a good reputation moved into a whole new level of popularity, particularly as it was the only 'outstanding' school in the local cluster for the next eight years. The numbers went from the initial 39 pupils to a high of 60 and with that came increased budgets. The improved finances, along with the Ofsted judgement, created more **freedom and flexibility** to run the school the way I, and the team, felt best.

Working with freedom and flexibility:

It is still unclear to me whether feeling like I could work with **freedom** and a high-degree of autonomy was an outlook I brought with me to headship or whether it came as a result of the small-school headteacher being directly responsible for pretty much every area of school life, but I have always had the belief that I could and should work in that way. I will look closely at some of this 'freedom' in Chapter Four when examining the relationships with various stakeholders but, even where I have felt some constraints in my role, I've then tried to bring some **flexibility** into that, encouraging others to not be fixed on process and be more concerned with outcome.

For a successful small school, **flexibility** is key to things working well as something like a member of staff being ill can have a major impact in a way that it wouldn't in larger schools. When I worked in Derby City and a teacher went home ill, we would simply split the class into groups and send 4 or 5 children into each other class with some work, but in a two class school this just isn't possible and there are many other examples of similar problems caused by how small we are.

Post-Ofsted, 2006 remained eventful, not least because of the Section 48 (Church School) inspection that, at that time, followed an Ofsted inspection. Although the Section 48 was an interesting event, on reflection I can't see anything that actually influenced me or the school through it except to say that it was also an 'Outstanding' outcome.

Also during the autumn term, we introduced school uniform to the school. Kirk Ireton was a rare hold-out on school uniform as the previous headteacher and the existing senior teacher were not supportive of it and so the 'uniform' when I arrived was worn by one child in the school during my first year there. The main reflection from the uniform episode is that it was my first real stakeholder challenge in terms of a very small number of parents being against the introduction of an enforced uniform policy.

Despite there being a small amount of negativity towards it, the introduction of uniform was very successful for two reasons: the first reason is that it was evidence led – I had been handed completed pupil and parent questionnaires when I arrived and a question about uniform had been asked and there was a clear majority response in favour of it. The second reason was that I approached the whole thing **considering every detail**. I am not sure where this attribute comes from, but it served me very well in this instance as I had recognised that the change would be contentious and therefore took every opportunity to pre-empt criticism. As an example, we got in the local vicar to count the votes rather than anyone from school doing it because we knew this would mean it was much less likely that anyone would accuse the vote of being 'rigged'. Although I know that a small number of families remained unhappy about the final decision, they at least grudgingly accepted it.

Attention to detail:

A mantra of mine for a very long time has been that, "if you look after the little things, then the **big picture** will take care of itself"; this approach may not work so well in a larger school where the big picture and the minutiae of the daily life of the school might be further apart and the ability to see all the 'little things' will be very difficult for a headteacher. In my situation, however, the **big picture** is not always that big, even if it involves a lot of different stakeholder groups. As the headteacher of a small school you are responsible in quite a direct way for so much of what happens in the school, from parental interactions to behaviour concerns, from the daily spending to the blocked toilet. Knowing the school well and taking care of the 'little things' is one aspect of what I mean by attention to detail. The other aspect of taking care of the 'little things' is ensuring that they are done well and dealt with promptly. So often what can be dealt with quickly and easily if discovered early is the same thing that takes inordinate amounts of time to sort out because it was left to get worse. This **attention to detail** is something I engender in all stakeholders and particularly children, parents and staff and I do this by promoting a line of **communication** that works because of a number of the other skills and attributes that are outlined in this section.

An ongoing aspect of my first year (and indeed is a constant feature of headship in a small school) was the **understanding of the budget** and the finances of the school. Budgeting was an area that I spent a lot of time on. I had inherited a school in a very healthy financial state, with a reasonable budget surplus. Early on in my time as headteacher, I made a clear policy decision to put excess funds into personnel. As a result of this policy, the school went from having a very small number of teaching assistant hours to having two teaching assistants in both classrooms every morning, as well as some time in the afternoons for the infant class. Latterly, there has also been teaching assistant support in the afternoons in the junior class and the infant class having a teaching assistant every afternoon. Aside from expenditure on staff, we have never been lavish in our spending and remain as prudent as my predecessor was, conscious that if even a small number of children left, the surplus would rapidly drop. As it

stands, a drop in numbers has never happened and as a result we find ourselves at most recent check with nearly £75000 set aside for a rainy day and with a national funding formula soon to be introduced and a drop in local birth rates starting to bite, I'm very glad.

Financial understanding:

Financial understanding is a skill that doesn't tend to feature in a lot of literature about leadership and certainly most teacher and headteacher training doesn't touch upon it. This lack of input may be as a result of the majority of schools in England having bursars, or at least someone who handles most of the financial management for the school.

In small schools in Derbyshire it is down to the headteacher to manage the money which generally means that they buy in a local authority package. With the package, there is a meeting with the 'patch officer' once a year to try and make sure the school remains 'in the black' and then the headteacher carries on with leading teaching and the day-to-day running of the school.

In my case, I have always enjoyed maths, spreadsheets and working with money, which set me up well for the challenges of managing a budget. Having now worked with many other local schools I have seen regular issues caused or exacerbated by poor financial management that is underpinned by a lack of understanding around the whole process. I opted out of the annual meeting option after the first one in 2006 and instead purchased a package whereby the monitoring spreadsheet was provided regularly to the school. Even for someone with a modicum of knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, an interest in this side of being a leader, the finance was still a lot of work and took a number of years before I really got to grips with it. Having a healthy budget provides leaders with options that aid working with **freedom and flexibility**. The re-employment of my administrator was an excellent example of where having the money and knowing the impact on the finances allowed for the best decision to be made (see the rest of this section of Chapter Three).

Ultimately, given that in very small schools, "a small change to pupil enrolment will have a very large impact upon school finances" (Walker, 2010:712), it really is vital that the small school headteacher keeps on top of **financial understanding** as a key area of their development.

One thing that, upon reflection, I hadn't developed as well as I have now is the ability to use my **instincts** effectively and to foresee some of the problems that

personnel decisions, in particular, can have. In this first year there were two personnel issues that in **hindsight** I could have handled differently. The first issue was with a teaching assistant who made it clear she didn't really want to work at the school anymore and was unhappy in her role. I didn't handle this terribly well and although I would say the right things, I wasn't really attempting to build a relationship and so things got worse rather than improving. I was **lucky** that the situation led to a resignation after a couple of months, something that could easily not have happened and would have left the school in a difficult state as one unhappy member of staff in a school that only employs 14 people can have a major impact. Once again, my **luck** was seeing me through and when we advertised this post, my first appointment as headteacher was a new teaching assistant who would play a major role in the school over the next 8 years. That appointment was actually a place where I started learning that my **instincts** tended to be good. When we made the appointment it was to the best person at interview, but that was also the person who I had decided within about a minute of meeting her during a visit to the school that she was perfect for the job and would bring a lot to the school.

Instinct/Inner Voice:

In the introduction to this chapter, I looked at the **moral compass** which may well contribute to **instinct**, by which I mean the times that you have no firm rationale for making a decision or taking a course of action but do it because it 'feels right'. The **moral compass** and **instinct** are two separate attributes though and therefore should be considered in isolation as well as recognising how they may intertwine.

There is a considerable amount of research on 'gut instinct' and the fact that there are clear physiological factors at play when we make decisions, as outlined in the work of Kirby (1997) and Wilson (2004). However, I am more interested in the times that a decision has to be made and there is often no obvious choice, and therefore **instinct** takes over. This **instinct** may then create what might be considered a chicken and egg situation with the next section on **problem-solving**, as it may be that my instincts lead me to where I can see the path towards a goal or it could be that I go with an instinct and then rely on problem-solving to make that decision work and the goal to be achieved. Clearly, there is also a case to be made that the more experienced one gets, the more this will inform 'instinct' and that, in fact, it is more about having a greater repertoire of tacit knowledge. Over time, the tacit knowledge may be used almost instantaneously and becomes 'instinct'.

Whatever the root of the **instinct**, the important aspect for headteachers is to trust it when it is there.

My second mishandling of a personnel issue was with the person who served the dinners. As Kirk Ireton is such a small school, all cooked dinners are delivered from another local school and then served to the children who eat in the classrooms. The catering is all arranged via a Local Authority service who the school pay a fixed fee each year to provide the meals as well as a server who dishes the dinners out when they arrive. This arrangement was never an entirely satisfactory situation as I had a server working in the school but who didn't work for the school and therefore I was not the line-manager. Although the role was generally undertaken well, there was an issue regarding the cleaning up after the children had finished eating. The cleaning was part of the job description and was causing disruption to the class and the good running of

the school – both midday staff and classroom staff were complaining to me about the situation. The course of action I took was to speak to the catering service line-manager who arranged for an inspection to take place which resulted in the catering assistant[58] feeling like she had been treated very badly and did not return to work at the school again. It was only much later that I really got to grips with the importance of **'The Difficult Conversation'**, something I will return to in the next section, but this was probably the first time I should have used it. I cannot honestly say, even now, if I used the fact that I was not the line-manager as an excuse or whether I was feeling constrained as to how to deal with it. I had actually practised tackling personnel challenges as an assistant headteacher by offering to speak to colleagues who were causing problems rather than the headteacher, but I clearly had yet to recognise how important such conversations could be.

One aspect of personnel that I felt got right at the time and also upon reflection, was the effort I made to keep my administrator in post. When I arrived at the school, the permanent administrator (known as school secretary at the time) was on maternity leave and there was a temporary contract for 16 hours of administrative support in place. It was near the end of the maternity leave before it was confirmed that the post holder did not intend to return to work. By this time the temporary post holder was already job hunting in the belief that her job would not be available. Just after the decision was finally made for the substantive post-holder not to return to work, the temporary post-holder

[58] The official job-title.

went for an interview nearer to home and for a role with more hours, responsibility and salary attached. As I had already developed a very strong relationship with the temporary post-holder, the threat of her leaving was of considerable concern[59]. I also believed that with her skills and qualities she was highly likely to be successful at interview. I made it clear that we would like her to stay in post at Kirk Ireton and, as a result, when offered the other job, she asked for a short time to make a final decision. In this time, I contacted the chair of governors and we agreed a package to try and retain the administrator, matching the new job salary and increasing hours. Whether to stay or go was still a very tricky decision, but we managed to convince the administrator to stay. This brief episode was key in the future good-running of the school as the administrator not only acts as a confidante for me[60] but has always acted as a conduit to the rest of the staff. There is an unwritten code that if the staff have concerns then they bring that to the administrator in the knowledge that important things will be passed to me so that I can act. The administrator's ability to filter information from staff offers a value that no amount of skill in the actual administrative side of the role could ever come close to matching. This episode is a good example of two things that have helped me find success, one of which is going almost on **instinct** at times, the second is acting quickly and **decisively** when needed and the third is **problem-solving**.

[59] It would have been hard not to either develop a strong relationship or a considerable dislike of someone when you share such a tiny office all the time.
[60] With no Deputy Headteacher and, at times in the first few years of headship, no-one else on staff who felt able to really reflect things back at me, having someone like this in post to help keep me on track has been invaluable.

Problem Solving:

> Problem solving is one of the most important skills that new and developing professionals must learn. The process is complex, involving information scanning, problem identification, and feedback processes requiring synthesis, interim assessments, problem error recognition and rectification, and timely and appropriate conclusions (Hart, Bredeson, Marsh et al., 1996:1).

Problem-solving can, of course, also be extremely useful when your decisiveness and instincts have led you to making a mistake or a difficult situation. **Problem-solving** is not only an area that has been absolutely vital in my success as a leader but also one that, either through nature, experience, or both, I have a strength in. Hart et al. (1996:1) give a clear indication that it is experience that supports **problem solving** through:

> the conscious and systematic learning of educational administrators in professional practice through their narrative and reflection. The differences between novices and experts emphasized the critical part that feedback from the context, recognition of errors or positive progress, and adjustment play in successful problem-solving processes in complex social settings. The data strongly suggest that administrative experiences, especially those that practitioners reflect upon and subsequently integrate into a personalized professional knowledge base, are critical to the initial training and to the ongoing professional learning of educational leaders**.** Although the experienced administrators made some errors usually made by novices, they relied heavily on the recognition of information needs and errors and on the continuous rectification of errors.

This brings me to the end of my first year of headship and the very steep learning curve that it was:

> 24.12.06: I've now survived a year as a headteacher and feel I've now experienced everything at least once (including OFSTED!). I hope this will help me to really drive the school forward in my next 12 months.

Table 2:

Skill/Attribute/Knowledge	First mentioned in	Cross References
Moral compass	Part 2, An Introduction	Openness/Honesty, Instinct/Inner voice, Difficult conversation, Wangling, Being true to yourself, Having fun, Not forgetting what it's all about
Luck	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Decisiveness
Decisiveness	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Luck, Adapting
Openness/Honesty	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Moral compass, Difficult conversation, Having fun
Hindsight	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Recognising value in the seemingly pointless, Refining the role
Pragmatism	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Learning to live with hoop-jumping
Creating a trusting and confidential environment	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	
Working with freedom and flexibility	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Financial Understanding
Attention to detail	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Seeing the big picture, Empathy, Communication
Financial understanding	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	IT skills, Recognising value over cost, freedom and flexibility
Instinct/Inner voice	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Moral compass, Problem-solving
Problem-solving	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Instinct/Inner Voice, Creativity, Scheduled reflection time, Adapting

Chapter Three

Section Two: "Settling In" January 2007 – December 2007

> 5.9.07: This is now likely to be the year of the 'build' as we look to put up an extension, an accessible toilet and a soft-play area.

Although the above quote from the school journal is taken from later in the year it was obvious much earlier that it would be a period with capital works as a focus. As we moved into 2007 we were sitting on over £50000 of devolved formula capital[61]. The money had built up since my predecessor's time at the school and needed to be spent (each allocation lasted three years before it was 'clawed back'). After around a year of staring out of the window behind my office desk, a room I share with the front door, the administrator, the photocopier and the staffroom, I realised that what was there was essentially dead space. Apart from the steps leading to our little 'eco-garden' (as the overgrown area in the corner of the school had become known) it suddenly became clear that there may be an opportunity to use some or all of the funding. I could see that by losing a little bit of the garden, we could put an extension onto the rest of the building, providing what I hoped would be a multi-purpose space, possibly even doubling up as another office at times.

[61] This is the ring-fenced money that the government gives to all schools each year that can only be spent on capital projects, although this had been widened to include the purchase of curriculum hardware. In 2006, it was still over £20000 per school plus a per capita amount, something which was massively in favour of small schools. It was reduced to around £4000 per year near the end of the Labour government and remains at this level.

Sadly, the flip-down desk and office idea never quite came off, but the new space did become known as the 'Sensory Room' as we designed it to be able to be blacked out and then used with sensory lighting and other equipment[62]. When I write 'we' in this instance I mean 'me' as it was my own experiences and **creativity** that led to this design and demonstrating that the ability to think beyond the norm can play a vital part in becoming an effective headteacher.

Creativity:

There is a clear link between **creativity** and the earlier attribute of **problem-solving** as it often requires some creative thinking.

> Is creativity something that represents the end-state of cognitive or personal development? If so, can everyone, theoretically, attain this end-state? Does creativity represent a different kind of thinking or being? Are some people born with this quality or do they somehow develop more of this ability than others? Can creativity be defined as problem solving or vice versa? Is creativity really a behavior that results from a special type of interaction among intellectual, stylistic, personality, and environmental factors? (Ohio State Department of Education, 1992:4)

Huff (2014:584) states that**, "**creative and critical-thinking must be developed. A variety of methods can be used to train people to use creative thinking" and Derr-Castiglione suggests using one or more creative-thinking techniques to develop this which include "brainstorming, doodling, asking the (right) questions, analogies, and random word associations" (2006:4–5). Many people may recognise these as something they just do naturally, and certainly brainstorming is something I do as a constant part of my daily existence, considering every angle and working through all the options I can see, but for others these may need developing which requires time that sadly so few headteachers have, or make the effort to seek out, for this kind of activity.

[62] There will be further information surrounding the Sensory Room in the 2008 section of this chapter.

Thankfully, I had a lot of Local Authority **support** in developing my creativity as Derbyshire had a lot of services with surveying and building being two of those[63]. The final design was partly informed by the fact that we knew we had a new pupil with significant needs likely to start the school the following year.

Support structures:

Having a supportive LA, particularly in 2007 when they were 'strong', was extremely useful while learning the role. As the 'Setting the Scene' chapter makes clear, the support of the local authority is not what it once was as a result of the coalition government's drive for a self-supporting system, but I still find a lot of value in their services and the support they can offer.

> the Coalition focused its attention on structural reform… this placed an additional onus on leadership agency within local school systems to shape contextually appropriate solutions. The schools in the two areas studied appear to have become more fragmented and yet – paradoxically – more networked… This has meant that the LAs have needed to sustain their traditional roles (Greany, 2015:125).

Although Greany's paper looked at Coventry and a London Borough, the experience in Derbyshire has been similar, though it has also maintained many functional roles such as maintenance, catering etc. that some authorities have been unable to continue.

No headteacher can work in isolation as the strategic nature of the role would require too much expertise for any individual to carry. The small-school headteacher will not have much of the required expertise within their own school, so a body such as the local authority has always been a useful and important tool for success.

Having illustrated the importance of the support structure of a strong local authority, that system also has potential downsides and I am reminded of this by a couple of quotes from the journal:

[63] Although the capacity of the LA now reduces on a seemingly daily basis and the more everything becomes a 'traded service' the less the bespoke nature of the support.

> 14.9.06: (Advisor) came in and set lots of new targets for me – no resting on OFSTED laurels then!
>
> 29.1.07: I went to the cluster head's meeting… one of the main topics was our issue with school development officers and the unrealistic targets they are being set.

The local authority had a team of 'link advisors' who were attached to schools. The personnel of the advisory service had a mixed background including ex-headteachers and ex-teachers, although not necessarily from the same phase as they were advising on e.g. an ex-secondary PE head of department was one of the 'senior advisors' on the primary team. As with any workforce, there was a mix of personalities, experience and quality. My advisor, whilst someone I had no personal dislike for, I found to be quite challenging professionally – and not in a good way. My issue was that I felt like I was only ever getting a blunt message from the most recent advisors' briefing, rather than a bespoke service that was tailored to my school and my needs as a headteacher. The second of the quotes above shows that I had become really quite disillusioned with this situation and was getting stressed in the lead up to meetings with the advisor. I rarely left them with any sense of achievement for me or the school. By this stage, aided by the Ofsted outcome, I was feeling a bit more secure in my role and felt that this was now something I needed to challenge.

At the next meeting, I told the advisor that I found the meetings to be less than constructive and that I rarely took anything from them that wasn't just hoop-

jumping[64]. The advisor was quite taken aback, but he dealt with this information very professionally and asked questions to try and get to a better sense of specifically what my issues were. Although this whole meeting was somewhat awkward and didn't end fully resolved, the meeting after that was immediately an improvement and actually it seemed we were both as relieved as each other. Although it is only later that I really started to recognise the importance of the **difficult conversation** this is probably the first example of where I used it and saw how effective it could be as long as you can get past the initial awkwardness. The **difficult conversation** is now something I talk about regularly and have refined my view on it to simplify how to recognise when it needs to happen: it is as simple as knowing that by saying nothing you will lie awake that evening thinking, "I should have said something" or "I wish I was brave enough to say something".

[64] See **Learning to Live with Hoop-jumping** later in this section.

Difficult conversation:

> It is only human to want to avoid such hard conversations and such situations appear more confrontational than supportive. Reactions to such conversations are not pleasant and a manager may dread the ensuing outcome (Farrell, 2015:302).

As a headteacher most of these conversations will be with someone who is a subordinate in the organisation, unlike my conversation with the LA advisor, and this adds another dynamic in that you are not talking as an equal. Nonetheless, my own approach has always been to try and make it a genuine conversation and not just having a moan or a rant at someone, approaching it with genuine ideas for how things can be improved. This approach links directly with other attributes I have already outlined such as **openness, honesty** and the **moral compass**. Jo & Shim (2005:279) state, "the growth of trusting relationship begins with management's efforts to enhance the relationship and facilitate dialogue between two parties".

> Difficult conversations are emotional. The effective leader acknowledges that emotions are at play so they cannot be avoided. But since the leader has practiced, the leader will continually turn the conversation back to the core issues (Farrell, 2015:306).

Dealing with the emotional aspect of the **difficult conversation** is something that must be practised, particularly given the regular difficult conversations a headteacher will have with parents which are fraught with emotion, so keeping these on track is essential.

The key message for any aspiring or in-post headteacher is that these conversations take practise and will not always go well in the moment, but if you ever find yourself going to bed knowing you should have said something, then that has to be rectified. As challenging as the conversation may be, the long-term outcome will be positive, either because it brings about change or you can act knowing that you have done everything in your power to bring about change before moving on to disciplinary or similar courses of action. In the main, you will sleep better knowing you did the right thing, no matter how difficult.

As I have already mentioned, by this point I felt more experienced as a headteacher and that I had a little more time and capacity and so I decided to restart my duties as a magistrate one day per month in term-time:

10.1.07: I took my first day out of school to do my duties as a magistrate after not doing this for 12 months.

This increase in capacity was a direct result of the reduction of teaching commitment and showed just how important that change was. More time allowed me to build my own capacity and also have time to do things that were important for my development and work-life balance. Although specific education-related training and CPD are vital and come up throughout this chapter, having time to do some other activities is equally important if taking the approach that you can **learn from everything**. To be able to go in to court and be reminded of how others' lives look and to have time in a professional and thought-provoking environment without the daily demands of headship (see **scheduled reflection time** below) has been a vital feature of my time as a headteacher.

Learning from everything:

I have already stated that my experience of small school headteachers, and indeed many teaching colleagues, is that they are not strong at focusing on their own professional development. Although I am not necessarily someone who spends a lot of time reading directly about education, I know that lifelong learning is vital and that the opportunities for that are myriad. Later in this chapter I will be looking at cultural learning and **expanding horizons** with two trips to Africa, but even in 2007 I was always keen to learn and to be cross-referencing all aspects of my life to support my role as headteacher. This theme continues throughout this chapter, with my trip to the leadership conference that really cemented my belief that you could learn a lot about high-quality leadership by looking beyond education and listening and experiencing **different perspectives**.

If you take the view that you can learn valuable lessons from everything you do, it also becomes both easier to find the time, but also more enjoyable as it happens naturally and without effort. Any book can provide key learning points for a headteacher and I find myself looking to sports biographies as these often contain useful ways of couching ideas such as Sir Alex Ferguson (2015:326) who encapsulates the building of leadership when he describes it as a process where you, "carry on building everyday".

Continuing the theme of professional development and out of school opportunities, by 2007 I had finished the largely pointless National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and had been invited to move onto the National College led 'New Visions' course[65]. New Visions was newly designed to provide further development for headteachers in the first two years of their career.

> 28.2.07: I went to start the 'New Visions' course on a 2 day residential. This is a follow-up to NPQH and is one of many things that are taking me out of school this half-term – I think things may pile-up very quickly!

The issue of being out of school did become something I had to manage, but I recognised the value of most of the things that were taking me out of school. New Vision gave the opportunity to meet with other new headteachers from around the region, therefore providing **different perspectives** not only about other schools, but also other local authorities. As part of the course we were put into triads (a favoured method of the National College) and were expected to visit each other's schools and then prepare and present about that experience to the whole group. I was initially filled with dread as I was placed with two female headteachers somewhat older than I was and that I had not particularly bonded with during the sessions up to that point. However, the grouping turned out to be another stroke of **luck** for me as not only did it force me to work with different people and see different settings (a mid-sized rural

[65] The design of the NPQH at the time will have been fine for some, but time spent on a masters' course in Educational Leadership meant that it was all ground I had covered. The other problem was that I started headship soon after starting the course – so my experiences overtook anything that was being delivered.

primary school in Rutland and a large inner-city primary in Leamington Spa) but it led to friendships that still exist and school visits that continued long after the course ended.

Different perspectives:

It is exceptionally easy for any headteacher, but especially the small-school headteacher, to become isolated and you will often hear colleagues describe the job as 'lonely' (the Times Education Supplement (2004) reported that almost half of British headteachers said this to be the case). Alongside finding the time to come out of the school as I have described throughout this chapter, I benefitted enormously from making sure that some of this time was spent surrounding myself with opportunities to experience **different perspectives**. Not only do **different perspectives** enhance critical thinking, they help to understand the similarities in experience of those in contrasting situations and to recognise how different approaches can help in your own setting.

Being out of school for CPD wasn't necessarily easy. In a small village school it was easy for people to take note of whether the lights were still on in the office or whether my car was parked outside – and they did. My predecessor had been well known for being in school all the time and working long hours, neither of which were my way of doing things[66]. In the long term CPD opportunities have worked exactly the way that I wanted them to in that I have developed myself and the school but in the short term it meant negative comments from parents and governors. As ever, pragmatism needed to play its part in this as I knew what I wanted to do, but didn't want to make my life difficult – every headteacher needs to recognise how important perception can be, even when

[66] And took no account of the reasons behind that. My predecessor, for personal reasons, preferred to spend as much time in school as possible whether that was productive or not, rather than spending it at home.

it is fairly wide of the mark. From what I had learned by this point, my predecessor very much fitted the mould of the 'hero Head' but:

> a vast tranche of leadership literature suggests that this kind of singular hierarchical leadership is inappropriate and does not produce lasting change (Thomson, 2009:58)

and through my masters' studies I had already recognised that this was not effective in the long term and was never going to work for me as someone who had no intention of working every hour of the day trying to do and know everything.

So I continued to spend time out of school when I could see the potential value and in the spring term I took time to attend a couple of Conferences:

> 8.3.07: I attended the annual Derbyshire Head's Conference which was very useful! The workshops and speakers gave me great inspiration and I also got valuable reflection time.
>
> 28.3.07: I attended an SSCO[67] head's conference at Hassop Hall and came away with a booking for 6 weeks of Tai Chi after Easter!

Although I would subsequently find less value in the local headteachers' conference, at the time it was a useful opportunity after 14 months in the job to do some networking and have some time away from the daily grind. In 2007, the conference took place outside the county in Stratford-upon-Avon, which really helped separate it from normal school time. Although I didn't sign up for

[67] School Sports Co-Ordinator.

the conference to get time away from school (it was more a first opportunity to attend something like this in my career) it turned out to be something that I immediately recognised as valuable as it gave me **time to reflect** whilst still in the professional environment. The second example at Hassop Hall was not a residential, but it did continue a theme of feeling more like a valued professional and it certainly enhanced networking opportunities with direct results for the school (the Tai Chi still happens every summer term). When I was then able to share my learning with governors and parents – where they could see a tangible impact to my time out of school – the challenges of perceptions about my time out of school were reduced.

Scheduled reflection time:

This chapter makes clear just how vital I have found reflection to be – but it is tricky to find the time for it to happen effectively. The trouble with taking the time at home is that it can be more of a rant at a partner or just tempting to watch the television. By finding time in a professional setting I have found it much easier to remain focused on the general world of my profession, even if that is whilst drifting away from a speaker at a conference.

Lovely (2005:viii) states that, "When leaders take a time-out, they invariably come back with a fresh perspective". Any day of a course or conference is likely to have speakers or time where your mind wanders due to the input being less than interesting to you, but I have always found it wanders within the educational landscape, giving time to reflect or to come up with new ideas (**see creativity**). Some of the most effective speakers are simply those that trigger these thought processes and let me take a thread and apply it to my own context.

Unlike some professions, such as the medical world, where regular professional reflection time is built into the timetables of doctors and nurses, education has little structured support for this outside performance management which has a tendency to focus simply on a narrow set of targets.

The challenge for the headteacher is how to make a reflection model that works for them. My own systems are outlined in this thesis, but Mauri, Clarà, Colomina et al. (2016:291) describe a continuing issue for the profession:

> Although increasing attention is being paid to providing future teachers with quality experiences that promote reflection many authors continue to wonder how it might best be promoted. Furthermore, the different educational models based on multiple and diverse models of reflection present major disagreements regarding the conditions that allow future teachers to learn to reflect.

The next event that showed an attribute that I seem to have had for a long time, although I am certain that headship has forced it to develop and refine over time, is my ability to **adapt quickly**:

> 23.5.07: Not a great day in the life of the school as (the administrator) fell at home after school and has badly broken her wrist – requiring surgery. We were expecting (the administrator) to be off soon for a separate operation, but we were not ready for this and school administration may be a difficult area in the weeks ahead.

> 18.06.07: (The infant class-manger) covered for me in the morning as we struggle to keep up with the admin tasks. We are being supported by (the administrator) from (local school), but just getting through mail, email and phone messages takes a lot of time. It is showing me just how busy (the administrator's) job is!

We can see from the latter quote that adapting still left challenges, but we had moved swiftly to negate this problem as much as possible using **networks** and **creativity**[68].

Adapting:

Adapting is linked to **problem-solving**, although it involves being able to change tack fast when required. **Adapting** is not the ability to change over time, which is more about evolving into a role, it is having the skills required to make immediate decisions in the face of the unexpected in order to keep the organisation running effectively.

By this point in my career I was building more of an ability to adapt, with **problem-solving** being a key skill to have sharpened ready for the unexpected. For a headteacher, especially in a small-school where almost everything falls to you when something changes, goes wrong or creates a crisis, being **decisive** in a way that is informed can be the difference between success and failure. As I would discover later in my career with the death of a colleague, there are no rulebooks for how to react, but if you have built your skills, **networked** and developed all of the other skills and attributes found in this chapter, then you can be as prepared as possible and ready to react and adapt.

The advantage of the small-school situation is that it is easier to adapt if leadership is strong as it is more akin to manoeuvring a canoe than it is to a large cruise liner, if continuing the boating analogy from the start of this little section.

[68] As a little side-bar on adapting, I have been reflecting on this during a proof-read and I might well be helped with this skill by one of my hobbies which is playing board games. A lot of these have chess-like qualities in that you have to react to what your opponent does. It occurs to me that this regular practise of thinking of how to respond may well have a direct benefit on my professional life.

Whilst the issues with the administrator were ongoing, life was certainly more challenging in school and may have contributed to the following:

> 16.5.07: The infants went to Church for Edward Bear whilst (the advisor) came to review the school development plan. After school, I had a performance management review with the governors – this was not a fun day and showed why headteacher recruitment is so hard – too many people with different demands to keep happy!

Right from the start of my time as headteacher, I had always described the role as a **plate-spinning** job with so many stakeholders to keep happy at any given time. Governors, pupils, parents, staff, local authority, Ofsted, Diocese, villagers and more all required consideration and it is a rare action or decision that doesn't involved at least two of the groups listed. Even if not acting or making decisions that involve the stakeholders, there is not a day goes by that you aren't going to encounter these stakeholders and the quote above shows that there are days that you specifically feel accountable in a very direct way to a number of them at one time.

Plate-spinning:

Rao (2007), when discussing work-life balance, examines the metaphor of **plate-spinning** and explains it as:

> You get one plate after another spinning and then keep them going by darting among your various sticks and adding sharp impulses to plates that are starting to slow down and wobble. What I like about this metaphor is that it gets at the fact that we react to squeaky wheels (excuse the mixed metaphor), and pay attention to one thing at a time, usually the most dangerously out-of-balance one. It also suggests the key role of momentum: the world isn't an entirely unfriendly place. Gravity may work against you, but momentum exists. You can breathe occasionally. Finally it suggests that there is actual energy involved, not just control. You have to run around a bit.

This quote offers a description that many headteachers will recognise and appreciate the in-depth analysis of some aspects of the metaphor. For me, when I refer to **plate-spinning**, the plates are always the stakeholders and as this is such a vital part of the role of the small-school headteacher, I will devote the next chapter to examining these stakeholders through a series of critical incidents.

Fortunately, just as it was becoming clear that the role of headship was in some ways starting to take its toll, another reflection opportunity came along that offered a genuine 'time-out'; I attended the annual National Leadership Conference run by the National College. Having had some experience of the high-calibre conferences that the National College ran through the now defunct 'New Heads' day conference in London, I had been keen to book the Leadership Conference into my diary. The conference was always an expensive thing for a small-school headteacher to attend but in this first year I was able to use the 'virtual' pot of money that new headteachers were awarded to help with their early training, **wangling** both the cost of the conference and the hotel out of

the National College[69]. Fortunately, the conference always falls on a Wednesday to Friday, so no supply cover was needed as my teaching commitment was on a Monday and Tuesday. The quote below from the journal says almost everything needed to sum up how important this event was:

> 8.6.07: I finished the 'seizing-success' conference which was an outstanding experience. Not only did it help make us feel like **valued-professionals**, but I came away filled with enthusiasm and new ideas for school.

The chance to recharge the batteries was invaluable to me. I had always talked to friends in the business world who spoke of conferences, dinners and the like, but this had seemed anathema until this conference opportunity came along. For the first time in a nearly decade-long teaching career I really felt like a 'professional'. I stayed in a decent hotel, went to a formal dinner, **networked** with colleagues from around the country (and some internationally as well) and heard speakers from beyond the world of education talking about leadership in ways that I had simply never experienced before. Over the years, speakers have included Daniel Goleman, Stephen Covey and even Annie Lennox and every one of them has helped my development and the way that I look at leadership.

[69] This funding is long defunct and so many small-school headteachers are never to be seen at conferences because they simply don't think their school can afford it and rarely prioritise their own continuing professional development over other expenditure, especially when there is almost always an associated supply teacher cost.

The conference was so important in my development that just recounting the first experience of it provides a number of things that come out as attributes and skills:

Wangling:

Wangling is any one of a number of terms I could use, but adopting a 'don't ask, don't get' policy has a value if used at the right time. My **moral-compass** on this has always been that if it is of benefit to the school and therefore the children, it is worth trying to achieve something even if it isn't exactly within the 'rules'. My experience has been that you don't hit too many problems if you have a clear rationale.

Becoming a professional:

Self-view is important, and it took some time and the push of the conference before I really recognised myself as a valued professional. This is not to say that I ever acted in a manner that would be described as 'unprofessional', but it took an experience of actively feeling treated like one to really cement the self-belief of having a vocation that mattered. For a headteacher this awareness can be key as the empowerment it provides should help to give others in the organisation the same feeling. Over the years I have taken a number of other staff to the conference and it has always provided them with a feeling of being valued as there are still so few experiences in education to match what the national conference offers.

Networking:

To some extent, **networking** is covered through **different perspectives** but **networking** with a wider scope offers so many opportunities to develop as a leader, especially outside your own phase of education. The conference allowed me to work with primary colleagues in a wide variety of contexts and also with secondary and tertiary leaders.

Of course, challenges are never far away and it was during the summer term of 2007 that I experienced my first real sense of the issues that were to come with a key member of staff. Although I had a brief dalliance with staff difficulties in the early months of my headship with the teaching assistant who left before too much of a problem was caused, **staffing** had not been a major problem for me thus far.

Staff team:

I inherited a very effective team when I started my headship – and this had been backed up by the Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunity and Threat (SWOT) analysis that I undertook with everyone as I arrived. The downside to the effective team was that I didn't really develop as strong or pro-active a management style as would be required when I started to hit problems with a particular member of staff and had still not really got this straight after six years when I 'adopted' a new team at the second school in 2012. My advice for headteachers on this front is that getting to know the team early (and possibly even before taking up post if that luxury is available) is vital, but then plan your management style accordingly.

I tend to see myself more as facilitator:

> By using both positive and negative feedback, a team can modify its processes so that they become consistent, optimal, robust, and evolving. The facilitator's role in this process is merely to make the team's processes more salient to its members. As such, the team facilitator is there to help the group discover its own identity: not to shape it. Under no circumstances should the team facilitator make suggestions regarding how the team's processes could be improved (Beaubien, 1998:531-532).

I also subscribe to the Danish style of leadership:

> Employees are seen as team members. Each person is expected to take their personal responsibilities seriously in return for influence and the degree of flexibility required to have a career without compromising work-life balance (Brits, 2016:35).

I will return to work-life balance at a later stage as this is extremely important to my success in leadership, but it is interesting to see the two-way link here:

> Individuals who perceive themselves to be supported by others exhibit more positive health, mental health and longevity (Day and Schmidt, 2007:79)

The descriptions in this section remain my preferred leadership style and I would try to promote the "personal responsibilities" aspect when dealing with the following incident, but later events would help me recognise that successful leaders also need to be able to draw on other styles when necessary.

In September 2007 we had taken on a number of new families following the closure of a local private preparatory school where our reputation was strong. One of the parents from this group was not easy to deal with and took up a lot

of our time on an almost daily basis. The situation with the parent was compounded by the fact that the teacher of the parent's children was part of the same social circle in the village[70]. The parent came in at the end of the school day to speak to the teacher. This sort of ad hoc 'meeting' was a regular occurrence and on this day the parent was in the classroom talking directly to the teacher. I walked through from my office to find the parent speaking to the teacher but immediately noticed that the teacher had not even acknowledged the parent's presence, pointedly staring at the books being marked rather than looking up. I stood for an undetermined amount of time, but long enough to be certain of what was going on, and then took the parent to my office to have a chat before the situation became more intolerable or embarrassing than it already was for all parties. The parent, as ever, just wanted someone who would listen but it is genuinely hard to describe, even all these years and experiences later, just how appalling the behaviour was from the teacher. At the time I remember describing it as the sort of thing you saw at school when you were a teenager or younger, but the utter lack of **professionalism** was really quite shocking. Of course, the incident meant that I had to go back in and deal with the teacher as there was no way that I could say/do nothing.

The conversation with the teacher was challenging, with responses accompanied by a similar behaviour to that I had just witnessed. I tried to show

[70] The management of being a member of staff and living in the locality is something I will return to when the chapter reaches 2010 and I move to the village, but the experience described above was something that was already teaching me how tricky that can be if not managed extremely carefully.

empathy with the fact that the parent was difficult, but remained focused on the key message that the way the teacher had treated the parent was in no way acceptable. This episode was another example of the **difficult conversation**, and by having it at least I could look myself in the mirror having stayed **true to my own expectations**.

Being true to yourself:

Clearly **being true to yourself** is linked very closely to the **difficult conversation** although the situation described was tricky because I knew the 'discussion' I had to have was unlikely to have an impact but I still had to challenge the behaviour. As much as anything else, the challenge for me in this situation was to stay true to myself and my belief system – in this case my beliefs on professionalism. Linking back to the **moral compass**, Pignatelli (2012:186) makes this conclusion on moral leadership:

> The difficulty, though, is that these days moral leadership aligned with progressive values and aspirations has no choice but to operate in contested, hostile spaces. If there is a way out of this dilemma, it has its origins in what Weber refers to as the maturity of the political actor. This is a person who truly and sincerely does take responsibility for his conduct and the consequences that emanate from it.

I would hope that I act with responsibility and that any successful leader must take account of possible consequences, even if not for moral reasons but simply to be prepared. Pignatelli continues with:

> there is no substitute for a deep and broad intelligence accompanying passion. In a similar vein, progressives, in my opinion, should strive for the artful cultivation of an enlarged thought always in the making. Staying true in these difficult times will require nothing less.

There is no doubt that a headteacher faces enormously "difficult times" and ones that will sorely test the moral purpose.

The parent involved in the situation described was an example of someone who presented a **challenging behaviour**, although it was not something I ever effectively dealt with. The family left the school as we were unable to guarantee

a place for a younger sibling in our reception and rather than risk this, they moved to another local school. I later received feedback from the headteacher at the other that the parent was a huge asset and that she was in school helping out and was really useful to them. This feedback made me reflect on why the outcome was so different and I quickly realised that what they had recognised better than I had is that this was a very intelligent parent who had stopped work to focus on her children. As the children started school the parent had a lot of free time and was struggling to focus this into anything productive. As a result, she would come to school to discuss things which caused problems. The new school harnessed her energy by making her feel valued and part of school life and turned what had been a major irritation for Kirk Ireton into an asset at their school.

I had done quite a lot of reading during my masters' degree on **managing challenging behaviours** and had become fairly good at stepping back and considering why someone may behave in a certain way, but this was applied more to staff and children. Since the feedback about this parent I have never been so quick to judge or write anything off in the same way again, no matter which stakeholder group I am dealing with.

Managing 'difficult' people:

One of the few education texts that I have really taken to the heart of my development as a leader is Honey's 2002 work "Problem People and How to Manage Them". The key to Honey's book is that it works on the basis that challenging behaviours are rarely, if ever, exhibited 'just because' but rather as a result of a problem that the person displaying the challenge has underlying. I have been very good at applying this when advising others and also when working with the children (our staff handbook makes very clear that I expect all staff to ask why a child is behaving in a certain way before acting), but in the earlier parts of my career, I wasn't always quite so good at applying that knowledge when I was experiencing the challenging behaviour first hand from an adult.

What has helped me to succeed over time is to continually return to this mantra of asking "why?" and it is now something that is fully embedded into the way I work. I would strongly recommend a circumspect approach to all challenging behaviours to any leader who wants to succeed.

> You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it (Lee, 2010:33).

Towards the end of the academic year we were about to try something new – a night of 'Infant Camping'. This event had been initially conceived as a response to a child in the junior class becoming so home-sick on a weekend residential that they were physically sick and had to be taken home. The child had never been away from home and simply did not have the resilience to cope with the anxiety caused by home-sickness. I drew on my own experience of camping[71] and designed a night for all of the infant class[72] in a very controlled environment, but doing this in tents. The night was to take place from 6pm on the Friday in the penultimate week of the school term and would end again at

[71] My family would camp, but more specifically I grew up through Beavers, Cubs and Scouts and had therefore spent a lot of time away from home over the years under canvas.

[72] Reception, Year One and Year Two, meaning we still had at least one summer-born child who hadn't turned five years old at the time of the camping night.

10am on the Saturday morning. We would have a pre-ordered dinner from the local chip-shop, play games, have a campfire and then sleep in the tents on the village field, about 75 metres from the unlocked school building for toilets and in case the weather happened to be particularly inclement.

Although there would be a considerably more problematic school event in a future year[73], this was a first example in my headship of what seemed to be a great idea, solely for the benefit of the children involved, widely supported by staff and at least some parents, but with some negativity from others. I recorded the event in the journal as follows:

> 29.6.07: In the evening we had our first 'Infant Camping Night' – despite a lot of cynicism, this was a wonderful experience for all involved, (two staff members) and myself took all but 3 of the infants in two tents and stayed on the school field for the night. We had very few tears and everyone had a great time.
>
> 30.6.07: In the morning we got some of the most positive feedback from parents that I've ever experienced. Roll-on next year!

I remember the feedback in the morning very well. At least some of the parents' positivity was as a result of the pleasure some had at being child-free for the first time in years, but mostly it was driven by how excited the children were about the whole thing. It would have been easy to cancel the plan in the face of parents claiming that "You can't take four-year-olds camping", but I was lucky to have experienced this sort of response for an event where I had

[73] See Section Three and 'Marathon-in-a-Month'.

absolutely no doubts that it would be successful and that the children would love it. I **stuck to my guns** resolutely throughout the planning stages and in the lead up to the night itself. It is also nice to reflect how we never had a repeat of the home-sickness at the level of the junior child ever again. We have never had a child go home from infant camping (and they all come every year) and we now see the children who are home-sick head off on the bus to weekend residentials with tears in their eyes, but also a steely resolve that they aren't going to let that spoil their fun.

Sticking to your guns:

Although it is a similar attribute to **being true to yourself,** sticking to your guns is more specific as it is when you have planned a course of action but there is external pressure to deviate. Of course, the ability to **adapt** to change has already been discussed and should never be ignored, but if something is well planned and a leader is confident in that plan it is important to see it through.

My experience of episodes like the camping one are that plans can be very easy to be pushed off course by what feels like a lot of pressure. Often this pressure turns out to be from a very small minority who are the ones who will make themselves known as those who are supportive are less likely to be pro-actively vocal with that support.

Smith (2012:14) states that educators:

> Must make up their own minds about why these conflicting points of view exist, unless they blindly submit to the assertions of the people who shout loudest or wield the biggest sticks (or carrots).

Within the small school, a leader has the opportunity to know his or her stakeholders and community very well and should therefore be well equipped to avoid the pitfalls of focusing simply on those who "shout loudest".

Upon reflection, it occurs to me that I may have benefitted in learning to **stick to my guns** during an early formative experience in my first teaching post. The infant school I worked in decided not to follow the newly introduced 'National Literacy Strategy' which went against what almost everyone else was doing. The headteacher was unwavering in her belief that the work of the school in literacy was already highly effective and she very much stuck to her guns, which the staff could all see as it was a fairly big deal that we weren't following a national programme. It is interesting that this was a headteacher who I didn't respect and who I was determined as a headteacher not to emulate, but yet there were still things that I could learn from her – linking to my earlier section about **learning from everything.**

Toward the end of the 2006-2007 academic year, I found an entry in the school journal that reminded me of something which had not remained in the forefront of my memory, but on reflection, was a drawn-out pressure over a number of years:

> 6.7.07: We also had (a specialist) in to support the development of an action plan toward the BECTA (ICT) award.

This visit of the specialist in the quote was to do with the school's attempts to attain the award in recognition of high-quality Information Control Technology (ICT) delivery in the classroom. As with many awards it was a long and onerous application process, with reams of evidence required that took a lot of preparation and collation. The award had been set as a performance management target for me as the governors felt it was important for the school and would give full recognition to the positive gains the school had been recognised for in the 2006 Ofsted inspection. The award was also a key point for governors as, despite the positive report in 2006, ICT had been a point for development from the previous Ofsted and was still something they were focused on. The quote refers to my latest attempt at getting it sorted, or to at least have some evidence for progress against the performance management target I'd been set. The award was an example of trying to get **priorities** right, or at the very least, trying to get to agreement about what the priorities should be. Ultimately, we never got the award, but it was on three cycles of my performance management and caused pressure and stress that was mostly down to the fact that I could see the time required versus the value was not worth the efforts. However, I never communicated my views well enough or felt confident enough to say "no" until it became readily apparent to all involved that the situation was benefitting no-one. We finally dropped it after the awarding body started to charge for the accreditation.

Prioritising:

Lovely (2005:viii) writes of setting priorities as:

> having the courage and wherewithal to either (a) step back from the fray, (b) ask, "Who is better equipped to handle this problem?" or (c) say "no thank you" without feeling guilty about it.

Managing "c" was a challenge in the earlier parts of my headship, although guilt was rarely, if ever, the issue. I felt like I couldn't say "no" to governors (or other stakeholders) as I saw them at this point in time as my superiors (despite being a governor myself). I will examine the governors in detail when I move onto the stakeholders section of this thesis in Chapter Four.

One final entry for the academic year shows another example of how I was working to **build trust and relationships** in the organisation:

> 19.7.07: (KS2 Teacher) took her 'days-in-lieu' from the residentials to go and see her son's passing out parade for the navy.

I had experienced the 'days-in-lieu' system at my first school and always felt it was a great idea as I had felt valued and appreciated for doing something I would have done anyway. For every weekend residential a member of staff gave up the time for, they were given a day off in lieu of that. This system not only encouraged people to help me staff the amount of residentials I wanted to run but provided the one thing that teaching never offered – flexibility with working patterns[74]. I would have let the member of staff go to the event mentioned in the quote anyway, as that was always how I tried to be as

[74] Having inherited a single junior trip, I introduced a Year 3 and 4 residential weekend and a separate Year 5 and 6 residential as well as the night of infant camping, giving us a unique selling point of every child having a residential opportunity every year at our school.

headteacher, but by having the residentials, there was no guilt felt by the teacher as the time had been 'earned'. Nonetheless, she was extremely grateful for this as, in the past, such opportunities may not have arisen for the staff. When applying the rule to myself however, there were problems over the years as I used time in lieu to support my own well-being. I took my days to go to the Glastonbury Festival each year and this was far more noticeable to stakeholders and seemingly a long way from what some people perceived should be the behaviour of the headteacher. Taking these days was another example of where I **stuck to my guns** as it was important event for me, but also to embed a belief in the staff that they could genuinely use their flexibility as they saw fit by directly setting that example.

In October, the journal references a key event, "18.10.07: I visited a school in Leamington Spa to get over the audit process which was thorough but positive"[75]. The quote seems to suggest a wearing, but not too challenging, audit process but the following quote from around a month later reminds me of the reality of the situation, "27.11.07: In the evening we had a governors' meeting where we managed to plough through everything required by the audit action plan". It turned out that although we had been praised by the auditors on the day, we still got sent a lengthy action plan of things we needed to fix, evidence and then send back to the audit department, many of which were what I viewed to be **hoop-jumping**. Over the years I have become more confident with simply not jumping through hoops but there are some that have

[75] This visit was part of the New Visions project mentioned earlier.

to be dealt with as it simply isn't worth the time and effort not to – and this was a prime example.

Learning to live with hoop-jumping:

Throughout my career I have really struggled with anything that I perceive to have no inherent value and that is simply being done for the sake of meeting some arbitrary requirement imposed by someone else (see also **Recognising value in the seemingly pointless** in Section Three). In the early parts of my teaching career and during my teacher-training, this struggle manifested itself with written lesson-planning and I found myself in challenging situations on both my final placement and my first two teaching posts as I failed to keep on top of the requirements placed on me to do written planning that I found to be of little or no value (even with hindsight it is hard to see how double-sided A3 lesson plans with arbitrary boxes such as "links to ICT" really benefitted the children in my class).

I have found that headship means I have less 'hoops' to jump through, but it certainly never lessened my dislike for anything that I categorised in that way. Doig, McClennan and Urichuk (2009:236) break down hoop-jumping into components including "Navigating the System" and "Meeting the Requirements" and I suppose that this was how I started to deal with things like the audit system. I knew that I needed to meet certain requirements, as to not do so would cause more trouble than fighting it would be worth, but I have developed better ways of "navigating the system" during my time as headteacher. This navigation makes me feel better as I can sometimes feel I have 'got one over' on the system and that is sometimes enough to balance the sour taste of spending time doing things I find to have little value to me or the school.

The next quote was a reference to something that would consume a lot of my time over the coming months as there were some very practical things that needed sorting out with regards to a child:

> 7.11.07: After school I met with (SSSEN) regarding the integration of (PMLD[76] Child).

[76] Profound and multiple learning difficulties.

The child was the sibling of a pupil already at the school from a family that lived within the village. We were very keen to make a placement work even though this was a child with considerable needs. The key point from the quote is that despite our **openness**, commitment to inclusion and desire to make the placement happen, I was having meetings where demands were being made of the school that simply would not work. These meetings helped me to understand how focused people could be on their role but as a result could not see the **bigger picture** I had to take account of. Using at least some of the learning that has already been considered in this chapter, I was far better equipped to value the expertise and support of the person referred to in the quote from the Support Service for Special Educational Needs (SSSEN) whilst helping them to recognise the limitations of the school and the needs of the other 50 or so pupils in attendance.

Seeing the Big Picture:

It is extremely easy as a small school headteacher to forget the strategic approach and get too involved in the details of one aspect of school life. It is especially easy to do this as you will have daily interactions with stakeholders who do not have a role that involves seeing beyond their own remit and sometimes this will be a highly focused remit as was the case in the example above.

A final entry for the calendar year of 2007 was one that probably opened many doors and really developed my career and my leadership:

> 5.12.07: I attended a residential course to train as a SIP (School Improvement Partner) which is the way the government wants school improvement to be managed in the future – I will find out if I have been accredited after Christmas.

The School Improvement Partner (SIP) scheme was just being introduced and it brought funding into local authorities to provide a minimum amount of school improvement support as well as external advice for Headteacher Performance Management. In Derbyshire, this system was mostly in place, but the extra time schools were to receive required the recruitment of what were known as 'associate' SIPs from the ranks of serving headteachers as well as the accreditation of all the existing local authority advisors. I'm not sure where I had picked up on the invitation to apply for this, but I did so and attended a fairly challenging two-day process that ultimately led to my accreditation as a SIP and the offer of work with four Derbyshire schools. This role offered a new and exciting opportunity to really **widen my professional networks** whilst honing my leadership skills.

Widening professional networks:

Widening professional networks is an extension of earlier points, but I wanted to make sure I clarified that this development of networks into directly working with and supporting other schools really moves beyond what we tend to mean by 'networking'. More than anything, taking on this role forced me to become a better leader, partly through what I learned whilst in other schools, but mainly because I needed to develop my expertise in order to be an effective SIP. A particular area that I really moved forward with was data and my understanding of documents such as the (at the time) new RAISEonline reports. Analysing data remains a huge challenge for many headteachers and it is my work supporting them that keeps my own skills sharp.

> School leaders spend significant amounts of their time in contact with people outside of their schools seeking information and advice (Day, Sammons, Leithwood et al., 2011:28).

At the end of 2007 I thought that my learning as a leader might start to slow:

> 21.12.07: Last day of another busy year – I feel I have finally got to grips with all the many elements of the job and hope to use this to really push forward in my 3rd year as head of Kirk Ireton.

I'm not sure that I really recognised just how much **time it really takes** to achieve any sort of mastery when it comes to leadership.

It takes time:

The realisation that **it takes time** only really comes with **hindsight,** but looking back at the quote shows just how long even feeling like mastering the basics can take (it is taken from nearly two years into my headship).

It is clear from my work in this chapter just how complex leadership is and the many skills and attributes that need to be drawn upon on an almost daily basis. Yukl (1998:5) describes leadership as:

> The process wherein an individual member of an organization influences the interpretation of events, the choice of strategies, the (arrangement) of work activities, the motivation of people to achieve objectives, the maintenance of cooperative relationships, the development of skills and competence, and the enlistment of support from people outside the group.

Looking back, I realise I had barely begun and almost all of what I have examined so far would require many more years of honing and the introduction of new challenges to really develop a full set of skills for mastery of small-school headship.

Table 3:

Skill/Attribute/Knowledge	First mentioned in	Cross References
Moral compass	Part 2, An Introduction	Openness/Honesty, Instinct/Inner voice, Difficult conversation, Wangling, Being true to yourself, Having fun, Not forgetting what it's all about
Luck	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Decisiveness
Decisiveness	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Luck, Adapting
Openness/Honesty	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Moral compass, Difficult conversation, Having fun
Hindsight	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Recognising value in the seemingly pointless, Refining the role
Pragmatism	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Learning to live with hoop-jumping
Creating a trusting and confidential environment	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	
Working with freedom and flexibility	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Financial Understanding
Attention to detail	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Seeing the big picture, Empathy, Communication
Financial understanding	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	IT skills, Recognising value over cost, freedom and flexibility
Instinct/Inner voice	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Moral compass, Problem-solving
Problem-solving	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Instinct/Inner Voice, Creativity, Scheduled reflection time, Adapting
Creativity	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Problem-solving, Scheduled reflection time, Adapting, Learning new trades
Support structures	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Different perspectives, Networking, Refining the role, Not forgetting what it's all about
Difficult conversation	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Moral compass, Openness/Honesty, Being true to yourself
Learning from everything	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Different Perspectives, Sticking to your guns, Expanding horizons
Different perspectives	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Support structures, Learning from everything, Networking, Expanding horizons
Scheduled reflection time	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Problem-solving, Creativity
Adapting	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Decisiveness, Problem-solving, Creativity, Networking, Sticking to your guns, Learning new trades, Refining the role
Plate-spinning	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	
Wangling	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Moral compass
Becoming a professional	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	
Networking	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Different perspectives, Support structures, Adapting, Widening professional networks
Staff team	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	
Being true to yourself	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Moral compass, Difficult conversation, Sticking to your guns
Managing difficult people	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Empathy
Sticking to your guns	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Learning from everything, Adapting, Being true to yourself,
Prioritising	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Managing the diary
Learning to live with hoop-jumping	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Pragmatism, Recognising value in the seemingly pointless
Seeing the big picture	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Attention to detail
Widening professional networks	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Networking
It takes time	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Hindsight

Chapter Three

Section Three: "Further Learning and Embedding" January 2008 – March 2011

This section reflects on the period between January 2008 and March 2011 (the end of the 2010/11 financial year). Whilst drafting out the key events for this period it became clear that this part of my career, whilst still developmental, was much more about practising and embedding the skills, attributes and knowledge that I had been building through the experiences in my first two years of headship. Therefore in this section I will continue to flag new learning points but also link my experiences to the learning points collated at the end of each of the first two sections of Chapter Three.

2008:

As 2008 began my wife and I were also expecting our first child. Despite the impending onset of parenthood, I clearly felt like I had a little bit of capacity having signed up for the doctorate that has led to the writing of this thesis. The extra capacity was also going to be needed as I further developed my range of skills both in building (not metaphorically) another new part of the school and catering for a wider variety of pupil needs. We were expecting the new pupil with PMLD which meant not only ensuring we had the skills in school, but also adapting the building to make it accessible for a wheelchair user.

The following excerpts from the journal show how the building work was a regular feature of the first part of the year:

> 23.1.08 An exciting day for the children as they had African dancing and drumming workshops all day in school. I had all the thrill of a site meeting for most of the morning!
>
> 18.2.08 I came into school (half-term week) for a brief site meeting regarding the extension which is now nearly 2 months overdue – the room looks great but the time is becoming increasingly irritating. We have been given assurances the interior will be ready for Monday – but we are not holding our breath.
>
> 25.2.08 Unsurprisingly, the interior is not complete!
>
> 19.3.08 The storage shed to go with the soft play was put up and we are now in the very last stages of that work – HOORAY!

Although I had already project-managed the small 'sensory room' extension during 2007, the next build was a lot more work and a more complex project, not least because the only access to the rear of the school where most of the work was to be done was via the village field[77]. The work also had to be completed in time for the pupil to start in September which added to the stresses of the situation. The school being in a conservation area and various building regulations also made life difficult from the start. There were also a multitude of related jobs that once again fell to me to sort out:

> 10.3.08 I had a rep. from ROMPA come to do some quotes on sensory equipment for the new extension.

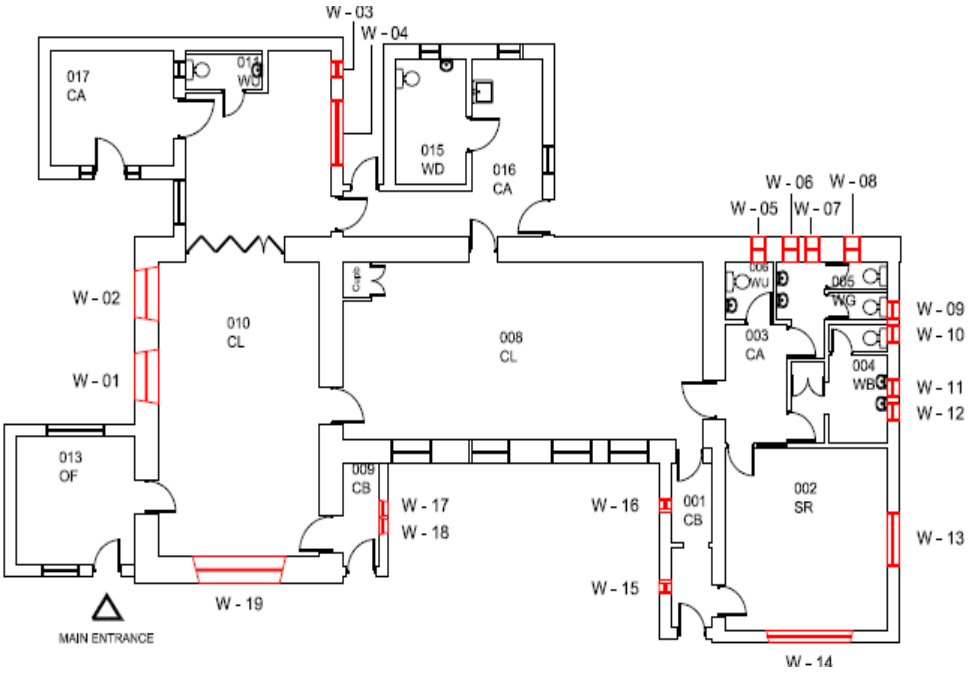
[77] The field to the rear of the school is owned in trust by the village, but the school has a lease agreement that in effect makes it the school field during school time. It is an important feature of the school and will be returned to in Chapter Four.

17.3.08 Kayda Blinds came to quote on full blackouts for the new extension.

2.6.08 We returned to find a new doorway as the water heater had been moved so as a door for KS1 could access the new toilet area.

23.7.08 We leave for the summer waiting for the accessible ramp to be built, new gates, ramps, shelving and electrics – we shall see!

Figure 3:



The plan in **Figure 3** shows the work that was completed with 017CA (the sensory room), 015WD and 016CA all completely new builds at the school during 2007 and 2008[78].

[78] At the time of writing I am sat in school as new windows are put in (the plan in **Figure 3** is taken from the plans for that work). The windows are part of the first major work we have had done since the extension in 2008, but with all of the capacity that has been built over the years, this has mostly been overseen by the school administrator. The change in how building work is managed shows how many of the things that are being examined throughout this chapter continue to come to fruition and help move the school forward.

All of the work during this period forced me to learn new skills and **new trades** as I understood more about building, design, regulations, planning and managing a project.

Learning new trades:

Building was an example of something small-school headship gave me a first experience of. There were aspects of headship, such as **finance**, that I was much more familiar with, simply by running my personal 'budget' at home, but apart from paying a firm to put a conservatory on the back of our old house, I had no real experience of building work or organising a complex project.

Within these new 'trades', opportunities are clearly there to enhance or practise other skills, such as people management, **adapting** and being **creative**. Continuing professional development is a recurring theme in this chapter, but that usually refers to training and learning that is directly related to the career. A small school headteacher has the opportunity to not only learn new things but through this develop existing or new skills through an entirely different filter. Myers (2013) reflects what most people expect when considering professional development:

> Since, like many other professions, the field of education is constantly changing, instructors need to stay up to date on instructional methods and best practices.

But I have found that by **learning new 'trades'** which seemingly have nothing to do with "instructional methods" or "best practices" in education, I have been able to take what I am learning and apply it to my main role.

Most of the building work work was driven by the arrival of a particular child and although the 'Sensory Room' extension that had been built in 2007 was for the good of the school overall, it was still designed with that child in mind.

> 26.2.08 (Senior Teacher) and I went to (local school) for a review meeting about (PMLD child) – we have agreed a transition timetable to start getting some sessions with (PMLD child).

The child lived in the village which was why we were working so hard to support the placement (a child with such significant needs would normally be placed in a special school). There will always be those with doubts or cynicism about a placement such as this in a small school where the impact can be significant, but we were very clear from the start about the benefits for all stakeholders. These benefits included the diversity it would bring to a school that had very little of that due to the nature of the locality[79]. Unfortunately, a small amount of this cynicism was to be found within the staff team. I had been very clear from the start that the new 'Sensory Room' was to be called that and not, as some people had started to do, '*child's* room' (using the actual name of the child). I impressed upon all of the staff that this really mattered as if we were to face criticism or cynicism from the parent body, to suggest that a significant school build was solely for the use of one child would not help. I recount this incident because **language and labelling** are extremely important, although it also reminds me of the challenge a small minority of the staff could offer at times.

[79] At the time, the school census showed 100% 'White British' children.

Language and labelling:

The importance of the use of **language** in a school both to and around children should be something that all educationalists are acutely aware of. Sadly, my experience is of this often not being the case at all. The use of **language** can become a particular problem with '**labelling**' both of things and of children. In the case of the 'sensory room' calling it '*child's* room' had negative connotations around the child, but also would have meant that the rest of the staff, children and parents may have started to limit the use of that space based on it 'belonging' to someone else – such can be the power of a label.

> The labelling of children by teachers lies on a continuum, from the informal categories, often implicit, which are used on a day-to-day basis within the classroom, to the categorisation of children's needs arising from formal processes and involving a range of professionals in gathering and analysing data about the child. Some forms of informal labelling upon which teachers draw can have positive or negative effects, depending upon the spirit in which they are applied (Mowat, 2015:156).

The informal **labelling** that my staff were using had the potential to be negative given the 'spirit' in which they were applying it. The wider point for the headteacher is that controlling **language** in the school and supporting the staff in seeing how important that can be is key. In a small school a label can be even more damaging. Imagine being the 'naughty' child in a school where you have the same teacher for four years or even being seen as 'gifted' but that not really matching your abilities.

> 31.1.08 I was going to Birmingham for a SIP induction course but was called back en route as my wife had gone into labour! Our baby daughter was born at 20:59!

Despite the joys of a new baby, enrolling on a doctorate and starting the role with the Local Authority as a 'School Improvement Partner' I still found myself, after two years in the role, with 'itchy feet'. This desire for something new manifested itself in a decision to look at leadership in secondary education. Ultimately, I applied for a deputy headteacher job but didn't get shortlisted for interview, something I knew would always be a challenge for a primary practitioner. In the process of the application, I realised that I was only really

seeking a challenge. Having recognised the root of my 'itchy feet', I also recognised that a doctorate, the SIP role and a new family was plenty of a challenge to be getting on with. I then made a firm **commitment** to Kirk Ireton to stay there for the foreseeable future. What was useful in this period was that I discussed how I was feeling with the Personnel Committee of governors who undertook my performance management, which helped them to understand what I needed to stay motivated[80]. This **commitment** was a key moment for my career as I had never stayed more than 3 years at any school, but I very quickly discovered that having made the decision to stay, it cemented a mental position and I remain **committed** to the school a decade later. So for me, getting past that 'itchy feet' period seemed to stop it returning – at least up to now – although this may also be as a result of the continued new challenges the job has provided me with since 2008.

[80] It was in these meetings that I discovered the governors had only ever expected me to stay for a year or two when they offered the job. They seemed happy to have me for longer – but maybe didn't realise that 12 years on, I'd still be around!

Committing:

> Organisational commitment is the bond employees experience with their organisation. Broadly speaking, employees who are committed to their organisation generally feel a connection with their organisation, feel that they fit in and, feel they understand the goals of the organisation. The added value of such employees is that they tend to be more determined in their work, show relatively high productivity and are more proactive in offering their support (Van Der Werf, 2016).

Meyer and Allen (1991) split "organisational commitment" into three distinct types of 'Affective Commitment', 'Continuance Commitment' and 'Normative Commitment'. Affective commitment relates to how much employees want to stay at their organisation; continuance commitment relates to how much employees feel the need to stay at their organisation and normative commitment relates to how much employees feel they should stay at their organisation.

For me, a combination of having affective commitment whilst not feeling pressures of continuance or normative commitment have led me to the reason I have mentioned '**commitment**' as a key factor in my 'success' as a small school headteacher. Although organisational commitment is important both for me as an employee and as an employer, what it has led to is a more traditional understanding of a '**commitment**' in that I made the decision to stay at the school for the foreseeable future. The effect of that **commitment** is that all decisions I make are with a mind to how they will impact in a month, a year or even further into the future. Looking at the future impact helps me to remain focused on the strategic function of my role. Over time it becomes a lot more evident that working as if you are going to be the long-term leader of the school (and this is definitely easier if you genuinely plan to be) makes the school more likely to succeed as decisions are not made for fire-fighting or short term gains, rather in the best interests of the overall good-running of the school.

2008 also brought a huge broadening of horizons, although completely unexpectedly, "23.5.08 Final day of the term before I set off to Zambia for most of the week". Although I knew very little about it until shortly before the trip happened, the school had been involved in a British Council project connecting three Derbyshire schools with three schools in Zambia (Livingstone) and three in Kenya (Nairobi).



Photograph 3: Primary School in Nairobi, Kenya 2008
The children are enjoying the recently introduced free education for all.

I discovered that it was expected that each school send a representative to each country for a visit to the other schools. Even after the African headteachers had come to Derbyshire, I still hadn't realised this would end up being me. No-one else in the school, including the senior teacher who had been the catalyst for our involvement with the project, had any desire or interest to go to Africa and I felt duty-bound to go. Although saying that I felt 'duty-bound' may seem a little ungrateful, I had a four-month-old baby at the time and heading half-way around the planet didn't seem quite so tempting as it might to someone with fewer commitments at home. The process was then repeated only a few months later, "25.10.08 Half-term begins and I get on a plane to Kenya!"

It would be easy to write pages about the two African trips as there was a lot to learn about myself, not least of all that I became slightly homesick for the first time in my life (presumably due to missing my wife and new-born child)

but the main thing that I reflect upon from the experiences is that of having the chance to genuinely **expand my horizons** and develop my perspective in a whole new way. Although I had been to Africa on my honeymoon and had visited Livingstone before, the British Council trip was not a tourist visit. We were able to see and experience the everyday life of teachers and children in these localities and the contrast between this and what we find in Britain is stark in many ways.

Expanding Horizons:

In some ways, **expanding horizons** links to the idea of **learning new trades** as it is about seeing things from a **different perspective** in order to enhance your understanding and apply that to other areas of your leadership.

Having also been a magistrate since 2004, I have regular opportunities to be reminded of how life can be for other people and I make sure I use this in my work as a school leader. My experiences in Africa were profound enough that even now, nearly a decade later, they still have an impact. The recommendation I have for other leaders is to find ways of **expanding horizons**, whether that be a regular activity (such as my Magistry work) or less frequent, but more significant experiences such as my trips to Africa.

Even after my African adventures, the building work was never far away, nor were yet more challenges for a small school headteacher who is responsible for the **I.T.**[81] in the school:

> 3.11.08 We have returned from half-term to find our new alarm system installed and ready – a lot nicer than my return from Kenya as we discover I have introduced a computer virus via one of the African cameras. This has caused quite a nightmare!

[81] Information Technology.

I.T. Skills:

It is possible, and something I will reflect upon at the start of Chapter Four, to see many of the items I am focusing on as either 'managerial' or 'leadership' skills, attributes or knowledge. It is clear that both aspects are required for success, but being familiar and competent with information technology and computers is neither of these – it is something that can facilitate both.

As a small school headteacher, it has often fallen to me to keep the computers working, which I am able to do with some basic understanding of computers (turning it off and back on again is remarkably reliable). These skills have been developed as I have always been an 'early adopter' of technology and as a headteacher with a healthy budget I have been more able to do this, using money to purchase technology for the school and for my leadership use.

On a more basic level, being able to type proficiently can save an enormous amount of time, allowing for more checking of emails before they are sent and generally much better **communication** with stakeholders.

Reflecting on the trips to Zambia and Kenya reminded me of another incident that I did not record at the time, but has been something that I have returned to over the years as an example of where I would go back and do things differently. In the week leading up to the trip to Zambia I chose not to attend an event in the local Church that involved the school children and was led by one of the teaching staff. At the time I was still living around 30-40 minutes from the school by car and had a four-month-old baby at home. In the week of this event I already had at least one other evening of work to attend to. As a result of the circumstances, I told the teacher I would not be attending and at the time thought little more of it. The event was very well received and seemed to have been an all-round success. It was only later that the teacher told me how upset she had been that I didn't think her event was of value. Although there were solid reasons behind my decision not to attend I still had to reflect

on my lack of recognition of what was important to someone else and to see how I could improve my use of **empathy** in the future.

Empathy:

The term **empathy** may have been somewhat superseded by 'Emotional Intelligence' over the past decade, particularly in leadership contexts, but I will stick with **empathy**, focusing on Salovey and Mayer's (1990) description of it being about knowing and handling one's own and other's emotions.

The knowing and handling really ties in to thinking everything through and **attention to detail.** For some people empathy may be much more natural, but for me it is a process and requires me to practise and apply repeatedly. As a small school headteacher, the importance of getting interactions right is vital as you are not some far-away figurehead to even the most minor of stakeholders. As a result of this, displaying empathy, and showing people that you care about how things affect them is a core part of the role. In the instance described above it is hard to tell the overall impact, but at the very least it left a key member of staff upset and was something that was remembered some considerable time later.

Kirk Ireton was now getting close to the introduction of the child with PMLD and this meant employing a new member of staff specifically for support. Around this time we also decided to employ another teaching assistant (TA) as numbers were still increasing at the school:

> 27.3.08 The TA who is going to work with (PMLD child) also came to look around.
>
> 22.5.08 We appointed (new TA) as our new KS1 TA from September – once again we have managed to get a TA who is a qualified teacher.

With the constant concerns around the small-school budget, I was extremely wary of spending money, but the TAs were a good example of starting to **recognise value over cost**. We were building up a considerable surplus which I

was loathe to reduce, particularly with an ongoing cost in the form of a new salary, but it was in the area of staffing that I really started to understand that sometimes spending provides exceptionally good value. The money that was sitting in surplus was partly to protect against a future drop in numbers or a budget settlement that might not be so generous to small schools, but also to buy resources such as computers. At this point in my headship, I was getting a lot better at recognising that every child having a laptop couldn't compare to the input from a skilled adult.

Recognising value over cost:

Recognising value over cost links to **Financial understanding** as without that understanding, getting to grips with 'value' is harder to manage. There always needs to be a pragmatic decision about whether you can afford something or not. This developing understanding was much more about starting to realise that sometimes it is worth loosening the purse strings because of the value created. Staff, when they are effective, are the most valuable resource in a small school. Conversely, as we will see in Chapter Four, staff can have an equally negative impact on the running of the school, but either way, staff are expensive and an ongoing cost. As time has moved on, and alongside my greater understanding of how small schools succeed, thinking less about the actual money and more about the value has been incredibly important for my ability to continue school improvement.

As the 2008/2009 academic year started and the numbers at school continued to increase, so did the numbers at home; "6.10.08 (TA) covered the infants as I went to our 12 week scan for baby 2!" Although "baby 2" actually meant a slightly easier time for me during the period that my wife went on maternity leave, we were having to **adapt** to **family life** and this meant less focus on career than I might have had prior to having children.

Family life:

Although it might be tempting to attribute the timing of the start of my family to **luck**, it was actually a very conscious choice not to try for children until I had reached the age of 30 (my wife was content with this as well). The choice had been more to do with enjoying life as a young married couple, but it certainly helped that by the time our first child came along, I was starting to feel settled and more confident in my role as headteacher.

The interaction between my **family life** and work life could be a thesis in itself, but there are two important aspects of it to note. The first aspect is that it made me more aware of the needs of others (**empathy**). The second aspect is that in coming years, **family life** gave me more understanding for another key stakeholder group – the parents. This **empathy** has helped me to refine practice in the school as I can see first-hand how certain aspects of school life play out for the child out of normal school time.

Over time **family life** and work have been an extremely challenging balancing act and, as Larchick and Chance (2011:20) state:

> Teachers are not immune to stress. The relationship between work demands of a highly technological and complex society and personal life-stress and pressures has contributed to an increasing teacher crisis in the public schools.

Although their research is based on the American system, the "crisis" is something that we see in English schools. In a small-school where all staff are in such close proximity, it is hard not to see the effects on the staff of the clash between home and work pressures.

Having a family, alongside the extra roles I was taking on – **"**27.11.08 Another full day of SIP work" – meant that I needed to get a lot better at **managing my diary**. The SIP work had periods where it was extremely time-consuming and I was failing to recognise that when planning my time.

Managing the diary:

Managing the diary links to **prioritising**, but the latter skill tends to be more about taking a number of tasks and deciding on the order they need to be dealt with. **Managing the diary** is much more about looking further ahead, recognising what tasks are going to need to be fulfilled and then specifically diarising the time appropriately. The SIP work meant ensuring that, following a school visit, another half-day was entered into the diary that I would be unavailable in order to type up the ensuing paperwork. The diary took a lot of time to master, but year on year has improved. The skill is getting the sense of how much time you need to leave on the basis of being hijacked constantly, which only experience has taught me can happen at any moment and take a lot of time.

> Time is the most precious thing in the world. Learning about how to effectively manage time is an important skill that someone will need to acquire to be successful in his life (Khan, Farooqi, Khalil et al., 2016:250).

The former part of the quote may be a little questionable, but I agree that to be successful as a school leader time-management must be learnt. Khan et al. (2016:252) discuss, "short range and long range" planning that ties together my two skills of **prioritising** and **managing the diary**. The research (2016:259) concludes that, "there is a significant relationship between teachers' time management techniques and their class performance" and that the reverse was also true.

Sometimes, my failure to **manage the diary** actually had benefits as the staff were aware of my struggles and stepped up to take on roles they might not have done. An example of this was recorded in the journal in the lead up to Christmas:

> 10.12.08 We did a full dress rehearsal of 'La Nativité' – the nativity in French! We invited older members of the community to this performance.
>
> 11.12.08 In the afternoon and evening we had the main nativity performances – these were an enormous success and a real credit to (the teacher's) French teaching.

Alongside the benefits of the teacher taking the lead with the nativity, there has definitely been a gain at the school from doing 'big things' that **grab the headlines** and get talked about by stakeholders.

Headline grabbing:

Having written a paper during my Master's Degree on marketing I have chosen to focus here on **headline grabbing** which falls into that category. For a small-school **headline grabbing** has other benefits beyond building the reputation. I have found that by doing relatively regular (maybe once a year) 'big' things makes life a lot easier and keeps people positive and on-side. **Headline grabbing** events are so visible to stakeholders in a way that much of what schools and school leaders do is not. Another example of this **headline grabbing** happened only a few months later, but through an examination of the 'Marathon-in-a-Month' in 2009 we will see that there are also potential pitfalls to running more visible events.

Of course, the reputation of the school improving through these activities is extremely important:

> More and more parents have ever greater disposable income: might they not as a lifestyle choice decide they want to spend that income on their most treasured possessions, their children, buying an education tailored to their view of the world (Barber, 2000:1)?

2009:

> 5.1.09 We started the new year with a shared child-protection INSET day at (local school). It was nice to do a joint session for a bit of a change.

The transition work that we had done from pre-school with the PMLD child led to a joint INSET day with that establishment. The INSET was probably the first instance of trying to enhance the Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for the whole staff at once. The INSET day let the staff work with colleagues

that, in a small school, they just didn't get the opportunity to (in a small school you may be the only infant teacher or reception teaching assistant for example). The training also allowed for staff to share ideas and really enhance the learning from the day. The event shows the start of some of my own key learning having been embedded enough that I was seeking ways of sharing this with the **staff team**, in this instance **different perspectives** and **widening professional networks**.

Returning to **headline grabbing**, I came up with the idea of tying in my new-found interest in **personal fitness** with something the children could get involved in.

Personal fitness:

I was around two stone overweight (based on the BMI calculation) at the start of 2009 and did no more than a weekly game of five-a-side football in terms of exercise (generally followed by a takeaway meal). As a result of my **personal fitness** levels, I got myself a place in the London Marathon and planned to use this as the impetus to lose some weight and generally feel better physically.

The weight gain had happened steadily over the period of about 7 or 8 years, but the three years of headship was definitely not helping. Since 2009, the pursuit of better physical fitness has become a key part of my life. I lost four stone from heaviest to lightest and remain active with recent challenges including a 52 mile ultra-marathon.

Boule (1993) makes clear that physical activity practised on a regular basis is associated with a great amount of physical, psychological and physiological benefits. Even as a teaching head, I still fell into the problem of the high prevalence of sedentary habits described by Nieman (1997), which are causing problems both in childhood and adolescence (Trost, Loprinzi, Moore et al., 2008). Olubayo-Fatregun, Ayodele and Olururusola (2014), state that regular physical activity and exercise are critically significant for the health, fitness and well-being of people and I can vouch for the enormous impact getting physically fit had on my life and also my performance as a headteacher. My improved **physical fitness** helped me to understand the benefits in a way that translated to trying to improve things for the children as well. When I am at my best physically, I sleep better and need less of it and so maintain my energy and focus throughout the working week.

> 6.3.09 It was a busy day as we launched 'Marathon-in-a-Month' for the NSPCC.

The idea of the event was that the children would walk, jog or run a mile every school day for 26 days, thus completing a 'Marathon-in-a-Month' leading up to the weekend that I would complete the London Marathon.



Photograph 4: Launch Day of 'Marathon-in-a-Month' March 2009
Taken on the Village Field (the rear of the school is in the background).

Apart from this event being something that is still talked about to this day;

> 24.4.09 This was the final day of our 'Marathon-in-a-Month' challenge for the NSPCC and I am very proud that all children (including the 4-year-olds) completed all 26.2 miles of the challenge!

it also sticks very firmly in my mind as an example of **avoiding hijacks**[82].

[82] This is not the same as the 'Amygdala Hijack' that Goleman (1995) writes of, although my response to the hijack described could be argued to fit into the same category.

The background to the launch of the event is that I was raising money for the NSPCC as part of my London Marathon experience, although it is worth noting that I had got my place through the public ballot and was not raising money in order to secure a spot. To make the event more meaningful for the children, we suggested that they were sponsored (this was not compulsory) and had brought in an NSPCC representative to share what they do during an assembly. On the morning of the launch, a parent came in to see me about the event and told me that "some parents" had approached him and had said that I was only doing the whole thing in order to get places in running events. The "parents" also believed that it was unsuitable for the younger children to be aiming to do a mile every day. When written down like this both of these issues seem relatively minor but at the time, having spent so much energy and effort setting something up entirely altruistically, they were extremely upsetting. I was ready to cancel the whole event and brought the entire staff in at morning break (the launch was set for lunchtime) to discuss the matter. After explaining everything, I was fortunate to have a staff who were completely supportive and reassured me that it was a great idea and would be a success. Thankfully, it was a success, but had I not consulted with the staff I genuinely might have cancelled whole thing.

The learning point of this episode is that I could have been completely **hijacked** by incomplete information. I subsequently found out who the two parents were who had made the comments and, with that context, was far less concerned as they both had other issues at the time. Whilst I would never ignore the parents

as a result of other issues, I would not have allowed myself to very nearly be led to a terrible decision on the basis of their views alone. It is worth noting that the parent who 'helpfully' informed me of this issue would subsequently become a governor and, ultimately, the chair of governors (see Chapter Four).

Avoiding hijacks:

What I call 'hijacks' come in all shapes and sizes and are the bane of any school leader's life. Hijacks get in the way of good time-management and can impact on many aspects of school life. From this particular episode I learned that I needed to get better at depersonalising the issues which also helps with not getting 'sucked in'. **Avoiding hijacks** is yet another skill that needs to be practised and has become easier for me over time both through practise and also with the increased confidence that comes through experience and being seen to succeed in your environment.

Another outcome of this episode was that in the future, we would have agreements with governors that they were never to bring me issues from other stakeholders unless they were prepared to share the source of the information.

Most of the rest of this academic year passed without any significant events, but the following entry is helpful in summing up that we never **rested on our laurels**:

> 5.6.09 (Infant teacher) and I worked through the new school induction booklet.

Not resting on laurels and building capacity:

For me, the definition of a genuinely 'outstanding' school is one that is constantly aiming to improve and this is why I try to never let myself, the school or the staff **rest on our laurels**. Pardini (2006:42) describes "continuous growth" and this is something that I've always tried to lead with. **Building capacity** is increasingly vital as the educational environment changes ever more rapidly and we need to keep up:

> While change occurs at different rates and paces, its omnipresence is now a constant feature of our lives. Attitudinal change may lag behind technological and scientific change, creating great difficulties in reconciling old values to new circumstances (Whitaker, 1994:25).

Hargreaves (1995:217) also states that, "…most schools are remarkably stable organisations for most of the time. They are difficult to change and are particularly difficult to change quickly." As a result of this, to seek to improve every day and therefore keep changing is a habit that is important for a school to remain healthy. The induction booklet is a good example of something that improved how we introduced new parents to the school and by using the time to design the booklet rather than taking a break, we created something that is still useful and takes very little time each year to update – it just took a lot of effort in the first place.

A couple of entries from the early part of the 2009/2010 academic year stuck out when reading the journal as they were both examples of something I saw as **hoop-jumping** and therefore fairly pointless, but that I did anyway. The former was to keep a stakeholder happy and therefore there was a slight benefit in that it tended to make my life easier:

> 15.9.09 I met with the chair of governors as she is no longer in school regularly as a parent.
>
> 25.9.09 I attended a SEF writing workshop at Masson Mill.

The reason for quoting both of these is that neither the meeting nor the workshop were as pointless as they had first seemed. Through writing this

thesis I have discovered a new attribute which is to **recognise value in the seemingly pointless.**

Recognising value in the seemingly pointless:

The SEF is an interesting example as it was something I did to **jump through a hoop** and when I read the journal entry about the SEF writing course, my first response was, "well actually that turned out to be entirely unnecessary", but then I questioned that response. Although it may have seemed an arbitrary task, in **hindsight** it almost certainly helped me develop my thinking about the school and what was working well and what needed to be improved.

An even better example of finding value that I have, for years, thought a waste of my time has been filling in the journal. It is clear that without that guide to my time as headteacher, this thesis would be a very different entity.

2010:

A lot of INSET time during my tenure has been just 'given' to staff to prepare or in recognition of all the extra hours they put in[83] and therefore they are not sessions that tend to get mentioned in the journal. The following session, however, did get a mention:

> 28.5.10 We had an INSET on staff well-being at (local venue). Although there was a mixed response from staff, I felt it was a really good day which had real benefit for those that entered into the spirit!

This INSET was a continued part of my efforts to support the staff with their well-being as it was such an important aspect of my own work-life balance and

[83] I have always found it very difficult to fill INSET time for the whole staff. This difficulty is mostly because we already spend so much time together on a daily basis and breaks are often filled with solely professional discussion.

I felt that some direct input from an external provider would be useful. As can be seen from the quote, I was a little irritated by the responses of some of the staff to what I believed was useful input. On reflection this may have been a lack of **empathy** again and a good example of needing to improve another key skill which is to **take care with your immediate response**.

Taking care with your responses:

Once again, there is a clear aspect of **empathy** here, which I was already much better at displaying but often only with reflection time to prepare. 'In the moment' I am still guilty, at times, of not thinking responses through.

Loisulie (2017:50) discusses the leader as a, "shock absorber" and that:

> A leader must be able to contain any information given to him or her, and handle it properly. This means a leader is required to control his/her temper to avoid mishandling of sensitive issues that might arise in due course. In the researcher's leadership experiences, people used to tell him that leaders are shock absorbers in the sense that they must be ready to receive sensitive information and handle it accordingly.

For me, the controlling of emotion is not all that difficult, much more that I am inclined not to properly think through what my verbal response is and how it may be construed. Where I have found this to be at its most problematic is with people I trust or feel comfortable around as I am less likely to be considered during any given conversation. **Taking care with my responses** is still an area that I constantly need to work on.

Towards the end of the 2009/2010 academic year a significant change in my personal life (with a direct impact on my professional life) took place as my two children and pregnant wife moved to the village of Kirk Ireton. The move took some considerable managing and a lot of groundwork to ensure that

stakeholders knew to respect the boundaries of my school and personal life[84]. The move was a significant change in a lot of ways, not least that I went from at least 90 minutes of commuting per day to about 2 minutes. Although living across the road from school freed up a lot of time, it did mean that I lost some of the reflection and 'chilling-out' time I would get on the drive home each day. In the following academic year I had to find ways to replace the time utilised in my daily commute so that I maintained a number of the important aspects of successful headship that have been outlined so far.

To finish the academic year though, an entirely positive note from the journal:

> 22.7.10 Today we had one of the best mornings I've experienced in Kirk Ireton – we all made kites, including some family members and went to fly them on the field. The sight of 60 kites successfully floating over the field was genuinely heart-warming. We then had a picnic lunch outside.

[84] I achieved this by talking to a number of parents that I had good relationships with and 'jokingly' said "dear help anyone who ever knocks on my door asking about homework!". Although this was all very good humoured, everyone knew that there was a serious underlying point, and thankfully that boundary has always been respected. Respecting the boundary between work and personal life is also something I have to work hard at myself, particularly as three of my children now attend the school and therefore I find it more difficult to keep my professional and personal roles apart.



Photograph 5: Kite flying on the village field, July 2010

The kite-flying was another **headline grabber**, although I have to confess not my idea as by this point the staff were superb at coming up with creative ideas in the knowledge that I was likely to give the go ahead. The learning from reflecting on this day is just how important **having fun** is, both for the children and for everyone else as well.

Having fun:

When considering my 'success' as a small-school headteacher it is key that after four-and-a-half in post headteacher is that to be in post for four-and-a-half years I was still moved by an activity such as the kite-flying. I was not becoming jaded and this event also exemplifies that I had not lost sight of the key stakeholders – the children. The main reason for choosing the kite-flying is that it shows that as a school we still all knew how to have fun. Leeder (2014:627) states that:

> Fun is not something that can be inserted into an organization from the top down, but is rather something that fills in the gaps when we stop taking ourselves so darn seriously.

There is a wealth of research on play and its benefits, but the quote above appeals to me as it chimes with my own belief that we should never stop thinking about the children and (as much as we still can) thinking as children. To have fun together and share experiences is vital and can build on so many of the key skills that have been outlined so far such as **empathy**, **openness** and many others.

Moving into the 2010/2011 academic year (the last one to be considered in this section), it had initially seemed as if there was a very settled year ahead. The year quickly turned out to be anything but settled, showing once again just how easily things can change:

> 9.9.10 I met with (parent), father of (child), who has come as a late applicant for reception. We will be admitting (child) but have some support issues to discuss first.
>
> 18.10.10 We had the first CAF[85] meeting of professionals since the process was introduced for a child causing concern.
>
> 19.10.10 We held a mini 'staff meeting' to discuss the deployment of teaching assistants to best support pupil needs.

The admission of the child in the journal entries caught everyone by surprise. The child exhibited behaviours that none of the staff, apart from me, had experienced before (inappropriate language and physically hurting other pupils and adults[86]). The situation created all number of challenges, not least managing the responses of the staff, but we had to **make do with what we had** as no support, financial or otherwise, was forthcoming from the local authority[87].

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[85] Common Assessment Framework – these were introduced to try and ensure that when a child had multiple agencies involved such as health, social care and education that everyone worked together. In reality, CAFs mostly fell to schools to lead and therefore also to complete the copious amount of paperwork that came alongside it – another problem for small-schools with headteachers often taking the lead in these cases.

[86] After a year a diagnosis of autism and attention deficit and hyperactive disorder (ADHD) was given, but when the child first started, it was difficult for these to be spotted amongst all of the challenging behaviours initially exhibited.

[87] After six months we got a small amount of temporary funding and then, after a year of work, got a Statement of Educational Needs in place which provided permanent funding.

Using what you've got:

As has already been discussed, the staff working with the children are the best resource a school has (see the work of Kane & Staiger, Rockoff and Wright, Horn and Sanders), but these still need to be deployed effectively. When the child in question joined the school, it meant a complete overhaul of the teaching assistant support and how they were working. Two members of staff were taken from their normal roles with the junior class and were instead used to provide one-to-one support with the new child. The situation was challenging for all concerned and needed very careful managing, but the key was that everyone remained focused on the child and making sure that we used the skills of the staff in the most effective way for the school.

We also made great use of the Special Needs Support teacher who came in twice a week to support the child with PMLD by getting her to help us design the right support, including social stories and other helpful techniques that the staff did not have the knowledge of to be able to deliver at the time.

The advantage of this approach, as difficult as it was during that period, was that there was a significant upskilling of staff which proved invaluable in future-proofing the school.

The autumn term also brought my third child, which meant that the time I could dedicate to school was again a little more limited[88]. As a result of the rebalancing of work and home commitments, things like, "11.1.11 After school, I started a Y4-Y6 board games club which was well-attended and good fun!" became a thing of the past. After a number of years of running clubs and 'extras' being the norm for me as a teaching head. I needed to **refine the role** further to fit in with the considerable change in my home life.

[88] Having children could be very different for some headteachers, but both my wife and I work and have always shared everything. I had to make balances where some families may have decided to organise things differently to allow one parent to fully focus on their work.

Refining the role:

To the best of my recollection, the board games club was the last instance of me running a regular after -school session and marks a change in the planning of my time and also how I viewed the role. My view on the role probably marked a genuine turning point, but the ability to refine my role was only possible through the confidence and experience gained through practise of **hindsight**, **support structures**, **adapting** and many of the others**.** As the section moves into my sixth year of headship it was becoming clear that many of the early skills and attributes were coming together and evolving in a way that helped me, and the school, to evolve as well.

2011:

From early in 2011, I found a journal entry that could have been taken from any point right from the start of my time as a headteacher, "17.1.11 Cluster heads met at school and was, as ever, a useful chance to discuss things with people who actually understand". The Cluster heads meeting ties back to my earlier item on **support structures** which remain vital and although Cluster Heads has evolved somewhat over the years, it has always been a place where the local headteachers can get together and share their experiences. Having this close network of small school colleagues is critical to survival as being with people 'in the same boat' is sometimes the only way to really be able to offload and to share the unique experience of small-school headship. Isolation is a constant concern for a headteacher, "stress from a curious kind of public isolation is a constantly recurring theme in leadership work" (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002:29). Every school will hit times of significant extra challenge, and as this thesis moves towards a far more difficult period of my leadership in

Chapter Four, it is a timely reminder that having a strong network of support, especially those who understand and may be able to offer advice, is vital.

Finally, after over five years of my time-line as a headteacher, the next quote offers a timely reminder of the children – hopefully the reason that most headteachers get into teaching in the first place;

> 18.3.11 In the afternoon the talent show was a sight to behold! The winning act was kung-fu ballet!!

One of the joys of a small village school, particularly in the type of community that Kirk Ireton provides, is that children can just be children, by which I mean they can enjoy play without too many external pressures to be 'cool' or to try and fit in with peers. As headteachers it is very easy to go about our jobs, following systems and trying to achieve goals and occasionally it is good to be reminded and ensure you never **forget what it's all about**.

Not forgetting what it's all about:

I am a firm believer that to survive, and hopefully thrive, in the education sector you have got to have a genuine desire to improve the lives of children. Without that desire at the core of your **moral compass** then the pressures of the job are far more difficult to strive through. Flintham's work (2003) on the "Reservoirs of Hope" covers aspects of the job already discussed in **support structures**, but for me, timely reminders of the young people whose lives we affect provides me with the greatest strength to carry on, especially when the times get tough – something they regularly seem to do.

Table 4:

Skill/Attribute/Knowledge	First mentioned in	Cross References
Moral compass	Part 2, An Introduction	Openness/Honesty, Instinct/Inner voice, Difficult conversation, Wangling, Being true to yourself, Having fun, Not forgetting what it's all about
Luck	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Decisiveness
Decisiveness	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Luck, Adapting
Openness/Honesty	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Moral compass, Difficult conversation, Having fun
Hindsight	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Recognising value in the seemingly pointless, Refining the role
Pragmatism	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Learning to live with hoop-jumping
Creating a trusting and confidential environment	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	
Working with freedom and flexibility	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Financial Understanding
Attention to detail	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Seeing the big picture, Empathy, Communication
Financial understanding	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	IT skills, Recognising value over cost, freedom and flexibility
Instinct/Inner voice	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Moral compass, Problem-solving
Problem-solving	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 1	Instinct/Inner Voice, Creativity, Scheduled reflection time, Adapting
Creativity	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Problem-solving, Scheduled reflection time, Adapting, Learning new trades
Support structures	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Different perspectives, Networking, Refining the role, Not forgetting what it's all about
Difficult conversation	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Moral compass, Openness/Honesty, Being true to yourself
Learning from everything	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Different Perspectives, Sticking to your guns, Expanding horizons
Different perspectives	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Support structures, Learning from everything, Networking, Expanding horizons
Scheduled reflection time	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Problem-solving, Creativity
Adapting	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Decisiveness, Problem-solving, Creativity, Networking, Sticking to your guns, Learning new trades, Refining the role
Plate-spinning	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	
Wangling	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Moral compass
Becoming a professional	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	
Networking	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Different perspectives, Support structures, Adapting, Widening professional networks
Staff team	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	
Being true to yourself	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Moral compass, Difficult conversation, Sticking to your guns
Managing difficult people	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Empathy
Sticking to your guns	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Learning from everything, Adapting, Being true to yourself,
Prioritising	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Managing the diary
Learning to live with hoop-jumping	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Pragmatism, Recognising value in the seemingly pointless
Seeing the big picture	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Attention to detail
Widening professional networks	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Networking
It takes time	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 2	Hindsight
Learning new trades	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Creativity, Adapting
Language and labelling	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	
Committing	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	
Expanding horizons	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Learning from everything, Different perspectives, Learning new trades
I.T. Skills	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Financial Understanding
Empathy	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Attention to detail, Managing difficult people, Family life, Taking care with responses, Having fun
Recognising value over cost	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Financial understanding
Family life	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Empathy
Managing the diary	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Prioritising
Headline-grabbing	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	
Personal fitness	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	
Avoiding hijacks	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	
Not resting on laurels, building capacity	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	
Recognising value in the seemingly pointless	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Hindsight, Learning to live with hoop-jumping
Taking care with responses	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Empathy
Recognising history whilst moving with the times	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	
Having fun	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Moral Compass, Openness/Honesty, Empathy, Not forgetting what it's all about
Using what you've got	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	
Refining the role	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Hindsight, Support structures, Adapting
Not forgetting what it's all about	Part 2, Chapter 3, Section 3	Moral compass, Support structures, Having fun

Chapter Four

"Stakeholders, Managing Change and Putting it all in Practice" March 2011 – July 2012

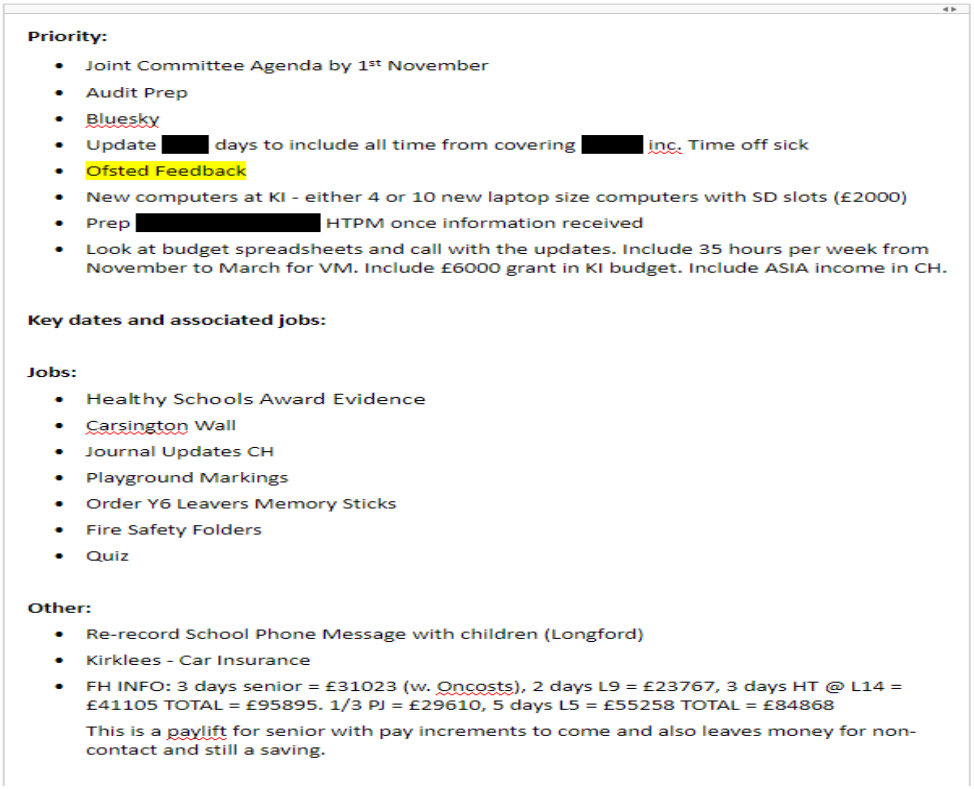
To preface this chapter, and the sections within it, the following describes my part of daily working practice at this point in my career. On my 'office days[89]', and often on teaching days, I wrote out a list of jobs (what some may refer to as a 'to do list') that I wanted to achieve. Such lists are not unusual, but what is important in my context is that the vast majority of the items on my lists were 'management' tasks that involved little or no direct contact with other people. By the end of the period covered in this chapter I had changed my outlook on what I considered important as a small school headteacher. I had focused a considerable amount of my efforts and 'headspace' on the practical which can be seen throughout the last chapter in items about budget, finance and other systems. Whilst it is still important that the school runs effectively, in the period described during this chapter I started to learn more about where the greatest value is to be found in terms of how best I spend time as a small school headteacher.

[89] Any non-contact time I had away from the class teaching commitment.

> A LinkedIn survey of 6,500 professionals found that although the majority (63 percent) regularly pen to-do lists, only 11 percent actually complete them. Respondents blamed unplanned interruptions, something all too familiar to teachers and administrators (McKibben, 2014:2).

Following another INSET day on well-being in 2011, 'task lists' were discussed by the facilitator and framed as an unhelpful system. The idea that each day potentially ends negatively because you focus on the things that have not been achieved due to an incomplete list really resonated with me. The theory that you look back on your day and focus solely on what you did achieve was very helpful in improving my mind-set in general. I still have a task list (now electronic and synced across all my devices) but it is not time limited and is simply to make sure that some jobs don't get forgotten about. **Figure 4** is the current version of the list I am working on (which does include one time-limited job). My lists sometimes have tasks that involve meeting with people, but I mostly find that 'people' time is booked into the diary or simply happens through the daily interactions with stakeholders.

Figure 4:



Priority:

- Joint Committee Agenda by 1st November
- Audit Prep
- Bluesky
- Update [redacted] days to include all time from covering [redacted] inc. Time off sick
- Ofsted Feedback
- New computers at KI - either 4 or 10 new laptop size computers with SD slots (£2000)
- Prep [redacted] HTPM once information received
- Look at budget spreadsheets and call with the updates. Include 35 hours per week from November to March for VM. Include £6000 grant in KI budget. Include ASIA income in CH.

Key dates and associated jobs:

Jobs:

- Healthy Schools Award Evidence
- Carsington Wall
- Journal Updates CH
- Playground Markings
- Order Y6 Leavers Memory Sticks
- Fire Safety Folders
- Quiz

Other:

- Re-record School Phone Message with children (Longford)
- Kirklees - Car Insurance
- FH INFO: 3 days senior = £31023 (w. Oncosts), 2 days L9 = £23767, 3 days HT @ L14 = £41105 TOTAL = £95895. 1/3 PJ = £29610, 5 days L5 = £55258 TOTAL = £84868
  This is a paylift for senior with pay increments to come and also leaves money for non-contact and still a saving.

The period addressed in this chapter covers a year of note-taking on my life as a headteacher. The 'learning journal' was initially designed to be the focal point of this entire body of work. As it happened, the learning journal I created[90], rather than being the core of this thesis, helped to set the foundations by framing my thinking and helping me to understand where I spent most of my time on all those days when seemingly nothing got 'ticked off' the list. The learning journal also helped me to recognise just how much value that time was actually having when considered against the time spent on more logistical or managerial tasks.

[90] References taken from my learning journal will be preceded by the date in the **xx/xx/xx** format to help differentiate from the school journal that has been used in previous chapters where the date has been written as xx.xx.xx

The notes that I took during 2011 and 2012 made abundantly clear that most of my time is spent interacting with stakeholders, the focal point of this chapter. The timeline of my career as a small-school headteacher is maintained as this sixteen-month period includes enough key incidents involving each group of stakeholders to exemplify how important each group is in terms of ensuring the school continues to run successfully. It is interesting that I had not recognised the time spent with stakeholders more until I analysed my notes, especially with my very early recognition that being a small school headteacher was a lot to do with **spinning plates**. My thought processes were still focused much more on the outcomes for the school and the systems to support that and I had not recognised that to keep the plates spinning required a significant amount of 'people' time to achieve.

Utilising the notes from my learning journal and the school journal from this period I will take each stakeholder group at a time by examining 'critical incidents'. This examination provides the opportunity to reflect on the learning points from Chapter Three as well as focusing on my relationships with each group. The analysis will also show the changes that took place in this period and how important some of the incidents have been in the life of the school and in my role as headteacher. To help maintain the flow of the chapter, a few items come out of sequence, but this support the focus on each stakeholder group.

Throughout Chapter Three a list of skills, attributes and knowledge was created and I have now split the list into two sections – 'Managerial/Functional' and

'Leadership/People'. As some of the issues are difficult to fully separate I have chosen to use a Venn diagram (**Figure 5**) to illustrate the divisions. As long as each skill, attribute or knowledge is mostly (in my view), in one category, it will sit within one of the two main groups rather than the middle. As an example, **adapting** could be applied to everything that I do, but is much more pertinent to interactions with stakeholders rather than how I manage my budget and it will therefore only sit in the 'Leadership' section.

Figure 5:



Even now, with all the reflection and recognition of how much of my time is spent with stakeholders, it still surprises me how many of my concerns focus

on the 'leadership' aspect of the role. Both sides of the diagram are important for success as a small school headteacher, but it is a timely reminder, when I seem to currently spend a lot of my time behind a computer, that I should make sure I spend plenty of time with stakeholders[91]. The focus on spending my time with stakeholders is something that was playing on my mind in 2011 as well:

> **22/11/11** As I write some of today's notes, I am in my car at a Tag Rugby tournament, trying to focus on what I'm doing rather than getting out and being involved/spectating as the children play. Once again, I start to think about time and also the things we do that are important and what is valued. Yes – I need to catch up on this note-taking and have some other jobs to do – but would I actually get more for myself/the school if I were to relax a bit, go and do some networking? The answer is that I really don't know, although I suspect it is a balance of both things.

Each of the sections in this chapter will take a stakeholder group and examine my interactions with them through key incidents. I will also return to the use of the skills, attributes and knowledge from Chapter Three as the incidents put some of them to the test and illustrate that I still had plenty to learn and to practise. I have identified the stakeholder groups through analysing the learning journal and identifying key words in the writing. The groups are not in a priority order during this chapter as I want to maintain chronology as far as possible, but **Figure 6** below is in the order I spent most of my time with:

[91] Currently, it has become much easier for me to interact less with some stakeholder groups as I am between two schools and am therefore no longer so 'visible'. It is currently hard to know whether this is simply a feature of my evolved role as an 'executive headteacher' or whether I need to make more time to focus on this aspect.

Figure 6:

Children[92]
Staff
Governors
Parents
Community
Diocese
Local Authority

This list could also include colleagues from other schools that I work with, external agencies and others but I have limited this chapter to the seven groups in **Figure 6** as between them they account for the vast majority of the 'people' time I spend during my working week (and weekends).

Bristow, Ireson and Coleman's 2007 study (in Thomson, 2009:70) for the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) of the working lives of headteachers in England found that:

> Heads spent 39 per cent of their time on management (staff-related issues, budget, behavioural issues, health and safety, grounds and buildings, pupil issues, assessment and examination) and administration (travel, walking around, assemblies, phone calls, emails and mail, newsletter, letters, playground and lunchtime duties, teaching and cover issues, before and after school clubs, special education issues and writing and reading references). A further 17 per cent of time was spent with external stakeholders. 17 per cent of their time was devoted to staff meetings and with administration staff, and a further 17 per cent on professional development issues including mentoring and coaching. What the NCSL calls 'strategic leadership' took up only 7 per cent of their time.

[92] The children as a stakeholder group may have moved further down this list since becoming an executive headteacher.

Despite using different categories Bristow et al. show just how much headteacher time is spent with people. The 39% that includes staff-related issues could very easily have been true for me in the period covered in this chapter as will be seen in the section on governors and staff. A question the quote raises, when focusing on my stakeholder groups, is whether some of the 'people' time may in fact be "strategic leadership" in a small school. As my Venn diagram shows, I have described 'people' skills and attributes as 'leadership' as well.

> School improvement is a collective effort involving senior and middle-level leaders, teachers and other staff, students, parents and the wider community (Gurr and Day, 2014:197).

Before starting to focus in on each group, I also need to reflect on the fact that at least some stakeholders react differently when they are around me, particularly the children and the staff, as there is a power dynamic at play. I have always believed in treating everyone the same and I have already discussed my preferred method of headship as being collaborative. My collaborative approach means that I genuinely see most colleagues as equals and very much partners in the running of the school[93]. However, I am also aware that my view of colleagues does not mean that they see me in the same way. Sidky (2017:113), when analysing the power dynamic between a teacher and a class of students, reports that, "It is obvious that the presence of the teacher puts many constraints on students' freedom, no matter how the

[93] This approach is very much to do with the level of 'trust' that I have in the colleagues and they in me. Without that trust, I find it much more difficult to view them as an equal partners in decision making.

teacher claims a democratic role". I recognise the potential for an imbalance to be at play when I interact with stakeholders. I also understand that people may have reservations about what they say or how they act in front of 'the boss[94]'. When reflecting on the dynamic, it does remind me of how I am viewed by some staff as there is a regular suggestion that the children also behave differently around me and that there is a clear 'Mr Johnston' effect when I come into the room. I have never believed that the particular dynamic between me and the children is to do with me being the headteacher or being male (both a regular belief of some staff). My evidence is that I had similarly good behaviour from pupils in my care as a teacher right from the start of my career. Also, the senior teacher at Kirk Ireton, in post from when I arrived up to the point of this chapter, also had excellent behaviour from the pupils and she was not male. Recognising the influence of the senior teacher is important as it demonstrates that the children behave the way they do because of the boundaries and parameters that area made clear, creating a respectful space where everyone knows where they are and how they will be treated. Boundaries relate back to my role as the headteacher when considering some of the other stakeholders. It may be that some stakeholders behave differently when around me and I need to ensure I continue to recognise that and also that I am the one with the authority to set those boundaries.

I now move onto the stakeholder groups, beginning with two groups who were a very significant feature of this period of my career.

[94] A term I dislike as I really don't enjoy seeing myself as being 'above' other people.

Section One: Governors and Staff

I have chosen to start with the stakeholder groups of governors and staff as this period, particularly from June of 2011 through to January of 2012, is dominated by them. The notes in my learning journal were almost entirely focused on the interactions with both groups throughout the period the journal was kept. I am sure that if someone was actually analysing my time, then parents and children would potentially have come above governors (although probably not staff), but it is clear from my notes that these were the two groups that occupied most of my 'headspace' over the period. I am covering both stakeholder groups together as they are almost impossible to consider separately as their stories are so intertwined.

In "Leading" (2015:225), Sir Alex Ferguson discusses the owners of the football club:

> Authority, and the exercise of control, rests on possessing the confidence of those who provide it. No leader stands a chance if the people he is supposedly managing sense that his hold on the job is tenuous. In football the providers of this authority are the club owners. If they are unequivocal about their confidence in – and support of – the manager, they make his job a lot easier. When I applied for my first managerial job… I was so eager to get my foot on the ladder that I didn't pay any attention to the condition of the club or the personalities who controlled the purse strings. As the years went by, I quickly gained an appreciation of how important it is to understand the person, or people, to whom you have to report and are accountable.

Although the “purse strings” reference is probably more of an aspect of the relationship between a football manager and the owners of the club, the rest of this quote seems like an almost perfect analogy for the relationship between headteacher and governors. As already explained, I was relatively **lucky** that when, like Ferguson, I would have taken any job to become a headteacher for the first time, I landed in a school with a governing body who were relatively easy to work with. Looking back on my appointment, the fact that the governors were prepared to employ an ‘untried’ 29 year old was indicative of the fact that we would work reasonably well together. Of course, that doesn’t mean it was all plain sailing and in the five years leading to the period in this chapter, there were plenty of challenges in managing that relationship.

Governance is something that is easy to miss when looking at the life of a school as most stakeholders barely know that governors exist. Even in schools as small as Kirk Ireton, it is often only the parent governors who other parents have any idea about and even then there is little understanding of the role. We had worked hard at Kirk Ireton to build strong governance but at this point, with **hindsight**, we were still a long way from the high-quality governance we have reached in 2018. We were always aware of how the governing body could be truly effective, but were also approaching a period where governance and school leadership were coming under increased scrutiny. In a speech to MPs in February 2012, Sir Michael Wilshaw, the new Chief Inspector of Ofsted, stated:

> I think we need to spend a lot more time addressing governance arrangements. When schools do poorly or badly it's not just the issue of the school leader, the head and the school leadership team it's the way the governors have held the leadership to account. Our new arrangements will focus much more on governance and the effectiveness of governance than ever before.

The shift in focus by Ofsted is important as it may have been part of the reason that some governors were starting to feel they needed to do more and become more involved in the decision making of the school.

Throughout my first five years there had only been one chair of governors, but by March of 2011 she had given everyone notice of her decision to step down at the end of the academic year:

> **1/3/11** I met with (chair of governors) to discuss general school progress and also transition arrangements when she resigns her long-term post as chair of governors.

During this transition period we had brought in a governor trainer to support 'roles and responsibilities' as some governors were struggling to observe the boundaries of their role. Wilshaw (2015) also observed, "They (Governors) must never overstep the mark and try and run the school themselves"; the Department for Education (2017:29) states, "The effectiveness of a board depends on the quality of its people and the way in which they work together and with executive leaders".

Part of the need for the training was a governor who, whilst extremely conscientious, capable and motivated by a desire to achieve the best for the

school, was overstepping the fine line between strategic leadership and the day to day running of the school[95]. The governor had, rightly, been appointed as vice-chair at the start of the 2010/11 academic year with a clear view that they would take on the role of chair in the future. The relationships and the structure of the governing body were well enough established to have future planning and agreements in place. However, even with the training that was delivered on roles and responsibilities, when the vice chair stepped into the chair at the end of the academic year, problems started to arise.

The chair of governors was not the only person stepping down at the end of the year. Our senior teacher, a long-established member of the school team and the community, took the decision to retire. The retirement presented a number of challenges for the school, not least in replacing an exceptionally strong class teacher, well respected by children and parents alike. The change also meant that we knew we could face a potential conflict when trying to recruit a new senior teacher as we had two internal candidates. To have two internal candidates is never a particularly pleasant situation but when one of them had, through their behaviours and actions, raised concerns about their leadership capabilities and the other was my personal choice to get the post, problems were likely to arise. The situation was further complicated by the fact that the more problematic candidate appeared to assume the role would be theirs.

[95] The governors are a strategic body that holds the headteacher to account and the headteacher's job is the day-to-day running of the school. The balance between holding to account and getting directly involved has always been a challenge for governors and headteachers to manage, especially in small schools where governors often have at least one other role in the school e.g. as a parent.

> **8/6/11** *(Senior Teacher)* has now sold her house and wishes to retire ASAP, I will approach the governors about this as it is in no-one's interest to keep her here any longer than necessary. I will be aiming to let her go at the end of the academic year and to put interim measures in place for September, with an aim to interview as soon into the new term as possible. This will almost certainly cause some problems as 2 current members of staff will be interested in this post.

As a result of the leadership of the school knowing the sort of problems that might arise during the appointment process (another example of the knowledge and skills that I had built up by this point such as **Managing difficult people** and how I was using these to better prepare in advance) I started to design a process that would be, and would be seen to be, completely fair. Once I had drafted the advert and the process, including the interview stage, I sent this to the governing body. Although recruitment of teaching staff falls within my delegated duties, I was always keen to involve governors where I could. This was more of a courtesy than anything else, but in this instance, the new chair sent a number of emails regarding the matter such as the following:

> Hi Peter,
> Have you heard anything from *(other governor – also secondary headteacher)*? I have been trying to get hold of him but have had no success. Did you talk to him about the process before you drafted it? I think we should wait until we have heard from him before finalising things.
> I still have a problem with giving the questions in advance. This is contrary to any interview I have ever had or been part of, and I have spoken to a few people with a lot of experience who have each said it is very unusual. Have you had any formal advice or training which suggested that this is necessary?
> Prohibiting the use of information brought with them on the day seems pointless and unenforceable, especially in these days of smart phones. Another argument not to give the

> questions in advance if anything. Anyway, won't questions be more about the candidates than information?
> On a practical point, who will be teaching the infants and juniors on the day of the interviews? I know governors don't have a role in the day-to-day running of the school, just curious!
> *(Chair of Governors)*

This email reveals a lot about how the relationship had been prior to the governor becoming the new chair, but it was reaching another level with the new dynamic. The email may not have been intended to come across as it did, but even to the impartial reader, there are some parts that can be read as questioning my knowledge, experience and decisions. It is interesting that within the same text, there is a direct reference to “day-to-day running of the school” as this boundary was something we needed to work on. What was extremely helpful is that other governors were skilled in their **communications** and the secondary headteacher was quick to offer his support by sending the following reply:

> Dear All
> Just a short e mail - currently on holiday and there is a very poor signal so fingers crossed that this will go!
> The process and weighting that Peter has suggested is, in my opinion, absolutely fine. I'm quite comfortable with giving questions in advance - should enable us to get more detailed and accurate answers and candidates should be more "themselves".
> Pleased that Governors have had so much input and this is credit to Peter - we just need to be sure that we don't step over the line into operational rather than strategic!
> Happy for the info to go out unchanged.
> Best wishes
> *(Governor/Secondary Headteacher)*

This email was sent following a private electronic conversation where the secondary headteacher had offered his advice about how the relationship with the chair really needed to be sorted quickly as he had experience of just how challenging a weak relationship could be. This brought me back to the **difficult conversation** and, before the summer break was over, I suggested that the chair and I sat down together to try and find a constructive way of working together. This conversation was absolutely vital in our future working relationship as I was **open and honest** regarding the implied tone of many of the emails and how important it was for the school that we worked well together. The conversation was somewhat awkward but productive as it offered the chair the chance to express his views and for us to start to build a properly constructive relationship. It turned out that we would both need a strong relationship in the coming months as there were considerable challenges ahead that **support structures** would be needed for, including back up when **sticking to my guns.** Most pressing following the conversation was the impending staffing issue that had forced our 'chat' to happen in the first place.

As we moved forward with the appointment of the new senior teacher the emails were still challenging at times, but the tone was changing and there was clearly more effort going in to improving the **communication** between chair and headteacher. Although a lot of the **communication** would still irritate me, the effort being made to improve the tone and content was noted and I tried to ensure I did the same. As a result of the **communication** improving, we were

already building a stronger mutual respect as we moved onto the interviews and the subsequent fallout.

The set-up in school at the start of the 2011/12 academic year was outlined in the following learning journal entry:

> **9/6/11** Governors have thankfully agreed to let *(senior teacher)* go early based on *(teacher)* taking the infants full-time and *(teaching assistant)* and myself job-sharing the junior class. This has not gone down fantastically well with *(teache*r), who wants to be in the juniors and who may feel that *(teaching assistant)* is being given preferential treatment in terms of preparation for the job. I have assured her this is not the case and that we are simply trying to ensure consistency for the pupils, but have also set a date for interview 2 weeks into September so that it can't be shown that one person is getting more of a chance.

We can see here more application of **taking care with responses** and **attention to detail** which, although did not ultimately make the forthcoming situation any easier, did ensure that I could feel confident things had been done 'right'. When being challenged about your decisions and courses of action, it is unquestionably easier to justify yourself if you are confident that everything was handled as fairly as possible.

As a result of my concerns about setting up an interview process that could be scored and be scrutinised for fairness, I was left with less control than I would have liked. Thankfully, there was no question in the panel's minds as to who to appoint and that concurred with my own view. Not only did the teaching assistant perform best in every aspect of the day, but it turned out that the

other governors, who knew both internal candidates well, had also a clear view of their preferred candidate. It was interesting to note that **professionalism** was a key feature of the governing body as evidenced by the fact that no discussion had ever taken place with me about how they viewed the staff. Although not knowing their views meant I was somewhat stressed that the panel would not see things as I did, it also meant that I came out of the process feeling confident that it was all done entirely 'above-board' which could not have happened if discussions had taken place beforehand.

After the interview is where the challenge really started and was also where the chair started to show their worth. The following detail of the post-interview fallout also showed that the chair's forthright style was as much of a blessing as it had seemed to me to be a curse at times[96]. The interviews took place on a Friday and the following email was received from the unsuccessful teacher's partner late on the Sunday evening:

> Peter*/(foundation governor),*
> I fully appreciate the difficult task that you will have had on Friday, and by all accounts it was excellently planned and undertaken. Nevertheless, the impact upon my wifes (sic) self-esteem has been immediate, and perhaps more severe than might have been anticipated.
> Please understand that the declaration of 'senior teacher' status to your current Teacher/TA is quite unusual. In fact, I have not yet been able to identify any school of similar demographics which has been able to justify a 'Senior Teacher' in addition to a Full-time Head Teacher.

[96] 'Forthright' is almost certainly how some people would describe my style and I fully recognise that a clash of personalities may have been part of the initial issues with the chair.

> I have asked the appropriate Union to clarify this with the local authority, and I understand this will happen this week. I would politely suggest that you refrain from communicating the title 'Senior' Teacher until clarification of the precise nature of the role is achieved.
> My understanding is that *(teacher)* wishes to spend the next couple of days focussing on the best way to progress her career aspirations, along with the impact this may have on our family life. The immediate effect of this is that *(teacher)* will not be in a position to recommence teaching until her normal contractual days of Weds/Thu/Fri this week.

The agreement with both staff had been that no matter what the outcome of the interviews, the teacher would continue to cover the infant class full-time until Christmas as, whatever way things panned out, we would need time to employ a new member of staff. I picked up the email on the Sunday evening and quickly communicated with the chair, knowing that it was likely that this would be an issue that might require governors to be involved:

> *(Chair),*
> If you get this tonight (thankfully I have just seen it), could you try and pop in a little early tomorrow to discuss this.
> Thanks
> Peter
>
> **Reply:**
> I'll try to be there 8.20ish. Ring me in the morning (*phone number*) if this isn't early enough. Ring me now if you want to.
> *(Chair)*

Having this support was really valuable both on the Monday morning and then over the coming weeks as the email from the partner was only the start of a continued challenge. The situation that only abated when the teacher secured

another job following the half-term holiday and then left as we broke up for the Christmas holidays. Whilst the teacher was still in post, I needed to make use of **decisiveness, empathy** and **widening professional networks** as I sought the support of the Local Authority Human Resources department for the first time:

> Dear Peter
> From the information you provided, this appears to have been conducted in a fair, thorough and transparent way, following due process, whereby you have a well documented audit trail.
> From what you have said, your next priority is to communicate the appointment to parents/carers. In doing so, and given the contents of the email below from *(partner),* you will need to do this as sensitively as possible, particularly as *(teacher)* is an existing teacher in the school.
> My advice would be to give *(teacher)* a ring this afternoon and explain that you have prepared a letter to parents/carers which you are intending to communicate as soon as possible, and which you had intended to send out whoever got the job. Nevertheless you are mindful of how she is feeling and for that reason wanted to speak to her directly prior to sending out the letter. I suggest that you read the contents so that she is aware of what is being said.
> I also suggest that you offer her the opportunity to meet with you when she is next in school so that you can give her more detailed feedback (if she wants it) to help her career development/longer term progression.
> Kind regards,
> *(HR Consultant)*

Having clarified that the teacher was not actually at home and had requested that we communicate via email, I sent the following:

> Dear (Teacher),
> Please find attached the letter that will be sent out this afternoon informing parents of the outcome of the interview process which we had intended to send out whoever got the job.

> I am very mindful of how you may be feeling and for that reason I wanted to communicate directly prior to sending out the letter, and would more than happily have a face-to-face or telephone conversation if you would find it useful.
> When you are back in school on Wednesday you will be very welcome to take up the opportunity to meet with me so that I can give more detailed feedback (if you would like it) to help your career development/longer term progression and also what school may be able to offer in the shorter term that may be of interest to you.
> Peter

The following few weeks were nothing short of horrendous, but to try and condense that into a very brief summary of what I had to manage, here is another entry from my learning journal:

> **5/10/11** What a lovely day! Having woken up early with the thoughts of a difficult meeting in front of me to try and resolve the current impasse with the teacher, things didn't really improve. I had the meeting at break time, having thought long and hard about the timing and whether to request it in advance or not. It was a complete monologue of mainly support but also with the key message that we needed to move forward with a level of professionalism higher than was currently in evidence. I then took the rest of break duty, but had a TA tell me upon return that I would need to take the class as the teacher was 'understandably' in floods of tears. I corrected the 'understandable' viewpoint, but then took the class for a few minutes until the teacher returned. The only thing that had been returned in the meeting was how ill this had made the teacher, to which I said if that was the case I needed to know, but that if they wanted to be in work we still had to have that level of professionalism. At lunchtime I popped home for two minutes to pick up some lunch and got a call from the chair of governors telling me that husband of teacher had rung and ranted including some nasty threats about my conduct such as days off and IT purchases (all spurious!). I had to go through the whole thing again for him and then he was to get back in touch with the husband. Having started to teach KS2 (and with teacher back in school post lunch) I spoke

> again to the chair who had made clear that the choices were talk to me, put a complaint in writing, or shut up (not his words!). He also said not to save things up as ammunition, if there was a problem about anything, it should be reported and sorted separately. This seems to have diffused things and also made clear that the meeting was in no way a disciplinary measure, so we now just wait and see.

The entry shows how much the chair was stepping up to the role, following systems and protocols and also making me feel fully supported. There is plenty more to this story which is not overly useful for reflection on being a successful headteacher, no matter how interesting the whole saga may be on a purely human level. I did note from my learning journal that there is evidence of how **personal fitness** was helping me improve my performance and also how I was able to use it to deal with the stresses of the job:

> **10/10/11** The fun never stops! After a busy weekend of failing to run a sub 1.30 half marathon, my anger has dissipated!

This quote may also provide a sense of how much I had moved on in terms of fitness since my overweight shuffling in January of 2009.

The school moved on with the teacher getting a new post and therefore needing to find another member of staff. The process of the teacher securing the new job did give me some issues with having to deal with the **morals** of being caught between being honest and doing the best for my school:

> **21/10/11** Came in wondering what to expect this morning as no communication from (*teacher)* regarding the interview. When she arrived I asked how it had gone and apparently they have narrowed it down to her, but the head wants to meet her again and will make a decision after half-term! To compound this, (*teacher)* says she isn't even sure she will take it!! This is all a bit of a nonsense, not least because if notice comes in after half-term, we don't have to release until Feb half-term (although we will!). Seems all a bit odd, but now leaves me with an enormous quandary as to whether I call the head for a private chat; normally I would do without hesitation, but given recent problems, the concern is that if I am seen to interfere, I am leaving myself open for criticism or complaint. I would also be putting myself in the position that I may have to answer awkward questions about my recommendation for the post! Despite this, I am almost certainly still going to make the call.

Thankfully, when I did finally speak to the head (who called me in the end) I was only asked about classroom performance and was able to honestly say that the teacher's performance in that regard had always been of a good quality. I made a **pragmatic** decision not to advance the conversation as I did not want to lie (or to tell the truth) about the leadership characteristics which this new role would require of the teacher. It is an example of a problem with no perfect answer or outcome that I had mostly managed to avoid as a headteacher up to this point.

To conclude this section on governors and staff on a more positive note, and to exemplify how challenge and **difficult conversations** are shown to be worth it in the end, here is another entry from the learning journal that shows the developing relationship with the chair as well as continued **refining of the role, reflection time** and **avoiding hijacks**:

> **30/11/11** Productive chat with chair – rightly pointing out that I leap to defensive too quickly. Set up a weekly meet – also saw him at the end of the day as had run out of time to send the email that I wanted to, which was to reiterate that I think he is doing a very good job as chair and then also told him he was right about leaping to the defensive – I think that this was genuine but also had a slight ulterior motive in trying to help him understand my perspective that if caught unawares and blindsided by an unexpected comment or issue then I am more likely to default to the defensive – therefore the weekly meeting – if we ensure that we don't have informal 'chats' at other times might improve our relationship having at first disagreed with the idea. Once again, this shows the value of genuine reflection time which I turned over very quickly in my HTPM meeting, but would be much more valuable if it was longer and more focused rather than 'on the hoof'. This seems again to show the value of this journal and how it is influencing my practice and ability to naturally reflect as doing this seems to be making it much more of an inbuilt thing to reflect and analyse. It was also the national strike day – something that had caused me considerable moral difficulties in that I agree with the pension issues and feel I should have gone on strike, but couldn't shut the school – although I'm not even sure if I'm not just using this as an excuse to avoid a day without pay as we desperately try to reduce our own debts at home!

I have left in the whole of this entry as it also shows that the **plate-spinning** never stops and that there is always another quandary just around the corner. Although it also shows that there is a myriad of staffing issues every day to deal with, I will now move on to the next stakeholder group, the Diocese. The Diocese as a stakeholder is not specific to small schools, but may have more relevance in Church schools such as Kirk Ireton, when they are so small and therefore so directly involved in the local community.

Section Two: Diocese

> **19/6/11** I attended the Wakes Sunday service – this is sort of expected of the headteacher.

Being the headteacher of a Church School comes with a set of expectations and responsibilities that may be quite different to a non-church setting. The Diocese, mainly via the local clergy, are a key stakeholder group in the life of a small Church school.

This stakeholder group includes the local clergy as well as the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) who are responsible for appointing the foundation governors[97]. In most Church schools, a member of the local clergy should also be a governor, which for many of my colleagues causes considerable issues. Thankfully, instances of the two roles clashing have been rare at Kirk Ireton – although this section touches upon one of them.

It is important to clarify that Kirk Ireton is a Voluntary Controlled (VC) Church of England School, which has some differences from a Voluntary Aided (VA) school. The Diocese of Rochester (2014) explains one of the key differences:

[97] Although the reality of these appointments are that they happen via the local Parochial Church Council (PCC) and more often than not are identified by the school and then recommended for the PCC to appoint.

> **Governors**
> In a Voluntary Aided School, a majority of the governing body is made up of Foundation Governors, who are appointed by the Church with a duty to include maintaining the Church of England character of the school in their overall governance. There are foundation governors in Voluntary Controlled Schools, but they are a minority. The Vicar or Priest in Charge of a parish is automatically a foundation governor of the parish school or schools, whichever category they are in. The governors also have some different responsibilities.

The "different responsibilities" and the other minor differences in the operational management of the school are in: staffing, where in VA schools, the governors are the employer rather than the Local Authority; finance, where in VA schools capital funding comes via the Church rather than the Local Authority and in admissions, where a VA school sets its own admissions policy[98]. In a VA school the DBE are also responsible for the quality of the education, whereas in VC schools, this remains the remit of the Local Authority.

The following incident takes place in May of 2012 when the school was inspected as a Church school. We had known this was on the horizon as the Church of England had to respond when Ofsted made 'Outstanding' schools exempt from routine inspection as referenced in Chapter One. The Church wanted to ensure they continued to inspect all their schools on a regular basis and so 'decoupled' from the Ofsted regime and set timeframes for inspection based on the outcome of the previous inspection. For Kirk Ireton, the new

[98] Traditionally, VA admissions policy has meant that the schools may have something about attendance at Church as an admissions criteria, but this is now being phased out by the Church of England.

framework meant we had to be inspected as a previously 'Outstanding' Church school by the end of the academic year five years after the last inspection.

> **Subject:** Kirk Ireton Section 48 Inspection
> Dear (*leader of the team ministry*),
> Just to let you know that we are going to have our church school inspection on May 28th ((*Clergy Governor*) knows about this). The reason for letting you know is that they will be interested in all we have done since the last inspection and obviously you were involved for a lot of that period, so if you were available on the day, it might be quite useful for you to meet the inspector (name).
> Let me know if this might be an option.
> Thanks
> Peter

This email is to the lead of our local team ministry, who had also been a governor at Kirk Ireton in the past. The Wirksworth area (Wirksworth is the nearest town to Kirk Ireton) has a team ministry who are responsible for all of the village Churches. Although each member of the clergy has pastoral care for a particular parish, there is more flexibility with the schools. For Kirk Ireton, the team leader had moved to another school even though he did not have pastoral care for that parish, but because he knew the school was having some issues and felt that the most senior member of the team should be involved. The team leader's **flexibility** and **pragmatism** may be a significant factor in Kirk Ireton not hitting the sort of issues that colleagues complain of when the local vicar starts to use their role as a governor to try and dictate how the school should be run. For Kirk Ireton, any issues with clergy becoming overly involved in the day to day running of the school has always been negated by them functioning well as a team. I have been able to liaise with more than one of them if problems ever

arise or if that is of benefit to the school (as it was in the following case, as having two clergy on hand for the inspection was very helpful).

Of course, having the team ministry doesn't mean that the arrival of a new vicar into the life of school is an easy thing and I had encountered this when we were employing the new teacher earlier in the year. The new vicar had asked (as a governor) if we could add a question to the interview about whether the candidate was a committed Christian. This would be discriminatory in a VC school and therefore not suitable, but I may have not taken enough **care with my response** in this instance as soon after I had replied via email to say we wouldn't be asking such a question, I got the following letter in return:

> Dear Peter
> Thank you, as ever, for your efficiency in turning this around in yet another tight time framework. I think the things you have put into place will make the transition as smooth as is possible.
> Permit me to write this in letter form as the latest flurry of emails has reminded me that emails do very badly in tone, both for the writer and the reader. In my email I was not being prescriptive but sending out what I thought was important to flag up, but I could see from both your and (*Chair)*'s response that I had failed to communicate effectively and for that please accept my apologies.
> I have since, been to see (*Deputy Director)*, at the Diocesan Board of Education, to give ourselves the best chance in finding the right person for the school and the wider community. While it is, as I knew and you reminded me, illegal to discriminate at any level of this process, it is both wise and good practice to draw the attention to candidates what **you** mean by a church school.
> (*Deputy Director)* gave me some suggestions of questions that are general enough to not be discriminatory, but would set the marker which communicates that 'this matters to us

> as a school' and would both raise awareness and test willingness to work in the context you set.
> The questions might run along the lines of… A) what difference do you think it makes to how we function as a school that this is a church school… B) what difference do you think it makes to how you teach, how you behave, how you relate to the other staff and children and parents and the wider community, given that this is a church school…
> I hope you find (*Deputy Director)*'s advice helpful. It certainly clarified things for me, new as I am still to being a governor.
> I remain grateful Peter for all you do, not only in the school, but beyond and please be assured of my support. I have every confidence in your experience and judgement and shall be praying that you might also know God's wisdom.
> With kind regards
> (*Vicar)*

I'm not sure that I recognised it at the time, but this is a rather humbling letter which has a number of important implications. It makes me reflect that I failed to **recognise value in the seemingly pointless,** and had failed to take enough account of **different perspectives.** It is a timely reminder that no matter how much you reflect or believe you have built a bank of skills, it is still vital to draw on them and regularly check that they are still part of what you do. Since this point, we always have a question in every staff interview about being a Church school. The following is the version that is given to candidates (in advance – I **stuck to my guns** on that one):

> This post is a very specific role in a small Church school. Could you tell us why you would like this particular job?
> *(It may be useful to make some reference to the Church School status in your answer)*

Having reflected on that particular incident, I was still using what I had learned up to this point to help deal with the clergy on a day to day basis, just as I would

with anyone who comes into the school as a 'specialist'. Much like the special needs support teacher in Chapter 3 (Section 2), specialists tend to come into school with a focused agenda and do not always understand that whilst their agenda is often very important, it still needs to fit with the needs of the school and all of the stakeholders. In the case of the clergy, there will always be numerous activities and services that we *could* undertake, but it is my role to ensure that the staff are not being overburdened by this. I have used **decisiveness, pragmatism, creativity,** and **honesty** in managing this relationship and supporting my staff in saying 'no' from time to time.

The Church inspection graded the school as 'Outstanding' again, which was helpful given that by 2012 it had been nearly six years since the Ofsted inspection and therefore the grade gave all stakeholders an external judgement to help keep their confidence up in the school. The inspection itself was rather challenging due to the inspector's conduct and that required a lot of managing, but I remained focused on the **big picture** and it was only after the inspection that I went to the DBE to raise my concerns about some aspect of the process.

Section Three: Local Authority

In Chapter 3 (Section 2) I examined my relationship with the local authority (LA) advisor and how it involved my earliest example of the **difficult conversation** as a headteacher. As a result of my early experiences and interactions, my relationship with the LA was now much more about my role with them as an advisor to other schools. I was also much more comfortable with the school's current advisor who, like me, was a serving headteacher. I still had to put my bank of skills into this relationship at times and in the following case utilised **financial understanding.**

As a result of the austerity measures that were starting to take hold in the wake of the 2010 general election (see Chapter One) we faced a difficult situation:

> **23.3.11** Then took phone-call from head of the LA advisory service saying that associate SIPs services will no longer be required as of July 2011. Not only is this £120 a month that I will be worse off, but school will lose about £2500 per year alongside some authority support in improvement planning. Not as a result of my own 'redundancy' I had to consider for the first time as head making redundancies in the future if we are unable to save the required money over the next 12 months.

As finance had originally been a key focus of the learning journal, before it started to become clear that it was much more about people, there were quite a few entries in this vein. However, money difficulties have the potential to impact directly on people and in particular the **staff team.** The following two

entries show that despite the impact of the cuts on my own personal situation and the school budget, I remained **committed** to what I had signed up to for the LA – which then led me in another direction. The first entry also shows just how challenging times were becoming for local authorities by 2011:

> **6.4.11 –** I attended the first SIP briefing this morning since the associates were all made redundant. There were only a VERY small number in attendance, despite the fact that we are still contracted for the morning of this session. *(Head of service)* went through the landscape including the fact that the DfE has 'defaulted' on the final standards fund payment of £2M!
>
> **13.5.11 –** I have spent the last few days having a lengthy email 'conversation' with school governors regarding a role to replace my work as a SIP, which is the Local Leader in Education scheme as run by the National College.

I applied for the Local Leader in Education (LLE) role and was successful in being designated. The LLE training gave me the opportunity to reflect on others' perception of me in a way that hadn't happened before. On the first of the training days for LLE at the National College in Nottingham we were joined by the head of the LA advisory service. There were three Derbyshire headteachers attending and the LA wanted to ensure they had a strong connection with this new 'school-led' improvement system. Near the end of the day, the head of the advisory service pulled me to the side and warned me that although people in Derbyshire knew me and how I worked, that I needed to be careful of how I was perceived in other places. Although I wasn't terribly impressed at the time as the comment was prompted by me being **open and honest** with the National College about the training (of which I was somewhat critical), it did remind me

that in many ways I was still **becoming a professional** and that I couldn't simply walk in like I knew it all. Although I stand by what I said that day, it showed that **empathy, adapting** and **widening professional networks** were not always used to achieve the best outcome in the long term (**seeing the big picture**).

On a more positive note, the learning journal did show that in terms of working with people, some relationships were a lot better than they had been in the past, and that included the LA:

> **28/2/12** Having been reflecting on Link Advisors yesterday, today brought a welcome visit from our current one, who had the good sense to recognise how good we are and had a tour more than the planned 'learning walk' around school.

In terms of the Local Authority and my relationship with them as a stakeholder, the journal entry shows that it was generally positive in a way that it wasn't for many schools. As the academy agenda was starting to permeate the educational landscape, those with weak or even negative relationships with the LA were looking at academy status in a way that I had no intention of doing, having become an ardent supporter of the Derbyshire LA over the years. The generally positive relationship also meant that **openness and honesty** was a key factor as seen in the conversation with the head of service at the LLE training event. Also, being able to talk as equals meant I developed my role as a governor trainer with them which **expanded horizons** for my career. The role as a governor trainer also meant that I found another new income stream for myself as exemplified by the section of an email I sent out in the spring of 2012:

22/3/12

Dear Headteacher/Chair of Governors,

Greetings from a fellow Derbyshire headteacher! (That's there in the hope that you might now read at least a little more of this email!)

I am writing to you as you may well be in the midst of tackling the Annex One and seeing where you might trim a few pennies off the budget. Although we have yet to receive the Traded Services (apparently this will now be 'Services to Schools' and we should be getting it on Monday) price list for 2012/13, one of the prices we know was quite high last year was the purchase of the statutory Headteacher Performance Management External Advice if you got it from the Authority (£475), which many schools did as they weren't sure of the alternatives!

This is where I come in (I'm trying to get to the point as quickly as possible!), last year I delivered the external advice to seven LA schools as a 'private contractor' and am very keen to offer this to more schools at a more affordable cost than the authority can supply (to be fair, they have more overheads than me, and so aren't particularly profiting from the system).

The delivery of external advice to school governors as part of their statutory responsibilities for Headteacher Performance Management is something I have built up and still undertake for between eight and ten schools each year. I was able to send the email above having discussed it with the LA and them responding that they were happy for me to be offering this in Derbyshire as a private contractor. The 'external advisor' role not only gave me some extra income, which was important for **family life,** but it also was a key aspect of my own professional development, particularly during the period when I was no longer able to do school improvement work and gain from all the on-the-job training that provided me with.

Section Four: Children

The children as stakeholders ought to be at the forefront of everything a headteacher does and yet, once again, this chapter is a reminder that in the life of a headteacher, even in a small school, it is very easy to **forget what it's all about**. As shown in **Figure 6**, the children were still much higher up the list as a stakeholder group in terms of the time I spent with them, but they did not take up as much of my thinking time and this is reflected in the learning journal. There were still instances that are reminders that a small school headteacher has responsibilities that in a larger school may be dealt with by someone else:

> **9/6/11** This week is turning into a serious stress as I try to continue ploughing through the monstrous amount of paperwork involved in applying for a child's statement and also organise the staff transition.
>
> **13/6/11** Yet another chunk of time taken on one child as we met for a CAF meeting, not sure what these are achieving!
>
> **14/6/11** My first ever home visit today, which was interesting as I went with the Ed. Psych[99] to the child who we are seeking a statement for. On the surface, it all seems fairly normal, but there is just no real recognition that the child has any needs whatsoever from the parents.

These entries were all related to the child who had come to the school with considerable needs that had not been recognised or dealt with in any previous setting. The whole year was taken up with dealing with this situation, managing the morale of the staff whilst ensuring we succeeded with the child.

[99] Educational Psychologist.

Now that I write about this period with the child I am reminded of just how much time was spent on this one issue and is something that I doubt a head of a large school would ever be as involved with. The experience was a great example of **learning from everything** as we had staff without the skills to deal with the child initially, but that offered the opportunity for me to start building serious leadership capacity amongst the rest of the staff by supporting them in **seeing the big picture.** It would have been easy to exclude this child as he would often hurt both staff and other children, but we were determined to be inclusive and remained focused on how we would all feel like we had failed the child if exclusion ever happened.

The other notes that I took in this period where the children are mentioned are mostly to do with the support of special needs or behavioural issues such as, "**30/1/12** Had parents in after lunch regarding a reception child's behaviour". There were other key entries though that are easy to gloss over and yet may be raise one of the most pertinent points for success as a small school head:

> **1/3/12** Feeling quite down. Not sure why. Could be not eating enough, exercising too much, not relaxing enough, too much thesis stress, feeling like not being challenged/not achieving at work. Unsure what to do about this – probably a good thing that will be with children for next day or so.

On reflection, everything mentioned in the above entry was true and I was lucky that these problems didn't spiral into a complete tipping of my work-life balance and wellbeing. The problems could easily have been a build-up of the many issues that the relatively short space of time that this chapter covers and

how that was leaving me with little proper **scheduled reflection time.** It turns out that being a teaching head, whilst partly a possible cause of the problem, could also be the solution, "**2/3/12** Being with the children definitely helped".

I have been reminded of the benefits of spending time in the classroom recently when I was invited into the infant class to sing with the children. I could easily have said no in order to concentrate on the huge pile of paperwork in my desk but I went in anyway. We had a delightful twenty minutes and I went back to the office refreshed, motivated and achieved a lot more than I would have done without the time with the children.

I find it disappointing that this section on the children is so short, but it reflects that other stakeholders were taking up my headspace at the time, and mostly still do. Fortunately, I can use the same question that we ask at the end of all of our governor meetings[100] which is, "What have we achieved tonight that will make a difference to the children?". When I analyse my day, week or a longer period of time as I am doing in this chapter and find so little directly about the children, I can return to this question as a reminder that, for me, it is all ultimately for the children. Reminding myself of the children provides a reassurance and motivation to keep going. I am also reminded that:

> There are associations between the increased distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities and the continuing improvement of pupil outcomes (Day, Sammons, Hopkins et al., 2009:189).

[100] Replacing the terrors of 'any other business' which was removed to help **avoid hijacks.**

Section Five: Parents

As was the case with the children as a stakeholder group, my notes from this period do not contain all that many references to parents[101]. The notes do indicate that the parents take up a considerable amount of time, if not quite so much headspace as other stakeholders, during this period. A small school headteacher has many interactions with the parents and these can generally be split into two groups: the first is meetings with them individually and the second is interactions with the parent body as a whole – the following notes describe my feelings about the latter:

> **8/6/11** We had parents in for a strings performance – nice to have something like this where I don't feel I'm in the spotlight.
>
> **10/6/11** A part of teaching that I also disliked, writing reports, doesn't go away even in headship as I find myself taking an age to write a comment for all the juniors and also do their ICT sections. I think this is a stress in the same way as end-of-term services, because you are always feeling in the spotlight with parents (a tough audience!).

After another six years of reflection, I'm not sure how much the parents are a "tough audience" and how much of that feeling is my own worries about standing in front of a group of people and feeling like I am being scrutinised. Either way, talking to the parents is a considerable part of the role and the

[101] Or at least with their 'parent' hat on. When discussing governors and the community a number of the protagonists are also parents. In a small school these overlaps in role could apply to a number of the stakeholder groups including clergy and local authority. These overlaps often make **spinning plates** all the more difficult.

expectation is that you speak at all key events, such as the aforementioned end-of-term services. The sense of feeling scrutinised by parents is amplified as a small school headteacher as the community is so small and many stakeholders, especially parents, have a direct relationship with the headteacher in a way that might not happen in a larger school:

> **19/6/11** I attended the Wakes Sunday service – this is sort of expected of the headteacher. I never know the dates early enough (they are set by the church by things like Trinity Sunday – I think!) and this year this has caused a problem (although not anything I could ultimately have changed anyway, as the rest of the week, including the much more involved Wakes Saturday, I will be at Glastonbury). This has been a bone of contention in the past, but has now become more accepted as most parents are not comparing me to my predecessor, and we are also very clear with parents about the situation regarding days in lieu etc.

This links to the fact that **it takes time**, which has certainly been the case with the parents as a stakeholder group. It may have been a combination of embedded relationships and my ability to apply my skills and knowledge more than I would have done in the early days of my headship, but there was evidence that a **trusting environment** was building and that this was improving relationships. In "The Handsworth Revolution", Winkley (2002:95) discusses an early encounter with parents in the community and says:

> The idea is to promote the Fair and persuade shops and homes to stick up posters. But as it turns out, more important is the walkabout itself. It is a sign to the community that the school matters, and that the community matters to us.

I am sure that by 2011 my length of tenure at the school, and also that I had moved into the village itself, made a considerable impact on letting everyone know how **committed** I was to the school and the community and this was paying dividends through a high satisfaction level amongst parents. There is evidence of the satisfaction levels via the annual parent questionnaires. The following **figure (7)** is from the 2012 questionnaires and shows the high satisfaction levels from parents as a group (although there remained some individuals who were not happy with the work of the school):

Figure 7:

Kirk Ireton Church of England Primary School

Parent Questionnaire Analysis 2012

- **79.7% of families responded (27 of 34)**
- **1 EYFS, 8 Infant, 4 EYFS/Junior, 2 Infant/Junior, 9 Junior, 1 all stages, 2 Unknown**

EYFS (Reception)	KS1 (Years 1+2)	KS2 (Years 3-6)
6	11	16

Based on the questionnaires received, each response equals 3.7% (rounded), some rows may not equal 100% due to rounding or no response for that question.

Relevant responses from 2011 have also been listed for comparison – where N/A this is a new question for 2012

(Please tick)	Strongly agree	*2011*	Agree	*2011*	Disagree	*2011*	Strongly disagree	*2011*
My child enjoys school	63%	*58.6%*	37%	*37.9%*				*3.6%*
The school keeps my child safe	70.4%	*82.1%*	29.6%	*17.9%*				
The school informs me about my child's progress	33.3%	*35.7%*	55.6%	*53.6%*	7.4%	*7.1%*	3.7%	
My child is making good progress at this school	40.7%	*46.4%*	55.6%	*50%*	3.7%			
The school promotes a Christian ethos	37%	*N/A*	59.3%	*N/A*		*N/A*		*N/A*
The teaching is good at this school	70.4%	*50%*	29.6%	*50%*				
The school helps me to support my child's learning	48.2%	*42.9%*	44.4%	*53.6%*	3.7%	*3.6%*		
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	55.6%	*46.4%*	44.4%	*53.6%*				
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example, changing class or changing school)	22.2%	*32.1%*	59.3%	*53.6%*				
The school meets my child's particular needs	40.7%	*42.9%*	51.9%	*50%*		*3.6%*		
My child has enjoyed learning in the Key Stage Two project days	48.2%	*N/A*	14.8%	*N/A*		*N/A*		*N/A*
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51.9%	*53.6%*	44.4%	*39.3%*	3.7%	*3.6%*		
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	51.9%	*42.9%*	40.7%	*53.6%*				
The school is led and managed effectively	55.6%	*35.7%*	40.7%	*57.1%*		*7.1%*		
The school has strong links with the community	55.6%	*N/A*	40.7%	*N/A*		*N/A*		*N/A*
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	66.7%	*57.1%*	29.6%	*39.3%*				
Visitors feel welcome in the school	55.6%	*57.1%*	40.7%	*39.3%*				
Pupils are well-behaved and well mannered	63%	*75%*	37%	*25%*				
The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities	77.8%	*N/A*	18.5%	*N/A*		*N/A*		*N/A*
The school website is a useful tool for school information and for helping my child learn at home	29.6%	*53.6%*	70.4%	*39.3%*				*3.6%*

Another important way that I interact with the parents as a group is through letters and emails (with the latter now being the norm), "**23/1/12** Got lots of little jobs done this morning, emails to parents etc.". **Communication** is one of the keys to success with all stakeholder groups and has been a thread throughout this chapter**.** With the increase in the use of emails, I was able to get key messages out regularly and to everyone involved, focusing both on the "skills" of communicating and the all-important "content" of what was being communicated (Hentschke, 2009:153). From the start of having an email 'mailing list' I made sure that governors were all copied in to everything that went out from school, making them feel more involved as well. As this whole chapter is about time spent with people, it is important to consider the quality of this time and good **communication** skills. These **communication** skills are deeply connected to **openness and honesty** which is vital in making the interactions valuable.

Communication:

When looking at stakeholders and the premise of this chapter being time spent with people, it is not surprising to identify **communication** as a key skill for successful headteachers. Day, Sammons, Leithwood et al. (2011:165) state that, "Communication and relationships were also a constant leadership focus". **Communication** needs to be a focus for two reasons: the first that it is clearly important for effective relationships and will always remain so, but the second is that to focus on it should mean it is practised and therefore improved. Practicing for improvement is the case for both verbal and written communication and links to **empathy** and **taking care with responses**. My experience has been that the more practise I have with **communication**, the better I am able to avoid challenges by pre-empting the questions that may be asked or the concerns that may be raised when communicating with stakeholders.

Laar (2014:222) also identifies a key attribute of dealing with **communication**:

> Their (headteachers') command of the inordinate amount of written communication and directives to which they are subjected, and their ability to manage it and relate it to what they judge to be in the interests of their school and children.

A useful reminder that **communication** is very much a two-way process and both directions need to be nurtured and practised.

The importance of **communication** is just as valid in the individual interactions as it is with whole stakeholder groups and there are numerous examples of time spent with parents in my notes, although some of these are actually with people who weren't parents at the time:

> **28/10/11** Whilst running past the school at the end of a morning jog, I saw a couple of adults and 2 small children at the front door of school. I had already been in school a couple of times over the course of the week as toilets were being refurbished, but thought I should check why people were loitering at the school! It turns out that they were one of a number of parents who have been in touch over the past few weeks about places at our school. We had a chat about the way things were and they intended to go directly to the estate agents to rent a house just across from school. Their youngest then needed to go to the toilet, so I brought them to my house! They were very grateful!

> **5/1/12** Another prospective parent called to look around the school!
>
> **18/1/12** Also spent another 50 minutes showing round a parent who is definitely coming to the school.

Showing prospective parents around is a task that I always take on myself, rather than delegating to other people. The tour around school usually takes around an hour. I must have always had a sense that the time taken to show people round the school was important as pupil numbers are a vital part of any school, but it was only around this time that I was starting to recognise the value that all this time (which I often resented) had.

There have been periods in my headship where interactions with parents were a lot more than the odd behavioural issue and showing around prospective parents, but by 2011, the main aspect of working with parents as a stakeholder group was probably summed up by the following note, "**6/11/11** Dovedale Dash with lots of parents". The Dovedale Dash is a local fell race, but what is more important about the situation is that I was now finding it harder not to be in social situations having moved to the village in 2010. The likelihood of seeing parents out of school meant that I had to be highly aware of remaining **a professional** in all situations and being even more attuned to **taking care with responses.** Being forced to constantly on my guard in order to ensure a workable situation between my home and work life supported an enhancement of a number of skills as they were forced to the forefront of my mind and therefore had to be practised all the time.

> **30/12/11** Attended a birthday party with my children for another village child whose older children attend school. This is quite an odd setup as they are people who both my wife and I could consider 'friends' but the dynamic is difficult due to my professional role. Maybe I make this more difficult than it needs to be, but I know that I do still need to be very careful. As blurring the boundaries, with some people at least, could be a very dangerous thing to do.

Keeping clear boundaries was something that was desperately needed during the times when the next stakeholder group (the community) posed a challenge. Wilson (2009:817) reported that headteachers of small Scottish primary schools:

> Were less likely than they had been to live in their schools' catchment areas and they were anxious both to maintain their own privacy and also encourage parental/community involvement. This need to achieve this delicate balance between parental involvement and possible interference was still evident.

Section Six: Community

Looking through both my learning journal and the school journal from 2011 and 2012, the community do not come up very often – when they do it tends to be a fairly significant event. Given that much of this chapter has described the work I put into building relationships, the following incident was not an easy period of my headship. The situation may have been worsened in the knowledge that I put so much effort into the school as a central point of the community, something which can be seen in small schools internationally:

> The holistic approach, with which the principal addressed the complex challenges of the school, was complemented with strong social networks, which she created with external stakeholders with whom she co-operated for the daily functioning of the school. (Pashiardis, Savvides, Lytra et al. 2011:542)

The background to the following incident is not confined to Kirk Ireton as it is also to be found in rural areas around the country – a very poor internet connection:

> A third of homes in the UK have broadband speeds well below the national average, according to research from price comparison site uSwitch. While half of addresses get broadband speeds of 6.7Mbps or above, a third struggle to get speeds above 5Mbps, 1.7m speed tests found (BBC, 2012).

In the village the traditional cabled method of getting the internet (via the British Telecom network) provided a connection speed of 1mbps. At the school

the poor connection speed then has to be split amongst multiple users. I had been lobbying the Local Authority about this since I started in 2006 as our curriculum, and also office work, was severely hindered by such a slow connection.

Over the Christmas holidays of 2011 I received a telephone call at home from a local planning officer. The officer informed me that a planning notice had been put in by BT to put a 'monopole'[102] onto the village field in order to provide a wireless connection to the school with vastly improved speeds. The planning officer had some concerns surrounding the monopole as the village is a 'Conservation Area'[103] and therefore applications of this nature had to be dealt with carefully. I was assured that, given the purpose of the monopole, it would get consent and the school would soon be getting the broadband it needed. The call with the planning officer was the last I heard of it until I was approached by a member of the parish council, asking for some more information about the whole project.

> **6/1/12** Another prospective parent turned up on the doorstep at 3pm as I was due to go into the juniors and was already in the midst of a conversation with a member of the Parish Council (also a parent) who had called to talk to me about the very contentious issue of a wireless internet receiver being put on the village field to support our quest to finally get decent broadband! I managed to get into the juniors and was then with the parent until 4.30pm!

[102] As will be seen, this became known in the village as a 'mast'. The term is misleading, but was adopted by those that opposed the monopole.
[103] The village of Kirk Ireton is mostly within a 'conservation area' meaning that any planning application has to consider how it will impact on the character of the village.

It became clear that the monopole was turning into a much bigger issue when I received a call from another parent who wanted to discuss the, "school's plans to construct a 'mast' on the village field". The parent had a property adjacent to the field and told me that not only were they concerned aesthetically, but had considerable reservations regarding the safety aspects of the equipment. This conversation was lengthy and, although I still hadn't realised what a big issue it was becoming, the call was enough to irritate me, "**13/1/12** Spoke to luddite parent re: new plan for internet". Hargreaves (2004:287) contends that, "Change and emotion are inseparable" and it seems that in this instance both the parent and I succumbed to this (which may suggest that I didn't provide the best **communication**). It was only after the telephone call that I discovered that planning consent notices had gone up in the village and at the recent Parish Council meeting a group of local residents had used the open forum portion of the meeting to air their considerable concerns about the project.

As I started to realise that this was turning into an issue that was not constructive for the school, either in terms of community relations or, more importantly to me, in terms of our desperate need to improve the internet speeds, I convened a meeting of all the parties involved in the planning process for the upgrades:

> **26/1/12** Had all the relevant bodies regarding the BT monopole in school. Got a lot of information that we can pass on and have now set up a meeting to try and move forward on the 'village politics' front.

The meeting took place in school with representatives from BT, the head of I.T. services for the Local Authority and the chief planner for our local area. To then continue my attempt to enact an, "intellectual and emotional engagement with all stakeholders" (Day 2004:432) the chair of governors[104] and I felt that the best way to move forward with the information and options we now had available to us was to convene a meeting of the local parties that had an interest:

> **30/1/12** This was a little difficult. (The chair of governors) decided to chair and focus the meeting on why we need the improved speeds, but this was not really of interest to at least some of the people there. In fact it was fairly clear that one person was just so set against it that debate was impossible! It did seem that we moved forward though.

Unfortunately, things then got rather worse and the issue took on a whole new level of challenge via the village newsletter (mostly supplied by an email list) which was distributed electronically on the evening of the meeting in school:

> **Internet Eyesore**
> I think it is time the village got together and formed a pressure group to get the poor internet service to the village improved. The issue came to a head for me with the application made by the School/BT to erect a 30 metre tall microwave mast in the village field. The function of the mast is to provide the school with internet facilities at a higher speed than are available via the phone line. Needless to say, living where we do we have objected to the planning application.

[104] Who was now on his second significant challenge since taking on the role. These challenging events did seem to be cementing our improved relationship and the support he would offer when needed was gratefully received.

The ‘fallout’ from the newsletter article was considerable. We started to receive emails and telephone calls from ‘interested parties’ in the village and in particular, a call that led to this note:

> **1/2/12** Difficult conversation with me far from at my best with a stinking sore head with a parish councillor I have never met.[105]

To try and deal with the situation, I wrote a lengthy letter to the whole village which I asked the editor of the newsletter to distribute and also sent to our own school email list. I then printed copies of the letter and took them with the paper copies of the village newsletter to the community shop for distribution to those who don’t receive it electronically. The letter at least seemed to help the wider community, including those who were so opposed to the ‘monopole’ plans, understand the school’s standpoint and particularly the reasons that a good internet connection was so important. By doing this, it seems we avoided the fate of another of the principals in Pashiardis et al.’s (2011:548) study:

> The principal did not include the parents in the school life and did not attempt to make contact with the members of the local community. Consequently, the parents were left completely ignorant of the vision which the principal appropriately communicated to the internal stakeholders and naturally contended that the principal had no particular vision for the school’s improvement.

[105] The timing of the note coincides with the news I received about a headteacher colleague having been in a serious car crash that will be related at the end of this chapter.

Had we known more in advance, or had the time to consider the community response, sending our letter prior to the planning notice may have circumvented many of the problems that then arose. Once again, the whole incident exemplifies how important effective **communication** is in a small school setting. It would not be unusual for me to have "acted rather than reacted" and "(taken) the offensive in situations of adversity" (Day and Schmidt, 2007:80) but in the situation with the monopole we were only able to react. It is easy to envision that some stakeholders felt that the whole plan may have been conceived on a very ad hoc basis and that the community had not been considered, but the letter seemed to address those points and we began to receive some positive feedback.

Ultimately, the monopole was never put in place and we are still working with the same poor internet connection years later. Although this was a difficult period without a positive result for the school, it is very possible that the community of the school was strengthened as:

> High priorities given to creating an active discourse that involves the exchange of values and ideas amongst students and teachers and between teacher and students as they learn together (Sergiovanni, 1999:17).

might also translate to discourse between school leadership and external stakeholders. Strike (2003:70) states that:

> Having schools that are communities is essential to the provision of safe and emotionally secure learning environments. I am not thinking here primarily of physical safety. I am rather thinking of having a sense of belonging and the emotional security that results from belonging. These feelings enable exploration and investigation. In communities, human relationships are more than arm's length. They depend on such things as trust, friendship, mutual affirmation, love, caring, cooperation, and especially a sense of membership. These features of the relationships that characterize communities are also preconditions of growth.

It is therefore possible that the work done around the monopole incident enhanced at least some aspects of community. In the intervening years, the only issues that have arisen have also been to do with the field, but have been much easier to deal with as it seems only ever to involve a small number of the members of the community. The following email demonstrates that no matter how hard you try, there will always be a few people who are difficult to keep on board.

> (*Villager*), how can I do the competition in skool (sic) when the headmaster has deemed me an undesirable? He can withdraw his ludicrous claim to the village field and he can apologise to me for setting that bloody (*member of staff)* woman at my throat. or f*kkim (sic).

Although I can now look back on this particular incident (caused because we asked someone to stay off the field during lunchtimes) with mild amusement, it wasn't funny at the time. However, it was something else that happened during this period that helped remind me to **see the big picture** and to keep everything in perspective. It is a shame that it required a tragic event to get this

sort of reminder to the forefront of my mind. The following is an email from one of the two headteacher colleagues that I had met right at the start of my headship career through the New Visions training mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 2:

> I send my apologies for not keeping in touch. We had a chaotic Christmas, back in hospital with my eldest son - he developed complications with the stomach surgery he'd had following the crash & the two of us spent Christmas Day & Boxing Day in A&E and then on the children's ward, (child) on a drip & me with a cheese sandwich and a sofa bed! Fortunately he's fine again now and we eventually got to celebrate Christmas just a few days late. I was back in hospital last Tuesday for what I'd hoped would be my last operation. The surgeon had hoped that the work they'd done on my kidney at the end of October would have repaired itself but unfortunately the fix hadn't worked. They've attempted another fix & I now have another op in 6 weeks' time to see if this one has worked. Consequently I'm still off work & will be for a while.

This email was the first I had heard from the colleague since I had found out a few months earlier that she had been in a car crash where her husband was killed and she was in an induced coma for many weeks.

To conclude this chapter on stakeholders, I would like to return to my original point that it is abundantly clear from the notes I took in this period that the vast majority of my time is spent with people. It is vital that this 'people' time is recognised when considering the skills, attributes and knowledge needed to succeed as a small school headteacher. More than anything, my reflections have led me to conclude that the most valuable thing that I can give to stakeholders is my time. In his book "Yes Man" (2008), Danny Wallace attempts

to improve his life by being more positive and saying “yes” more often. As part of the adventures this leads him on, he gets to meet a man who is known by his community as the “Yes man”. What Wallace concludes is that the success of this man is not that he says “yes” to everyone, it is the time that he gives to people that they value so much in him

> What struck me about this wasn’t the way his diary was filling up. It was the connections he had made. The friendships. The time he had for people. *That* was what it was all about (2008:338).

This description has always resonated with me and I am reminded that **it takes time,** but that if that time is used effectively, it builds a network of support and relationships that then make everything more positive. When new or increasing challenges need to be faced all of the time spent building relationships becomes invaluable, just as the practise and embedding of all the identified skills, attributes and knowledge with stakeholders have been for me as a headteacher.

Conclusions

And so we have come to the end of my story – at least in terms of this thesis. Following the conclusions there is a review of how the leadership literature speaks to these and then after a final summary there is a short postscript about 'what happened next'. Everything I had learnt up to 2012 was about to be tested in a vastly more challenging environment. The postscript is important as this body of work aims to provide something of an 'instruction manual' to those embarking upon a career as a leader, and particularly those considering headship of a small school. There are courses and qualifications available to help aspiring leaders to prepare for headship, but although these courses are helpful in deciding the sort of headteacher you want to be and how your vision can be formulated, this thesis offers a much deeper understanding of the role.

The original question for this thesis was to examine what makes 'success' in a small school and what is needed to not only survive, but ultimately thrive in the role. In analysing the first six years of my time as a small school headteacher I have noticed themes developing. Bush (2003:5) states, "There is no agreed definition of the concept of leadership", but I would like to conclude by gathering everything together into broader motifs. These motifs can be used to support new or existing leaders in synthesising everything so far into more manageable themes. Of course, as with the earlier Venn diagram, there are a number of the skills, attributes and knowledge that could easily sit within another motif, but I have put each into the area I feel it fits best.

Be thoughtful:

I have started with 'Be thoughtful' as it is the motif that encompasses what has underpinned so much of my success over time. By always thinking things through you will develop better **hindsight** and the ability to use that to your advantage which also helps with understanding **different perspectives**. Of course, **scheduled reflection time** is vital in being able to think things through. I am gifted with a good memory, but no matter how good it may be, the journals have been immensely helpful in my learning journey, so I would now recommend to colleagues some formalised approach to reflection. There is also the less structured reflection time – the structure of this conclusion came to me whilst lying awake on a school residential when all of the children had gone to bed. Uninterrupted 'downtime' is often when my mind gets a chance to 'think' – so find this time and get yourself to do it. I will admit that I am **lucky** enough to only need about five hours sleep but even if this were not the case, the point is that leadership depends on using the time you have well. Through reflection skills and attributes like **seeing the big picture, managing difficult people, recognising value over cost** and in **the seemingly pointless** will also become easier. Thinking things through will not stop **hijacks**, but it should help the headteacher to avoid some of them as the more you reflect and learn, the more you will be able to pre-empt potential problems and the time they then take up to resolve.

Although it will be a much more natural process for some leaders, I have always had to use a more logical approach in order to develop **empathy**, which does

not come easily to me. By taking the time to reflect and analyse situations, whether they have gone well or not, I have built up a bank of **responses**, alongside a more ingrained ability to consider these even when in 'the thick of it'. Being thoughtful also helps a leader to take care with **language and labelling** and to **recognise history**.

Be curious:

The fact that I took on a doctorate shows, as much as any given incident in my story of headship, my interest in wanting to know things and to be knowledgeable – an attribute that is important for any leader. Thomson (2009) uses Professor Dumbledore from the Harry Potter books as an example of a headteacher that is venerated and deemed to be both successful and respected. One of the attributes that is revealed though his title 'Professor' is, "that this is a knowledgeable head"(2009:45). Dumbledore and the Harry Potter series exemplify the awe and wonder that should always be there for children and is still there for me as a leader. By being curious, you are more likely to **learn new trades** and gain better **financial understanding**; neither of sound terribly glamorous, but you can **learn from everything** and I am still amazed by how elements of learning from one area open up a better understanding of another. This **attention to detail**, can also be key in unlocking **creativity** as new ideas and solutions present themselves when knowledge is applied and framed in different ways.

Be prepared:

'Be prepared' is not just a slightly twee reference to the boy scouts – although I was in that movement from the age of five until I was nineteen. Being prepared builds on 'be thoughtful' but also has a very practical aspect when combined with a mantra of 'better to have and not need than need and not have'. I find that the view that 'no plan survives contact with the enemy' is actually pretty accurate, but that doesn't mean not to have a plan – it means having many plans, having thought through as many eventualities as you can. By being prepared you are far more able to **adapt** and also to be able to **problem solve**. Being fully prepared also helps with **prioritising** as you are far more able to make the right decision about what to do next if most of what you are doing is 'in hand' and only a small number of variables are on the go at any one time. There is also a link to **managing the diary**, and having plans in place that allow time if things do start to go wrong. **Wangling** is also an awful lot easier if you are prepared, both in who you are dealing with and with everything you need to make your argument and answer the questions that may come your way.

Be determined:

I make no pretence about the fact that I am competitive and dislike failure (as I perceive it) and this certainly feeds into my determination to 'succeed'. What is important about my determination is that it is not about 'beating the other

guy', it is about being the best that I can be, regardless of what anyone else achieves. Determination helps when **learning to live with hoop-jumping**, **using what you've got**, **plate-spinning** and **difficult conversations** as these all require a lot of both physical and emotional energy and so having the motivation to go on can be extremely helpful.

Being determined also helps me to remain of the opinion that the Harry Day quote (see Brickhill 1954:44) that rules are, "for the obedience of fools and the guidance of wise men"; this viewpoint is a very helpful way to regard the education system at times. With such a **pragmatic** view in mind, you can work with **freedom and flexibility** and act **decisively** when needed. Determination also means **not resting on laurels**.

Be generous:

Be generous – especially with your time as that will really make a difference to people which in turn sets the tone for the school. It is easy to become overly focused on the paperwork and systems of the school as a headteacher and whilst these are not to be underestimated in their importance, the analysis of my learning journal showed me, more than anything else, the value of 'people time'. It is through the 'people time' that **trusting environments** are created and **support structures**, **networks** and **wider professional networks** are built. Time with colleagues is also how you properly interact and develop the **staff team** - without an effective staff no school or headteacher can ever succeed.

Being generous with yourself is also vital, not only because it keeps things in perspective and helps to stop you becoming focused on one aspect of life, but also because it helps retain a stable **family life**. By **family life** I don't just mean a partner or children, but rather a more general quality of living with friends and personal interests. In an earlier part of this thesis I mentioned the challenges I had with attended the Glastonbury Festival each year. I still attend the festival every year and have recently achieved a lifelong ambition by playing there and appearing in the printed programme with my acoustic duo, "Wobble & Wheeze" (see **Photograph 6**).



Photograph 6: Snapshot of the 2017 Glastonbury Festival Programme

Not only does such an experience give me energy and motivation in general, it also seems to inspire some of the children and even parents. A family who recently joined the school told a member of staff that knowing I played at Glastonbury was a "clincher" in their decision to attend.

Be fully committed:

Whether or not you end up being the leader of any particular establishment for a long time, you need to act and make decisions on the basis that you will be – showing long-term **commitment** to doing the very best job possible. Thinking about everything you do as if you will still be the headteacher in ten years or more is going to help make the best decisions. I was helped in remaining focused on the job in hand as I had no further ambitions when I started as a headteacher. As a result of not thinking about 'the next step' I was solely focused on the job in hand, and not what my future might be beyond Kirk Ireton. Being fully committed will also help as it is only with considerable **hindsight** that I have really started to understand that **it takes time** and a long-term commitment works towards that. Seldon (2009:91) states that, "Trust is cumulative in relationships and grows with each encounter, so continuity of relationships is all-important". By staying committed and being in one place over time, it really helps to develop the headteacher as a **professional** and to **refine the role** as it can be improved, new techniques applied to the same situations, but all the time within an ever-building **network**. I have also found that keeping things relatively constant by staying in post for a comparatively long time helps with **expanding horizons**. The capacity built by keeping the school in a fairly stable state allows headteachers to try new things to a much greater degree.

All of the benefits of being fully committed has been supported by my improved **personal fitness** and I would recommend to anyone wanting to take on the role that fitness should be taken into account. As someone who has been both extremely unfit and also at the other end of the scale, I can confidently say what a difference it makes – especially when the going is tough. The amount that **personal fitness** has supported my mental resolve is considerable – especially the 'marathon' mentality of keeping going even when your body is screaming at you to stop.

For me, there was one part of my **commitment** to headship that I believed in right from the start – that if I ever left, it should be that no-one really noticed. Of course, this doesn't mean I would just disappear, rather to ensure that if I did go, the school could run effectively without me for a reasonable length of time. In a speech to the National Leadership Conference before retirement in 2017, Steve Munby shared his questions to ask when leaving a leadership role:

> 1. Did I leave my organisation in better shape than when I started?
> 2. Having experienced my leadership, were colleagues more likely to want to be leaders themselves and more equipped to do so?
> 3. Did I make a difference to the lives of those I came into contact with? Are they better or worse people for having worked with me?
> 4. Have I shown authenticity and integrity in my leadership? Have I led with moral purpose?

These questions seemed like the perfect encapsulation of what the goals of effective leadership should be within them are many aspects of the conclusions of this thesis.

Be yourself:

I recently ran a series of assemblies for the children that were focused on self-esteem and we started with a PowerPoint presentation filled with quotes that lend themselves to that theme. The quote that seems to fit here is one that is often attributed to Oscar Wilde[106], "Be yourself; everyone else is taken". There is a serious point here for leadership in that it is an intense and heavily scrutinised role. To try and be something you are not is doomed to failure as there is no way that you can maintain a pretence over time under the sort of spotlight headship put the leader under. I am **open and honest** even if this is sometimes to a fault and the effect of this is that I am seen as genuine. There may be times when stakeholders are not happy with some of the decisions I make or the way I handle something, but with strong and effective **communication** there tends to be a grudging respect and also a belief that I am not trying to hide anything. Of course, ensuring that your guide is that all important **moral compass** is vital in these decisions leading to success over time.

Having a strong vision and ethos (although never one that isn't open to **adaptation**) helps with all of this and it may be why courses such as the NPQH give 'vision' such a high-priority when preparing candidates for headship. If you have a strong understanding of who you are and your core beliefs, then it is much easier to **stick to your guns** and remain focused on what you want to

[106] There is no clear evidence as to who originally said or wrote this.

achieve. Being yourself should also feed the **instinct/inner voice**, at times when there is little guidance as to what you next move needs to be.

By being yourself you can also not waste your time trying to do things to please other people or to make yourself look 'good'. Pleasing other people and looking 'good' should be by-products of doing an effective job, but not the purpose of it. I also find it much easier to not have more than one 'persona' and I therefore am pretty much the same in all aspects of my life, both in work with all the different stakeholders (including the children) and at home, with friends and family. Of course, there are aspects of my personality and behaviours that I recognise have to be held in check at times, but never at the cost of acting in a way that goes against my core beliefs.

Conclusions and Leadership Theory

Before moving to my final summary, this section looks at the literature that has underpinned my approaches to leadership throughout my time as a headteacher and considers how my conclusions relate to what leadership research has to say about effective or 'successful' leadership – the central tenet of this thesis.

The main 'story' in this work has been about my first six years as a headteacher. Throughout those first six years (and beyond), I have worked to the same mantra – to get the school to the point where I could disappear one day and that essentially no-one would notice (as discussed on p.202 within **'Be Fully Committed'**). I based my approach to headship on a combination of the experiences of the headteachers I had worked under (those that I saw as both effective and ineffective) and also the messages learned about leadership throughout my master's degree. The learning from the master's degree was further cemented during the taught aspect of the doctorate that this thesis is the final requirement for.

It is easy for a reader to approach a narrative written by a school leader and see it as a 'hero' narrative. As was briefly mentioned in Chapter Three, the idea of being a 'hero-head' was everything I hoped to avoid in my time as a school leader and the literatures in this section support that vision.

> Charismatic leaders may lift their school to impressive heights, but the leader's shoes are usually too big for successors to fill… And while heroic leaders can achieve great things through investing vast amounts of their time and energy, as the years pass, this energy is rarely inexhaustible, and many of those leaders and the people who work for them ultimately burn out. (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006:2)

Having come into Kirk Ireton on the heels of a leader who had made their success through the investment of "vast amounts of their time", I could see that, for me, that was never going to be sustainable and nor could I fill those shoes.

This section examines the literatures that provide some guidance as to another approach to that of the 'hero-head' and again exemplifies why reflection and the need to **be thoughtful** are so important in the lives of teachers and school leaders. Informed practice has helped me to make sense of my role and to navigate a path through the challenges of headship, a journey which continues every day, even after nearly twenty years in the profession. This thesis has been another step in that journey and has helped refine my practice further.

The list of skills, knowledge and attributes that are summed up in my conclusions exemplifies the "complex, unpredictable and multi-dimensional character of leadership" (Angelidou, 2010:1) but also shows in practice much that speaks to the existing body of research on leadership in schools.

Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2007:29) identify the “core practices” of successful school leadership and claim, “almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic practices” wherever they work:

> • Building vision and setting directions: includes building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and demonstrate high performance expectations. People are motivated by goals which help them find meaning in their work and find a sense of identity for themselves within their work context.
>
> • Understanding and developing people: includes providing individualized support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation and the modelling of values and practices important to the mission of the school. These specific practices according to more recent research has demonstrated, 'are central to the ways in which successful leaders integrate the functional and the personal'.
>
> • Redesigning the organization: includes building a collaborative culture, creating and maintaining shared decision making and, restructuring the organization, building relationships with parents and the wider community. This set of practices acknowledges the importance of collective learning and the building of professional learning communities as key contributors to teachers work and students learning.
>
> • Managing the teaching and learning programme: focus on staffing, instructional support, monitoring school activity and buffering staff against distractions (Leithwood et aI., 2007:30).

Clearly, as principles underpinning leadership and management practices, these look different in different places. Each school brings its own particularity – history, people and place. My research provides concrete detail of how these four key practices were accomplished in a small rural village school in the UK.

"Building vision and setting directions" relates closely to my conclusions on '**Be thoughtful'** and **'Be generous'**; to build a shared vision relies on the creation of **trusting environments** and the **staff team**, alongside the consideration of **different perspectives**, **seeing the big picture** and other key skills, knowledge and attributes. In the village school these aspects of leadership also apply to "Understanding and developing people" and "Managing the teaching and learning programme". Although I have reflected on the **luck** that I experienced by inheriting an effective school and therefore I did not have to face any significant "redesigning (of) the organization", the postscript to this thesis will make clear that this was a challenge I was still to face.

My conclusions also show how much of my approach might be considered to fit within what the research describes as "distributed leadership" (Leithwood, Mascall and Strauss, 2009). Leithwood et al. (2009:xvii) make clear that effective "distributed leadership" relies on a focus on the, "Conditions under which distributed leadership has its most beneficial effects" and that this is not the same as "being popular". Distributed leadership relies on a continued ability to **be yourself**, with effective **communication** and **sticking to your guns** being necessary to create something even when there is challenge against that happening: for me, this was particularly evident in the early years of headship as the school moved from what could be described as a period of 'hero' headship, or what Southworth (1995:10) might describe as "head-centred", into a more distributed model of leadership.

Of course, as with almost every 'catchphrase' about school leadership, the definition of 'distributed' leadership is varied and subjected to different interpretation. Harris (2004) notes how the definition of 'distributed' leadership varies from the normative to the descriptive. My own definition, aimed at creating a situation where leadership is so diversified as to make the headteacher much less of a lynchpin to the success of the school over time, is much more about shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003) and democratic practices (Ray et al., 2004). In my leadership journey, distributing leadership has been about ensuring that there is a genuine ability to 'lead' the school on a day-to-day basis and through the many challenges that arise whether the headteacher is there or not. My definition is not solely focusing on tasks that are associated with leading areas of the curriculum or specific aspects of school life as the work or Spillane et al. (2009) suggests.

My aims around creating a model of 'distributed' leadership lead are about creating sustainability – something that for small schools can be a challenge due to the small numbers of staff and there often being no senior-management team as such. The postscript to this thesis provides a look at how I moved towards a much deeper sustainability for my small, village schools through collaboration and federation; however, through the first six years of my headship, I was focused on creating sustainability with a clear understanding of how long it can take for anything a leader introduces to have a permanent and lasting effect on a school.

> Change in education is easy to propose, hard to implement, and extraordinarily difficult to sustain. Pilot projects show promise but are rarely converted into successful systematic change.
>
> Better quality education and leadership that will benefit all students and last over time require that we address their basic sustainability (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006:1-2).

By being **fully committed,** I have been able to see the changes I implemented through and to ensure they are embedded and sustained throughout the school. **It takes time** to create sustainability in leadership, and therefore in the operational running of a school, but I believe that this is what has been created at Kirk Ireton, and latterly at my second school.

As my postscript will show, all of these designs around 'distributed' and 'sustainable' leadership not only take a widely varying amount of time depending on the development state of the school when the headteacher arrives, but also, in the short-term at least, the deployment of other methods of leadership identified within research literature.

It became clear, soon after I arrived at the second school, that I would to utilise other forms of leadership such as "instructional leadership" (Murphy, 1988) or "Commanding" leadership (Goleman, 2000) when faced with a different set of challenges. The hardest aspect of this was to move outside of my preferred methods and style, challenging my assumptions about **being yourself** and how that needed to be redefined. This redefinition would include a recalibration of my **moral compass** to make sure it was more strongly focused on the outcomes

for the children when I had to deal with the challenges of ineffective staff who were not improving even after a vast amount of support. The whole experience over the first two years of the second school developed my understanding of how successful leaders have to **adapt** in really significant ways in different contexts.

For a leader to be 'successful' requires the school to experience 'success' over time – the key aim of 'distributed' and 'sustainable' leadership. Moos, Johansson and Day (2011) consider how school leaders sustain success over time and find conclusions that demonstrate considerable similarities to my own conclusions; they discuss "Self-renewing communication", "the distribution of influence", "the importance of resilience", "personal commitment", "community engagement" and "building on experience".

All of the factors that Moos et al. conclude with have a clear correlation to my work as a headteacher of a small village school, showing that many of the skills, knowledge and attributes I have identified are applicable to successful leadership in all phases of education and well beyond simply a rural British context.

Final Summary

And so we come to the end of my offerings on the trials and tribulations of small school headship and what my research shows are factors for success in that role. Returning to the idea of being a 'successful' headteacher that was discussed in the introduction to this work, it might be helpful to know that in September of 2017, shortly before this final summary was written, Kirk Ireton was re-inspected by Ofsted, eleven years after the last one. This inspection was 'triggered' by weak data in the 2016 Year 6 cohort and ended up being a full two-day inspection. The Ofsted was an extremely tough process and one that nobody expected to end with anything other than the loss of our 'outstanding' grading. However, having **stuck to our guns** in the way we approached the new curriculum and maintained an education that didn't focus solely on SATs outcomes, we remain 'outstanding'. I don't believe that the Ofsted grading should be used as a major indicator of success, but sadly it remains the most visible external 'validation' of the quality of the work of a school and therefore it exemplifies that the headteacher has remained, at the very least, effective in the role.

The first attribute I wrote about in Section One of Chapter Three was **luck** and I wanted to return to that learning point. Any leader needs things to swing in their favour from time to time, but I wanted to reflect how much I have learned, through this thesis, that I was constantly making my own good fortune through that first six years of headship. Another aspect of my work/life balance that I

use to keep me motivated (and also I find it helps me with **problem solving**) is playing board games[107] which provide a useful analogy about creating good fortune: if you roll two dice and hit the double six you need, then you might think you are **lucky**, but if you've loaded up twenty dice and fail to throw at least two sixes, you might actually think yourself pretty darn unlucky. The more I have analysed my experiences so far, the more I can see that I add extra dice to my roll. So, like in the classic game "Frustration", you need that bit of luck to roll a six to start but everything after that can be helping stack the odds in your favour.

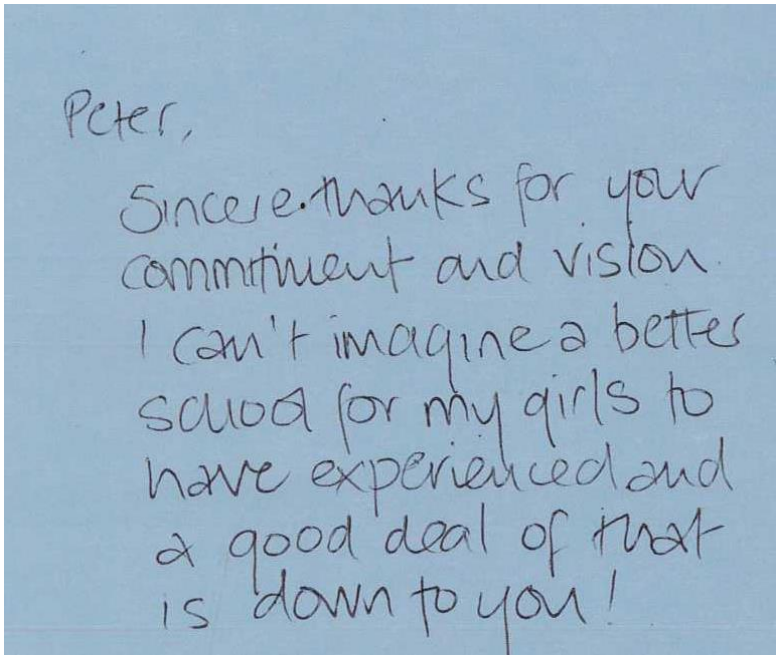
I also wanted to say a final word about **pragmatism**. If I am ever asked to describe myself, then "pragmatic" is the word I am most likely to use. In everything that I do, I concentrate on getting the best possible outcome and in doing so I remain focused on the goal and 'success' in any given venture. For me, **pragmatism** sits across everything in these conclusions and in all the work preceding them. Without a healthy dose of **pragmatism**, I really struggle to see how a headteacher will succeed, or even survive, in such a demanding and all-consuming role.

Finally, as another period of my time as a small school headteacher is about to begin, with a third school to lead and a move into a far more strategic role, I will keep reflecting. This thesis has helped put me in a strong position to start writing my next 'chapter'. I have yet to find out if the new school has a

[107] Not games like Monopoly – board games have moved on a lot since my childhood.

handwritten school journal to keep up to date and it may be that I need to discuss with my new 'heads of school'[108] whether they will now take that task on. After all, I may be doing them a disservice if I didn't offer them the journals and the chance for them to stop once in a while to reflect. For me, my final reflection for now is that I will keep asking myself, "What have I done that makes a difference to the children" to keep that focus on **not forgetting what it's all about**.

At the end of the most recent academic year I received a card from a parent (**Photograph 7**) who has been with the school for nine of my twelve years as headteacher:



Photograph 7: A thank-you card from a grateful family

[108] The senior teacher role will become 'head of school' in the new system.

Whilst anyone would be ill-advised to take on the role of a small-school headteacher for the thanks or for recognition, it is still a lovely thing when it comes along. For all the ups and downs, the small school offers an incredible opportunity to make a difference. The small school also helps to really see that difference in the children that you know so well and in the relationships with all the stakeholders that are developed so deeply when you have been the headteacher as long as I have.

Postscript

Just after the end of the 'story' contained in this thesis, I was offered the opportunity of taking on a second small school in July 2012. The 'leadership collaboration' with the second school led to a highly challenging period over the next two years as the school was not in a strong developmental state at all. The Ofsted inspection that took place in my second week at the school deeming it to 'Require Improvement', with even that being a fairly generous judgement from the inspector.

It was only in the challenging conditions of the second school that I really started to properly understand that **it takes time**. I thought I could go in, model everything that worked at Kirk Ireton and then in six months it would all be fine. Just to turn the school back to a 'Good' judgement in November 2014 took every ounce of energy that I had. However, the fight to achieve that judgement made me a better headteacher as I had to put into practice the work I had done on **difficult conversations** when I had to remove a teacher due to competency issues. The experience with the failing teacher sorely tested my **moral compass** but really helped me focus on remembering that I was there for the children. I was heavily reliant on the **support structures** I already had, particularly the team at Kirk Ireton and **scheduled reflection time**, which didn't get to happen for around six months, but made all the difference when it did. I had to learn to **adapt** my leadership style, going from the collaborative approach to much more of a 'dictator' style when I realised that this was what was needed in order

to create proper foundations for the school to then build upon. I also made good use of my **financial understanding** as the school had a projected three-year deficit of £80000 when I arrived whereas in April 2017 we carried forward nearly £50000. I also had to really improve on **managing the diary** in a way that meant the ever-widening group of stakeholders were not neglected.

The whole experience over the course of those two years made keeping **personal fitness** on track a struggle and by the end of 2013 I was back to being (a little) overweight. I had to make a very firm decision to tackle this, although that meant an even bigger challenge in the difficulties I was having in properly supporting **family life** and maintaining some sort of work/life balance.

Just as the second school was starting to improve in the lead up to the second Ofsted inspection, I then hit the single most challenging point of my career. I return to the school journal to help explain:

> 8.7.14 Today will be marked as a very dark day in the history of Kirk Ireton Primary School. It started normally, with Y6 visiting Gell, the SATs results being released (very positive) and (*name of pupil)*, a new pupil who will join us fulltime as a Y5 in September, coming for lunch, but following the governing body meeting I received a message from (*husband of senior teacher)* to inform me that (*senior teacher)* had died earlier in the day following complications from her operation. (*Senior teacher)* was 42 years old and had been the beating heart of our little school since she joined us as a TA in early 2006. She was a true friend to all and was loved by children, parent and colleagues alike. It is hard to see the future when dealing with this news.

If ever I was reliant on **support structures** having a **trusting environment** and **not forgetting what it's all** about it was the following day. It was also a day that there was no instruction manual for and really did rely on **instinct** and all I had learned in the eight years of leadership up to that point:

> 9.7.14 Today should have been our open day for parents and sports day, but instead became the hardest day, not only of my time as a professional, but of my entire life. We had to get the children into school whilst quietly informing staff of (*senior teacher's)* death. Following this, I called every family to inform them before we told the children. The entire team were almost unbelievable in their determination and professionalism throughout the day, supporting both the children and each other. Governors, the LA and 2 of the local Educational Psychologists were also highly supportive throughout the day. I can only hope that no headteacher ever again has to work through such devastating news, but if they do, that they are supported by such incredible people and community as I have been.

No amount of learning will ever fully prepare a headteacher for a day like that one and I hope they never need to. Whilst it remains exceptionally hard to reflect on this period due to the continued grief felt by everyone in the community, it does show me that so much of what I had learned up to that point was useful in managing such a crisis and moving forward in the aftermath.

There was no chance to properly recover as the Ofsted at the second school was still looming, but:

> 13.11.14 After two years, we finally closed the door on the constant pressure and spectre of Ofsted hanging over us. Although the report won't be published for a couple of weeks and judgements are provisional – we have come out as 'good' with an 'outstanding EYFS'. The overall was the best we could achieve and marks an incredible turnaround given the state of the school two years ago.

At least when this was done, I got a little bit of a chance to 'breathe' and get myself back on track. Fortunately, although it was on the back of another challenging recruitment process, the new senior teacher at Kirk Ireton managed to be everything we needed and has since built the relationships with stakeholders that are as strong as her predecessor.

On a more positive note, between 2014 and 2017 my own career and Kirk Ireton as a school continued to develop. I returned to do advisory work for the Local Authority, become a National Leader in Education (with Kirk Ireton being designated a National Support School) and I sit on the strategic board of the local Teaching School Alliance (continuing to **widen professional networks**).

In 2015 my wife and I had our fourth child, which has been a really big challenge, but one that my work experiences have helped with. I have got myself slightly back on track with the **personal fitness** and completed a 52 mile ultramarathon in 2017 and I still play (sporadically) with "Wobble & Wheeze".

As mentioned in the conclusions, we are about to collaborate with a third school who approached us having been attracted by the vision and ethos of "The Village Federation" (the corporate entity of Kirk Ireton and the second school). As was written much earlier in this thesis, I always believed I could be a better head of two schools without the teaching commitment (I haven't had one since taking on a second school) and have been saying since 2012 that a third school would be a strong model for the future. What this once again shows is that **it takes time**, but it will only be time that tells whether I am right about this new model and whether everything I have written in this thesis stands up to the test of a whole new challenge.

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