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and teachers network

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Welcome

Sue Williamson,
Chief Executive, SSAT



I am writing this welcome on Budget day and am feeling angry and frustrated. I am also agonising over whether I should share these emotions with you or simply focus on highlighting the brilliant work that is going on in schools featured in the journal. I am angry that you and SSAT took the time to respond to the Green paper consultation, ‘Schools that Work for Everyone’, and yet, even before the consultation was complete, in an article in the Daily Telegraph on 7 March the Prime Minister made it clear that the government will plough ahead regardless with its plans to extend selection, either now or following a General Election.

At a time when every school is struggling to make ends meet, valuable resources are being set aside for new selective free schools and the expansion of existing grammar schools. As Tom Middlehurst writes:

“With three weeks to go before the end of the consultation period in December, the Chancellor confirmed that money would be put aside for grammars in the autumn statement. And now, despite the response to the consultation not yet published, we are told that a white paper is imminent and that this will pave the way for legislation removing the ban on new grammars.

I simply cannot believe that the public and profession’s responses to the green paper were favourable to the government’s proposed policy. Indeed Justine Greening remarked that the response was not ‘an overwhelming flood of negativity’. I think her words say rather a lot.

For an education secretary, ministerial team and civil service who claim to want to listen to the profession and work with them, this is an outrage. The hours that colleagues spent gathering evidence and writing their responses have been entirely wasted; their views dismissed.

For ministers to claim they want an evidence-informed profession and to have dialogues with teachers, this is not just laughable, but shocking. The green paper consultation has been shown to be a complete charade – and will undermine any future efforts to elicit opinion and expertise.”

The DfE constantly tells us that we are operating in a school-led system, and yet the views of the profession are totally ignored. Visit bit.ly/2mQ1du9 to read Tom’s blog in full.

School leaders are very worried about their finances

and many have to make serious cuts that impact on the curriculum, class sizes and the experiences of the young people in their care. The money set aside for the Prime Minister’s vanity project could be used to support existing schools, including existing grammar schools.

During my visits to schools, headteachers tell me that they are struggling not only with finance, but also with the recruitment of new staff. It’s not surprising that we are facing a leadership crisis.

SSAT’s immediate response is to set up the Leadership Legacy Project, through which we will work with 120+ teachers in their first four years of teaching. We want to expose them to the best leaders in education and other sectors. The launch is on 11 May, and we will give you regular updates on their progress.

This year’s National Conference is being held in Manchester between 30 November and 1 December 2017. The conference will explore how school leaders can be truly evidence-informed in making strategic decisions, how a culture of evidence and research can be embedded across a school or MAT, and the implications of some of the latest research on what we do in schools. I do hope you will join us – all member secondary schools have a place as part of their membership package. This edition of the Journal includes reports from last year’s main stage speakers.

We are very grateful to Arcadis for sponsoring the journal and providing so much thoughtful information on the use of space in schools. Our publication with Arcadis, *Triumph in Adversity*, is a very useful tool for schools, and their article in this journal extends their thinking further. A copy was sent to all member schools.

Despite the politicians, great things are happening in our schools; the case studies in this journal touch on just a few. I love my visits to schools, particularly talking to students – they always tell me the difference you make to their lives. Thank you for all that you do, and if we can help in any way, please contact us through your relationship manager.



HOW SCHOOL LEADERS CAN 'MAKE THE IMPOSSIBLE POSSIBLE'

SSAT CHIEF EXECUTIVE SUE WILLIAMSON

Sue Williamson opened the 2016 National Conference at ICC, Birmingham, with examples of “the tremendous work that goes on every day in schools”, much of which she sees in her many school visits during the year: “It is very rarely that I come away without having seen something or someone that is truly inspirational.”

As a judge for the lifetime achievement award for Pearson Teaching Awards, with fellow judge, former headteacher Sir Alan Steer, she visited four shortlisted candidates in England and one in Scotland. “Usually we hear from colleagues past and present, parents and students – you will not be surprised to hear that it is the evidence from the young people that has the most impact.

“At a school in Glasgow, we spoke to former student Jenny. Her story was very sad, but uplifting. Her home life was terrible; her parents did not want her. Her only adult support came from teacher Carol McManus and another pastoral lead. She had very little in life, and eventually at age 15 she was thrown out of the family home. She did not know what to do, so phoned Carol, who found her a place to stay.

Somehow Jenny got through her examinations – she often wanted to give up but Carol kept her going. I asked Jenny what was she doing now and she told us:

‘I’ve just graduated from Glasgow University with a 2:1 in English. The graduation ceremony is next week and Carol and another teacher will be my guests. They are taking me out for a celebratory lunch afterwards. I am going to become a teacher of English like Carol – she saved my life.’

Making the impossible possible

“These and so many other examples confirm that teachers make lives,” Sue Williamson commented. “They make the impossible possible, and we need to celebrate these wonderful stories.

“The title for this conference came from Sir Alex Ferguson’s

book *Leading*. In it he states: ‘My job was to make everyone understand that the impossible was possible. That’s the difference between leadership and management.’ It made me reflect on what leadership is needed in the school-led system and what lessons school leaders might learn from other sectors.

“I think we are a long way from a school-led system. There are still too many top-down initiatives, and we need a different accountability framework. However, we are on a journey and school leaders need to be leading. SSAT has always advocated ‘by schools, for schools’ and principled leadership.

“Sir Alex again sums it up for me: ‘I cannot imagine how anyone without firm convictions and beliefs can be an effective leader.’ I entered teaching with a passionate belief that every



child can succeed, and I took this into headship. As we move into a system of multi academy trusts with some free-standing schools and academies, we are seeing new leadership roles, with necessarily different approaches. In the recent pamphlet *SSAT on Leading*, I cited three of them: headteacher, executive headteacher and chief executive.

“These additional levels of leadership give added focus to the question: what lessons, if any, can we learn from business and adapt for a school or multi-academy trust (MAT)? Jim Collins has inspired many leaders, particularly with his book *Good to Great*. In the pamphlet, I take lessons from another of Collins’ books, *How the Mighty Fall*, and today I would like to focus on two of his key arguments.

Collaboration, partnerships

“In education, we should be focusing on giving greater value to our shareholders – to the young people in our schools, parents, and the local community. By adding value in the development of young people, we do a great service to our country. It’s not just about examination performance (though this is important), but enabling young people to develop the skills, knowledge and aptitudes they need to succeed in life. Collaboration and partnerships are crucial, and SSAT is working with a number of partners to help with the development of young people.

“For over 10 years we have partnered humanutopia in supporting schools to help young people to have hope, confidence and happiness, to

develop relationships and to be employable. humanutopia’s theory of change is designed to help young people understand how they can bring about positive change in their own life. In developing our partnership with humanutopia we will be offering schools the opportunity to bring three or four challenging students to regional workshops. The

the young people and staff. An essential requirement for any MAT is a growth strategy. There is no model policy, each one has to be based on context.

“To that end, it’s essential that everyone engages in talent management. We need the right people in key positions, whether in an individual school or a MAT. Sir David Carter rightly says that the best MATs provide career

Staff need to see practice beyond their school, MAT, and region – this is why national networks are so important

session will be the starting point for transforming the way they look at themselves. The first workshop is being held in the North East on 25 January 2017 with further events in the Midlands, London and the South West.

“We are also forging partnerships with the National Children’s Bureau to provide resources on mental health; and only this week we met with the charity Community Save a Life Scheme, which aims to have a lifesaver on every street. We will be highlighting their work in SSAT’s journal and helping members to book the training.

“All our partnerships will help member schools with providing an enriched curriculum – good results plus.

Grow your own way, but don’t become insular

“Collins also speaks about growth. We have seen some MATs and chains grow too quickly, to the detriment of

progression for all their staff. In a time of teacher and school leader shortages, it is even more important for an organisation to grow its own.

“However, a MAT or a school has to take care that it does not become insular. Staff need to see practice beyond their school, MAT, and region – this is why national networks are so important. I am very proud that over the years SSAT has trained more than 12,000 school leaders and teachers. All SSAT programmes are designed and delivered by headteachers.

“Educational leadership requires creativity of approach and the courage of your convictions. We have seen lately how wildly different approaches can divide opinion – even when they are all rooted in achieving excellence for young people.

“Yes, we live in a period of immense change – but with that change comes opportunities to do things differently. The

DfE and Ofsted now agree with prominent school leaders: there is no one way to do anything. Pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and your day-to-day arrangements are entirely up to you, providing you can support your decisions with a strong narrative rooted in evidence.

“But this leads to one important message for all school leaders and governors: for too long, many of us have put pressure on staff and students because we’ve thought certain behaviours and practices were required. In reality, as a school leader, it really is your choice how

many of the external pressures you allow to go beyond your office door. We know that we are facing a teacher recruitment and retention crisis. Often we look for external factors to attribute to this – how often do we look at what negative behaviours are being driven by our own school policies?”

An appeal to school and system leaders

“So please make one commitment to yourself: that you will improve the lives of your staff or students. You might ban the phrase ‘for Ofsted’, making

sure you never do anything to please an outside agency. You might ban emails after 5.30pm and at weekends to help staff workloads. You might systematically make sure that every member of staff and every student receives one positive comment every week.

“We have these opportunities to do things differently, and we need to seize them in the interests of our students’ futures. But doing this requires us to think differently about our leadership development. Today, we have innovative new programmes



STUDENT PERFORMANCE

Arden Academy



We must all
commit to our beliefs,
and do what's
right for the
individuals in
our schools

such as our High Performance Leadership programme partnering with the Centre for High Performance at Oxford, NASA and Apple; and our Chief Executive programme, looking at this changing role.”

SSAT’s franchised middle leadership award is now in its third cohort, making it one of the largest middle leadership programmes in the country. The franchise model is helping us to support the schools-led system in a real and meaningful way. “At this time of great change, I truly believe that SSAT is the hub of educational leadership development in England, and I urge you to join us in growing the next generation of leaders.

“*SSAT on Leading* identifies eight core principles that underpin our programmes, and I hope they ring true to you.

1 Know yourself is about being critically honest with yourself about what role you really want. This means being candid about your own strengths and weaknesses and holding your hands up when there’s something you can’t do.

2 Prepare to unlearn acknowledges that we need to work in new ways. As school leaders, we need to think differently about staff education and training at all levels – from ITT that reflects the reality of being a trainee teacher in 2016, to personalised CPD and leadership training that is robust and rigorous.

3 Blueprint your dreams is about turning a vision into reality. As a leader, I am proud of where we have taken SSAT since we became a private company in 2012. At the heart of all our networks and all our programmes are you – the executive heads, heads and senior leaders who contribute so much.

4 Learn from business: ever since we worked with David Hargreaves on personalising learning and system redesign some 10 years ago, it has been evident that we need to look at other sectors to inform our own educational practice.

5 Knowing the practical stuff backwards may sound pedestrian; but we have seen too many instances where MAT and school leaders have fallen from grace. True, sometimes this is down to the head’s own hubris, but I think more often than not it’s individuals not realising how different some of these roles and processes are.

6 Getting the right people on the bus: think carefully and critically about what the key roles in your organisation are. It may not always be the immediate senior leadership team. Middle leadership is often

referred to as the engine room of the school.

7 Your legacy as a leader really matters. To nurture the next generation of leaders we must have a strategic, cohesive and national approach to leadership development – and this needs to be led by you, the profession, not by government.

8 The final principle reaffirms Sir Alex’s comment about the absolute necessity for leaders to have **firm convictions and beliefs**. We must all commit to our beliefs, and do what’s right for the individuals in our schools.”

Personal challenge

Sue Williamson then made a personal request to delegates: “I would love you to engage and debate these principles with me – challenge me on them, suggest ones important to you. Let’s take forward a new, more nuanced dialogue around educational leadership. Do share your views using the hashtag ‘love to lead’.

“The final point that I wish to make is that SSAT is prepared to invest in the development of the next generation of school leaders. We are going to fund 100 young leaders for a year to engage with the best leaders nationally and internationally, and to examine leadership in other sectors. We are not suggesting that they leave school for the year, but it will require some days out in the course of the year.”

Find out more about the SSAT Leadership Legacy project at <http://bit.ly/2jFJat1>



The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never put it out

*Reverend Mike Haslam,
Taunton Academy*

Reverend Mike Haslam, chaplain of Taunton Academy, finds light in a discussion about Donald Trump

“What do you think of Donald Trump?” My question to students at The Taunton Academy prompted many, many answers, but only one theme.

“Do we have to be polite, sir?” many asked. “Well, you have to be quotable.” I responded. There was silence for a while. “I don't know where to start... or where to stop,” some said. Others were brief and to the point: 'racist', 'homophobic', 'sexist', 'bullying', 'orange' were all oft repeated words. He was compared to a satsuma, but I objected to that, I like satsumas; the alternative description was “like a dead ginger cat”; which also felt a bit tough on ginger cats, even those that have died. One usually confident lad remained very quiet through a conversation. After a while I asked him he if wanted to defend Donald Trump. He looked up in horror as he said “Of course I don't!”

On the night of the US Presidential election last November, I personally crossed the line of endurance at 4.30am and went out and ran far and fast under the light of the supermoon as it struggled to break through the cloud cover. Words from *The Lord of the Rings* came to mind. Sam and Frodo are journeying in great darkness though the chaos and evil of Mordor and: “There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For

like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach.”

The Bible expresses this more succinctly in John's Gospel when we read: “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.”

In an assembly the next day I asked whether we were going to be people who would allow the challenges of the darkness to overcome us, or whether we were going to be strong, courageous, resilient people who never give up on looking for and sharing light.

Since January 20 and the inauguration of President Trump, things have got ever darker. Yet the call to seek for and live by light is every bit as strong. The fact that I haven't been able to find a single student in school who would support Donald Trump's bullying, racism, sexism and homophobia is itself like 'a light that shines in the darkness' and a reminder that we must never, ever give up.

All political or religious views expressed in this article are personal.



Leadership that overcomes discord and creates united efforts towards excellence

*Patrick Ferguson,
Hope Academy*

Patrick Ferguson, principal of Hope Academy, St Helens, reflects on some of the factors behind the remarkable turnaround of an academy comprising two failing schools, which had been suffering drastic senior staff turnover levels and major disaffection among staff and students

Hope is about leadership

I think that there are a number of key attributes which characterise a good leader. Leadership requires humility, and it is very important to listen to what others are saying, as this gives one the opportunity to tap into collective wisdom. It is often helpful in making decisions to get a variety of perspectives, and a leader should be prepared to change his/her mind. But it is important that a leader has the last word in any decision. If it is possible, I always find it helpful to sleep on decisions.

It is important to demonstrate competence, and to be a credible leader from the outset. However, all leaders make mistakes, and one must accept that this is going to happen. What is crucial is to learn from mistakes, as how one responds to adversity is a strong element in improving leadership. Be flexible, but be strong.

It is crucial for others to believe in a leader's honesty and fairness, even when they disagree with his/her decisions. In this regard, emotional intelligence is another key attribute in leadership. I have also found that it is essential to resolve conflict as quickly as possible.

One of the enduring influences on me throughout my career has been my father, who always counselled honesty and decency in all aspects of life and work. I have met many individuals whose attributes and practices I have incorporated into my leadership style

to improve my practice. One of my strong formative experiences was my MSc in leadership, focusing on researching teamwork. I believe that this formal training significantly accelerated my development as a leader.

Two schools thrown together with little thought about the culture

Both the predecessor schools to Hope Academy, which I took over as principal in December 2014, were deemed to be requiring improvement, and results were falling, as were pupil numbers. Results in the (larger) faith school seemed good, but it had been identified by Ofsted as a 'coasting' school. Some feel that there was a sense of denial about this, and many staff at the faith school vigorously opposed the transition to a two-school academy.

For some time before academisation the two schools were federated, with the head of the faith school becoming executive head. The two schools were very different, however. The faith school had larger numbers, a 'better' perceived catchment area, a smarter building and a strong ethos and culture. The community school was smaller, had no sixth form, many 'naughty' children and a very dilapidated building. They sometimes felt like the 'poor relations'.

The staff at the community school initially welcomed the opportunities an academy would bring. Those at the faith school felt even more opposed to change when their head applied for the post of principal of Hope Academy, and was unsuccessful. She later declined the post of vice-principal.

Many who had not been cynical beforehand felt less enthusiastic when the competitive interviews

were staged as late as the July before the academy opened. There was a perceived lack of communication between the new leaders and the staff. Many thought that the jobs had already been decided, mostly to the detriment of the community school. This led to suspicion and hostility in some quarters, and bringing staff together was just as challenging as bringing pupils together. Some staff who did not want the challenge of change began to seek alternatives, and some became long-term absentees.

It is interesting that the number of staff remaining at the academy from the smaller school far exceeds the number from the larger school, especially in more senior positions.

Staff disillusioned and multiple changes of headteacher

Hope Academy opened in 2011 with a newly-appointed principal who did not come from either of the two predecessor schools. After successive disappointing Ofsted inspections, the academy was put into special measures in February 2014 and the principal and chair of governors resigned.

A new principal was appointed in May 2014, but was unable to start before January 2015. Two vice-principals were also appointed. None of these three appointments took up their positions, all withdrawing by October 2014. Hope Academy was being led by a retired principal from the Anglican Diocesan Education Service, who was focused on stopping the gap and healing wounds until a permanent appointment could be made.

Two new vice-principals were appointed to begin in April 2015, and I was appointed as principal in December 2014. One of the two vice-principals chose not to continue in post. This paved the way for the current team to be appointed in the summer of 2015, and they have been together since then.

Staff members were dispirited and demoralised; not only had their academy been branded as inadequate, but multiple potential leaders had apparently abandoned their posts. The high level of discontent was reflected in staff absence rates, especially long-term absence. This particularly affected the science faculty.

The academy was fully staffed; in fact it was over-staffed due to the TUPE transfers from predecessor schools and three years of falling pupil numbers. However, many of these staff did not want to be at Hope Academy and had not been seen by the then leadership team as part of any renaissance.

The consequences of this were a downward trend in attainment, increasing pupil absence and deterioration in standards of behaviour. The *Weltschmerz* (melancholy, anxiety) of many of the teachers was rubbing off on the pupils.

People-focused approach has brought the staff together

After my appointment there were a number of issues to address in the first weeks. I spoke to staff, pupils and parents, and was careful not to talk about what was wrong with Hope Academy, but to focus on what was positive. It was also an early imperative to identify a potential leadership team. I thought it crucial for staff to revisit the core values of the academy, and so I brought in corporate culture experts Sycol, through whose consultancy the staff took ownership of a new set of core values, vision and mission statement. I also extended the ambit of an existing training programme for teaching and learning.

I brought in on a part-time basis two people whom I had previously worked with, one to advise with financial issues and one to help with planning and documentation. This led to the introduction of budget-planning software (HCSS) and the production of a rigorous development plan which would be used to drive improvement and remove the academy from special measures. I used governors' meetings to realign the academy.

The next steps in the first term were to introduce the Frog data platform to facilitate teaching and learning, and to ensure that professional development and performance management were closely linked to teaching and learning. Data management systems and the target-setting process were strengthened to enhance teaching and learning.

Before the end of the first term, it was crucial to carry out an analysis of staffing structure and staffing needs, and to rationalise the staffing in line with the projected budget. There were a number of staff on long-term absence, and it was desirable that they be allowed to leave with dignity by means of voluntary redundancy. The timing of this was important, as the professional associations needed to be given the statutory period of notice so that the changes could be in place in September 2015.

The academy's curriculum was redesigned to promote a growth mindset approach, and the collective leadership decision was to move to mixed ability classes.



Responding to change

The leadership team in general responded well to these changes, and their growth as leaders was visible. They wanted to be involved, showed flexibility, and were open to new ideas and to learning about leadership. Above all, they showed a strong work ethic. However, two individuals who felt unhappy in their roles moved on from the academy.

Staff not affected by the restructuring process responded positively to what was happening, and took charge of their roles in the improvement process. By the end of my second term we were ready to face the scrutiny of HMI, with growing confidence in the quality of education at Hope Academy. That inspection resulted in a judgement of 'good'.

Restructuring the SLT

In some respects the leadership team had been restructured before I took up the post in January 2015. Two vice-principals had been appointed to start in April 2015, though one of these was seconded to us for two days per week from January. I identified two assistant principals who had the necessary vision, flexibility and diligence to move the academy forward, and gave them clearly defined roles within the leadership team. When one of the vice-principals de-

cidated not to continue at the academy, these assistant principals were promoted, giving the leadership team three vice-principals, each with key responsibilities.

We now have a dynamic leadership team, and a change in culture within the academy. Results, attendance and behaviour have all improved greatly, pupils are satisfied with the education they receive, and staff work purposefully and feel part of the success. Relationships with our local primary schools are excellent, and the academy roll is rising. We now have a new website, and a new academy uniform which we sell from a shop within the academy. The leadership team is proactive and energetic in continuing to improve our key outcomes. [The academy was shortlisted for Educate Awards' 'Most Inspirational school' in November 2016; the award was won by Winstanley College.]

Persuading governors to keep the sixth form

An example of how opinions and beliefs can be changed by persuasion based on a challenging but realistic ambition for the academy is the fate of its sixth form.





A previously-appointed principal who did not actually take up the post was nevertheless doing preparatory work for the academy between May and October 2014. His response to his budget analysis, as I understand it, was that the sixth form was being subsidised by the rest of the academy, and that given the problems facing the academy, focus needed to be on years 7-11. Ofsted had also identified the sixth form as an area of weakness. He therefore wanted to discontinue the sixth form provision. He conveyed these views to the governing body, who were eager to back his judgement.

My view was that we should hold on to our sixth form regardless of cost, as sixth forms give pupils something to aspire to, and we should remain committed to an 11-18 offer within the community. I felt that we would not grow the academy by surrendering sixth form provision.

The governing body accepted this, and no governors were lost as a result of this decision. The sixth form is growing, and results have improved. It will be a long-term project to have an outstanding sixth form, but this is our aim, and the development is being closely monitored by one of our vice-principals.

The main challenges now

The main challenge is to become an outstanding school. This incorporates sustaining our improvements in attainment, attendance and behaviour. It requires attracting and recruiting staff of the highest calibre, while retaining and developing those staff who have the skills to push us higher.

We need to continue to increase pupil numbers until we are fully subscribed.

To become an outstanding school also requires an outward-looking approach, networking with a range of other schools and academies so that we can learn from others, and also help others to improve. We must continue to offer an engaging and diverse curriculum to our pupils, and strive to maintain and extend our improvements at KS5. Prospective future funding changes are another challenge that has to be addressed.

Having previously led a school to 'outstanding' status, for me it would be a major milestone to take a second institution to an outstanding category. I know that my leadership team will work with an energy bordering on zeal to move Hope Academy towards this standard, and I am confident that they will carry colleagues with them.