



Leading the future

THE HEADTEACHER crisis is a not a new phenomenon. With numerous heads retiring this summer, and overwhelming disillusionment causing hundreds of potential leaders to exit the profession, there is a serious deficit of inspirational teachers ready to take on the challenge of running a school: a shortfall which will leave thousands of children without the kind of schooling necessary to afford them every opportunity in life.

The need for great leaders is perhaps most pertinent in urban secondary schools situated in areas of high social deprivation. These schools are challenging and complex places to work, often with mountains to climb in terms of attainment – only 40 per cent of pupils in deprived areas have a chance of achieving five good GCSEs, compared with 75 per cent of pupils living in highly affluent areas.

Equally, many of the children attending these schools come from fractured communities exposed to drugs, violence and gangs, and often have numerous behavioural and social problems. They are difficult places to work; the pressure on the leaders of these schools is immense. And yet, in some of these schools, where heads demonstrate outstanding and exceptional leadership, numerous pupils are outperforming their most affluent peers. And so it is here that Future Leaders, an organisation dedicated to developing inspirational leaders, is concentrating all of its efforts to ensure that outstanding leadership is no longer an exception, but a standard.

Future Leaders is a fast-track leadership programme supported by the National College for School Leadership, Absolute Return for Kids, the Department for Children, Schools and Families, and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

In its own words, it “seeks to expand the pool from which headteachers can be found for urban complex schools by recruiting from non-traditional sources and providing a model for changing attitudes to recruitment of senior staff.”

The idea is to recruit current or ex-teachers who are committed to making a difference for every child by driving lasting change and achievement in urban schools as an outstanding headteacher. The fast-track scheme consists of a rigorous selection process, some foundation training, a one-year residency as



With the current leadership recruitment crisis in schools, one organisation is trying to stem the tide, and develop leaders who can change the face of urban education. **Emma Mills** explains

a member of the senior leadership team in an urban secondary school, after which participants apply for positions as deputies or assistant heads, and eventually headteachers.

What perhaps sets Future Leaders apart from other professional development programmes is its insistence on five key criteria: Every Child, No Excuses, High Expectations, Lead Learning, and No Islands.

The overall theme is that every child has the right to high standards of excellent education, and that heads should be committed to developing leaders of the future and working with other schools to create sustainable improvement across the education system.

For recruits, the programme offers the opportunity to work with and learn from an outstanding urban headteacher with support from a dedicated leadership coach, to train with education leaders and visit exemplary schools in the UK and US, and also earn a salary while learning.

For the schools who host the residency year, it is, at its most basic, the opportunity to add an excellent teacher at a subsidised rate to the senior leadership team, but also provides an enthusiastic and dedicated leader who can bring a new dynamic to the school, as well as a commitment to high standards and achievement.

It is an attractive scheme, but one that requires a huge commitment from participants, who not only have to take the risk of quitting their current roles to enter the Future Leaders programme, but who are also expected to make a considerable impact on their residency school. This however, according to one head, is what makes them an inspiring leader to have in any school.

“Future leaders are natural risk-takers, which you need if you want to improve something. They’re also ambitious and dynamic, with a clear drive and determination to raise standards,” explained Delia Smith, headteacher of St Angela’s Ursuline School in Newham in east London.

Participants themselves have equally noted the aspirant quality to the scheme, and speak particularly highly of the Future Leaders ethos.

“I got involved with Future Leaders because I believe fundamentally in what it stands for. Every child does matter; they are incredibly important. Our job as educators is to make sure every child is as successful as they can be,” continued Simon Carter, from the 2007 Future Leaders Cohort, who is now working as a deputy head at Acton School.

Peter Hyman, a Future Leader from the same year, who moved from politics to teaching because he felt frustrated by his inability to make a difference, agrees. He told *SecEd*: “Where the programme differs from other professional development is that it has a missionary quality to it, a sense of determination that a Future Leader can really truly change an urban school.”

Changing, and having a positive impact on, an urban school, forms a key part of the Future Leaders programme.

Jessie Kaur, who spent her residency year and a subsequent second year, at Park High School in Harrow in north London was heavily committed to raising the attainment of 40 of the most underachieving pupils, and accomplished unprecedented results, with 90 per cent of pupils gaining a grade B in literacy and numeracy, enabling all of them to gain college places.

Added to this, she improved and developed the way subject departments are reviewed, successfully bid for a £30,000 grant for an extended school science initiative which she is now project managing, helped change teacher attitudes towards the lowest achieving pupils, delivered CPD to enable teachers to deliver consistently outstanding lessons, wrote numerous governors’ reports, and project managed several outreach programmes.

Other Future Leaders have had equal success in their schools, with their achievements ranging from launching

and leading the introduction of a new curriculum, improving attendance and punctuality by 75 per cent, writing a new timetable and turning around a struggling humanities department to redefining the approach to achievement across the school, encouraging over 70 per cent of teachers to consistently deliver outstanding lessons, raising attainment by 95 per cent at key stage 3 and improving results at key stage 4.

But it is not simply the impact on achievement that a Future Leader can make in the school which encourages heads to offer a residency place. For Sir Michael Wilshaw, headteacher at Mossbourne Academy in Hackney, north London, the effect that Future Leader Peter Hughes had on the rest of the staff was crucial.

He explained: “What’s been interesting is the impact Peter’s had on the rest of the senior leadership team, and how they see their careers progressing. Joining a team where people haven’t thought about headship before actually convinces other teachers to really think about their own potential. It’s no accident that other teachers have started to look at the programme, and this is vital to get more aspirant headteachers filling the gap.”

While there is still a lot of work to be done – the programme has been running for just three years and only operates in London and Manchester, though it rolls out in Merseyside and the West Midlands this year – it is clear that it is opening doors to leadership and change.

And while the organisation must continue to ensure the highest quality teachers are exposed to only the highest quality leaders, as well as maintaining a rigorous and exacting selection process, the appointment of the first Future Leader from the 2006 cohort to a headship in Lewisham in south London signifies that they are on the right track.

The coming years will reveal more fully if the scheme is consistently providing the kind of leadership needed to fill the recruitment gap.

• Emma Mills is a freelance education journalist.

Further information

Future Leaders is now recruiting for schools and applicants in the West Midlands and Merseyside. Future Leaders is not-for-profit and does not charge fees for helping to place applicants. Potential applicants, or schools wishing take on or recruit a Future Leader, should visit www.future-leaders.org.uk