

PARTICIPANT CASE STUDY JOURNEY TO HEADSHIP

Jane Keeley was part of the second cohort of Future Leaders in 2007 and one of its first graduates to move into full-time headship when she took over leadership of Haggerston School, an 11-16 school in Hackney with 750 pupils and 55 teaching staff. She and her senior leadership team are helping the school to emerge from a turbulent period in which staff morale had plummeted and Haggerston's reputation in the local community was poor.

She joined first as an Associate Head in September 2009 as part of an intensive programme, put together with the help of neighbouring Mossbourne Community Academy and brokered by Hackney Learning Trust, to support the school and add capacity to the leadership team on an interim basis.

One of the first policies the new team introduced was targeted behaviour management.

“A key strategy was to identify a few things that the senior leadership team could have a rapid impact on – ‘quick wins’ as the cliché has it – and one of them was ensuring students were lining up outside in an orderly way,” she says. “It meant that, instantly, class teachers would have calm, quiet groups filing into the classroom and standing behind their chairs. The high visibility of the senior leadership team coupled with being clear and unwavering about rules and sanctions had a dramatic impact. The leadership team were consistent and the staff could see it working in improving behaviour.”

A survey after three weeks of the new approach found that 100 per cent of staff felt behaviour had improved while two-thirds said it had improved dramatically from one end of a five point scale to the other. The findings were subsequently endorsed by Ofsted in May 2010 who found behaviour to be good.

Steps were also taken to strengthen middle leadership skills with a new approach to line



Jane Keeley, Future Leader Cohort '07
Headteacher at Haggerston School

management whereby the senior leadership team met middle leaders once a fortnight to discuss teaching and learning specifically. “There was generally much more rigour and scrutiny around teaching and learning, how the faculty heads were monitoring students, how they were examining work books and monitoring lessons.”

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One of her particular tasks was to create a dedicated training programme for middle leaders for which deputies in a department or new subject leaders could volunteer to attend after hours every three weeks.

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including English and Maths in 2009 and 56% in 2010, plus a value added score of 1017, putting it into the top quartile of schools nationally. Perhaps even more profound than exam scores, is the change in the ethos of the school, brought about by Jane and her team's insistence on putting learning at the heart of everything in the school.

“Visitors who knew the school before would see that the ethos has changed and that it's now a much more settled learning environment, a place where it feels as if children in class are really learning faster” she says. “At their first assembly, we talk to the students about the importance of learning and working hard and if you go into a class or talk to students around the school, they will talk about learning and about their progress. They will know what levels they are at, that there are after-school classes and revision clubs - which is completely different from before - so learning and progress being first on the agenda is definitely something that people comment on.”

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Experience on Future Leaders

Before taking over Haggerston, Jane benefited from experience in a range of different school settings and exposure to different leadership styles. She spent her residency year at a challenging school in London where her projects included raising parental engagement for a group of under-achieving Year 11 students. It helped boost the group's attendance and performance that year with all of the students outperforming their predicted grades at GCSE.

She went on to work in four more schools in the space of three years, first as an Assistant Head and subsequently as Deputy and then Associate Head.

Each time she focused on a key area, making often small but rapid improvements.

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Some were relatively straightforward but in others the task was more complex, such as developing student voice in an already outstanding school.

“One school was divided into vertically structured houses, so in my house I had a third of the school from years 7 to 11, covering both pastoral and academic needs. It meant that there was no overarching approach to services such as special educational needs provision. The work I did was about setting up a whole school additional needs register and provision map, putting certain practices into place and then spreading these practices to the other two houses.”

Lessons from the programme

Like many participants, Jane cites the Future Leaders network of fellow professionals as a major benefit of the programme. But it has been the experience of working alongside outstanding heads in particular that has yielded some of the most memorable leadership lessons of Jane's career.

“One of the things that has had a major impact is seeing how an outstanding head holds the senior leaders to account in meetings by questioning. In the same way that a very adept classroom practitioner uses questioning very skilfully, so an outstanding head uses penetrating questions to move the school forward by testing the accountability, testing the way in which the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) are fulfilling their roles in school. Seeing it done

repeatedly has been enormously influential for me,” she says.

“In another instance, I hadn’t been at a school for very long and the head had to tell the staff that two students had been permanently excluded. She said that it was with a clear mind and a heavy heart she had made the exclusions, pointing out that it was for the greater good and that both young people were being supported by other agencies now. She judged the temperature of the staff perfectly and it has remained a very vivid picture in my mind. The lesson I took from it was how the head addressed the huge issue of the welfare and wellbeing of the two students at the same time as considering the welfare of the whole school.”

Plans for the future

With Haggerston now improving, Jane and her team have identified priorities for its next stage of development, chief among which is the drive to improve absolute attainment. Haggerston students score above the national averages but behind the top performing school in Hackney, Mossbourne, which has a similar cohort and where the scores are much higher.

They also plan to make more of the school’s training school status and boost the take-up of continuous professional development (CPD) among all staff from SLT to reception. One scheme already under way is work-shadowing for associate staff in which staff go into City of London companies to study how they approach HR, admin, reception and other business and support services.

“I have enjoyed working with Jane tremendously. She is an inspiring person who has an absolute commitment to young people in urban schools. Since joining Future Leaders she has worked in some really challenging environments but

has always remained calm, measured and considerate. In all her schools, even when there for a short time, she has gained fantastic approval ratings from staff. Jane is becoming a great Head, able to create change and improvement while taking people with her.” Sir Keith Ajegbo, (Jane’s Leadership Development Adviser throughout her time on the Future Leaders programme)

Conclusion

Prior to Future Leaders, Jane’s career trajectory had been unusual. As a young science teacher with a PhD and a passion for learning, she had made headship her career goal early on but, after moving out of schools to work in higher education and then for the children’s charity Barnardo’s, she had found her unorthodox career path was stymieing her attempts to get back on the school leadership ladder.

“Participating in Future Leaders has given me the opportunity to fulfil that ambition. Without it, I’m 99.9 per cent sure I would never have been a head.”

“Future Leaders was a breath of fresh air in that you did need Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) but you didn’t have to be in a teaching job and as a reference it didn’t specify ‘current headteacher’. I was 50 at the time and it was also very clear that there wasn’t a hidden age barrier,” she says.

“But I wanted to be a Head because headship puts you in a position to influence the life chances of children and young people. Participating in Future Leaders has given me the opportunity to fulfil that ambition. Without it, I’m 99.9 per cent sure I would never have been a head.” Jane has since been appointed substantive Headteacher at Haggerston.