



Hampshire
County Council

Improvement and
Advisory Service

Secondary Headteachers

Mentor Brief

Summer 2024

Introduction

Becoming a headteacher is an exciting career step, an opportunity to develop oneself, both personally and professionally, as well as to have a long-lasting, positive impact on the lives of young, their families and the school community. With this opportunity come challenges too – headship often brings great joy but can also be intellectually complex and physically and emotionally tough at times.

Developing key personal-professional behaviours early on in headship is important. Nurturing non-judgemental relationships, articulating the challenges being faced to trusted colleagues, having licence to find the role difficult and recognising that it is okay to ask for help and advice are all key. Wisdom comes from multiple perspectives and so new headteachers are encouraged to engage in professional dialogue with others during their early days of headship and to develop lasting networks which will support longevity in the role.

Initial contracting and the purpose of mentoring

When a new headteacher is appointed, the School Improvement Manager will arrange for an experienced and successful headteacher to act as the new headteacher's mentor during their first year in post. Usually, but not always, the mentor will be leading a school in a similar context, that is located outside the immediate geographical area of the new headteacher's school.

The role of the mentor is to provide bespoke, unscripted and relevant support for the new headteacher. Usually, the mentoring relationship will start with the new headteacher and mentor visiting each other's schools. From there, the support provided by the mentor will be shaped in liaison with the new headteacher. Usually, both the mentor and mentee find the arrangement incredibly productive and enjoyable, but if it is not perceived to be working by either the new headteacher or the mentor, the arrangement can be terminated at any stage.

In the event that the arrangement is effective and impactful, there is nothing to stop it being continued beyond the new headteacher's first year in post. To complement this, new headteachers are also encouraged to take up opportunities provided by the local authority (LA) to attend county-wide, area and district headteacher meetings, conferences and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities, as well continuing to access their own existing networks and accessing the LA's wellbeing support materials and programmes.

Mentoring relationship and activities

A successful relationship between a mentor and mentee is likely to entail a combination of formal and informal opportunities to work together.

Examples of activities which can be supportive and developmental for the mentee are:

- One-to-one informal discussions and coaching sessions
- Walking the school and sharing perceptions of environment and culture
- Shadowing senior team meetings and discussing building of effective teams
- Formulating a quality assurance and monitoring schedule together
- Observing teaching, triangulating evidence and comparing views
- Discussing the format of a helpful Headteacher's report to governors
- Discussing and formulating the school improvement plan
- Evaluating and shaping school-home communication methods
- Modelling challenging conversations
- Discussing how to form a positive relationship with the Chair of Governors
- Discussing whole-school approaches to securing staff wellbeing

Mentees should talk to their mentor about their school, their leadership journey and what has made them an effective headteacher. In sharing this experience, mentors should look to try and articulate how this learning can be set in the mentee's own context, as they begin and develop their headship journey.

Further information

All new headteachers are invited to participate in the phase-specific **New Headteacher's Induction Programme**, led by the following HIAS staff:

- Secondary – Beverley Murtagh – beverley.murtagh@hants.gov.uk
- Primary – this is led by district PPIs – contact district School Improvement Manager for further information.

New headteachers will be contacted about this programme shortly after they take up headship.

For further information about mentoring and any questions, mentors and mentees should contact their district School Improvement Manager.