

# SecEd

## Guide to...

# Effective middle leadership

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- A guide to becoming an effective middle leader
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- Identifying your leadership style
- Case study: how one school is supporting its next generation of middle leaders
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In association with

**ASCL** Association  
of School and  
College Leaders



# GUIDE TO...

## Effective middle leadership

Effective leadership is a crucial factor in the success of a school. But how do you become a good middle leader, and what qualities and traits does the role require?

### Leading by example

The old saying “do as I say, and not as I do” has no place in middle leadership in schools. As a middle leader you will be leading others and therefore it is crucial that you adopt and display the behaviours you expect from your colleagues.

When you are in a high-profile position, people look to you to demonstrate the same professional conduct and behaviour that you would expect from them. If you are supposed to be on gate duty at 3pm then you must make sure you’re there. Similarly, if you have a report to complete by the deadline, then it must be done. In doing so it becomes easier for you to challenge others if they don’t meet their commitments and responsibilities.

Corridor walks are a good way of being visible in school. If you see poor behaviour tackle it, and pick up any litter as you go along, setting an example to colleagues that they should do the same. Don’t expect others to do what you’re not willing to undertake yourself. Acknowledge the good things you see in colleagues relevant to the values and

vision you are nurturing as a middle leader. Make sure you adhere to school policies and procedures, and that you support a whole-school ethos. Be aware of what CPD staff may require.

A middle leader should be seen to be taking on their fair share of the jobs everyone tries to avoid. A strong track record of being reliable and supportive to colleagues, and not being afraid to take on difficult issues, shows your commitment to the school and everyone in it.

### Think beyond the classroom

The jump from classroom teacher to middle leader requires you to develop a broad organisational understanding of your school and to consider the ‘big picture’. You will no longer only have concerns for the quality and impact of your teaching but also the whole-school areas in which you will be leading. You have to think about the young people, not only in your classes, but across the school.

Being knowledgeable and keeping abreast of changes in policy and legislation show that you have the interests of the school at heart and are thinking ahead. Try to make yourself available to sit on working groups or participate in one-off projects in your school to give you that wider perspective.

A willingness to shadow senior colleagues or observe middle leaders in other schools demonstrates an understanding of the need for your own professional development.

Ensure that you are aware of the broader priorities in your school or college. You can champion your own subject and department but not to the detriment of the needs of the whole school.

If you are a head of department, then make sure you are ahead in your subject by joining subject



organisations and networking wherever possible. Your knowledge and expertise may also benefit from you becoming an examiner or moderator with an examination board, for example.

Be proactive and bring ideas to your senior leadership team. They will appreciate your offers of support in the realisation of the school's plan and vision, and your willingness to engage in different projects.

### Having difficult conversations

One of the most difficult skills for middle leaders to develop is, undoubtedly, to comfortably and effectively have difficult conversations with colleagues, who are often friends. As a middle leader it will be part of your role to address issues such as underperformance and professional conduct, which can be awkward and difficult.

How to approach these discussions is important in how successful they are. Remember to show empathy. Start conversations with "how do you think it went?" or "what could have been better?". If you require an explanation for an incident you could begin the conversation by saying "I am a bit puzzled about... can you explain please?".

Another way to alleviate the tension of the difficult discussion is to start it with "this is not a conversation I personally wish to have, but professionally we need to talk about this". Make sure you know the school procedures on dealing with staff issues before the meeting, and it is a good idea to make notes to help you remember at a later date exactly what was said.

It is also a good idea to talk to your line-manager prior to the meeting, as they may have useful advice to give. If the difficult conversation doesn't go to plan, at least they will know the background and will be able to support you.

### Develop your negotiation and influencing skills

Middle leaders are at the front line of whole-school improvement and have prime responsibility for the implementation of whole-school policies and initiatives. This usually requires getting others on side, often when they might be reluctant.

Create a mental image for people of what success looks like to get them on board. There will

be times when you will try to influence people and they won't be interested because they have enough to do already, so you will have to convince them that what you're saying is important and that their role in making it happen is too.

Listen to your colleagues' views and opinions as this can help to engage and motivate those who are less willing to be involved.

A clever combination of dynamism, direction, empathy and support can win round even the most reluctant colleagues. Try to discourage negative talk among your team, but let them feel that they are being heard. Involve them in your ideas and in developing the vision and ethos you're trying to achieve. Always be clear about what it is you want and are asking of others.



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### Identify and use your leadership style

There is no formula for what makes an effective leader and many of us will demonstrate more than one style. What is important is to understand your own strengths and weaknesses and how these can be developed and utilised in order to effectively lead others.

A good start is the Jung personality tests and team roles test for an insight into your own working style (see [www.123test.com](http://www.123test.com)).

Be prepared to try different styles of leadership too. You may feel out of your comfort zone adopting a coaching style, but it may be exactly what your key stage 3 leader needs. Recognise that there

is a difference between managing and leading. There was a time when middle leaders were more like managers, collecting examination results and looking at how well students have done, for example. Now, as leaders, they will have to look at the results to see how and where improvements can be made.

You may find you have to adapt your leadership style to different situations. Know what motivates your team and make sure you are fair and consistent in the way you deal with people.

### Work as a team

Working as part of a team will not only allow you to build relationships with those who you are leading, but it will also provide opportunities for you to draw on the talents, skills and experience of others, often resulting in improved outcomes.

Don't feel you have to be a complete leader. You cannot do everything on your own, so find out your colleagues' interests and strengths, as well as their weaknesses.

Equally, recognise your own strengths and weaknesses and build your team so that you have complementary skills.

Spending time with each member of your team will help you to understand the dynamics, and what motivates them. A better team spirit can be created by involving people, and asking for and listening to their opinions and views.

### Continually work to improve teaching and learning

Middle leaders bring about improvements when they positively influence the quality of teaching and learning, but they must recognise that developing this is one of the most important jobs in school. Make it your starting point that professional learning can always be better.

Work with the staff in your department to develop assessment practice and encourage one or more to train to be a chartered assessor. Take the lead in developing and testing approaches to closing gaps in attainment – for example, by using the Education Endowment Foundation Toolkit and other resources. It might be worth seeking out links with a department in another school to share good practice and to learn together.

Set aside time in meetings to discuss, for example, how you are going to implement a new initiative or concept to a class. Meeting regularly with support staff, such as special needs assistants who support pupils in your subject area, will make them feel valued and have a positive impact on their work.

Be enthusiastic in everything you do and transmit that to your colleagues and students.

**Don't feel you have to be a complete leader. You cannot do everything on your own, so find out your colleagues' interests and strengths, as well as their weaknesses**

### Keep abreast of current educational issues

The educational landscape is continuously evolving, with reforms to the curriculum, qualifications, safeguarding and funding. These changes can have significant implications for schools, and as a middle leader it is your role to make sure you are up-to-date with them in order to work as proactively as possible.

Joining a professional organisation such as ASCL's Ahead Network for middle leaders (see the back page), or a subject organisation, will help you to stay on top of reforms and offer opportunities for networking with colleagues in other schools.

Publications such as ASCL's *Leader* magazine and the education press contain the most up-to-date news, analysis and debates on educational issues.

Using social media, such as Twitter, and following fellow professionals who blog or run websites can provide insights and will enable you to exchange opinions and experiences – and to reflect on your own practice and personal qualities.

### Further information

ASCL's Ahead Network: [www.ascl.org.uk/ahead](http://www.ascl.org.uk/ahead)

# The next generation

## A group of schools in Havering is supporting their next generation of middle leaders with an extensive CPD initiative

Succession planning and staff retention are important in securing continuity in successful schools. With that in mind, the Havering Learning Partnership in London introduced CPD for its middle leaders in the form of ASCL's Professional Development Twilight Support Programme.

Simon London, head of Hall Mead School in Upminster, was chair of the group when it was decided to embark on a coordinated programme of training across the partnership: "At the time our schools' partnership of heads wanted to be more than just a group sharing problems and opinions, and to be more strategic. One of the things that was important to us was the next generation of middle leaders and the need to think about succession planning for senior leaders."

At Hall Mead, now a Teaching School where the scheme forms part of the core training offer for staff, a number of middle leaders have moved on to the senior leadership team, while talented classroom teachers have been brought on to middle leadership roles. Among them is Brandon Hughes, who became head of history at the start of summer term 2014 after participating in eight twilight sessions over a 10-week period.

He said: "As teachers, the biggest thing we tend to focus on is what is going on in our own classrooms, and there is often a lack of opportunities to look beyond that and see the bigger picture of what is happening within the school.

"Each session of the programme focused on different aspects of leadership and management styles, and gave an insight into the types of situation that might come up in the role of middle leader. It really was like a new world opening up that you don't normally see. I found the experience incredibly worthwhile, and felt like I was progressing all the time and building up my self-confidence and belief that I could do the job."

He added: "Education is in a constant change and flux and this was another thing that the course prepared me for. I feel ready to take on whatever comes and can handle it. I now need to look at where I go from here and what the options are in terms of my own progress."

Mr London said the programme provided opportunities for staff who might not have had a chance to explore issues of school leadership because the succession structure in schools relies on people moving on. He continued: "Staff either come forward asking to be put on the programme or we approach them if we feel they have the talent and potential to progress. Latterly, we have had a selection and interview process, because it has become so popular – the programme has a certain kudos.

"Once they have completed the programme they can step quickly into those roles if they become available. We see the scheme as a strategic direction of leadership and it's important to develop our talent pool. So many of the 'graduates' of the scheme are now in middle leadership and senior positions."

Mr London said staff who had completed the scheme clearly became more strategic thinkers: "They are able to look at the horizon, rather than what is going on in their own classrooms," he added. "They become more collaborative about working closely with colleagues who have different skills and strengths. They also become more confident, and it has helped them to understand some of the less glamorous things about leadership. Often staff worry about what promotion will bring, so it can also dispel some of the misconceptions they have.

"It is important to invest in school staff for succession planning and retention. And when you invest in people it is a sign that you think they have the potential to do the job."

# If you want to get Ahead...

## ASCL's Ahead Network is a community for middle leaders who aspire to move into senior leadership positions

### Ahead Network: For individuals

The future of our education system relies on the effectiveness and success of our middle leaders. As the number of senior leaders reaching retirement grows, it is important that middle leaders receive the encouragement, support, coaching and mentoring they need to progress swiftly up the career ladder.

This is what ASCL's Ahead Network is all about. Membership of the network is currently free to any middle leader keen to develop their leadership skills. It includes:

- A monthly email newsletter with updates/advice.
- Relevant ASCL publications.
- Access to the Ahead Network website.
- ASCL's membership magazine, *Leader*.
- Downloads of webinars – to come in spring 2015.
- Access to relevant ASCL courses.
- Opportunities for informal networking with colleagues via regional seminars.
- Subsidised rate at the middle leaders conference.

### Aspiring Senior Leaders Package for Schools

The Ahead package for schools offers additional benefits and support to those schools that have groups of staff aiming for leadership positions. It is aimed at groups of staff in middle leader roles who

aspire to leadership. The package is suitable for group sizes of up to 30 staff and can be organised for individual schools, groups of schools, academy chains and trusts. It runs over an academic year and each participant has access to all of the resources listed above. In addition, the group receives:

- Four, two-hour bespoke, needs-matched twilight sessions delivered by an ASCL consultant.
- Access to six webinars over the year.
- Ten per cent off ASCL CPD courses for the year.

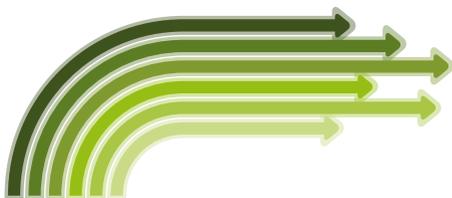
As part of the Ahead service, ASCL Professional Development also offers a menu of in-school sessions, which can make a real difference to the success of middle leaders, developing their skills and enhancing their ability to contribute more effectively to self-evaluation processes and face Ofsted with greater confidence. The toolkit can cover aspects of:

- Building high-performing teams.
- Leadership styles, including coaching/mentoring.
- The cycle of school improvement, including effective target-setting and monitoring.
- Leading highly effective teams.
- Inspiring and motivating colleagues.
- Managing complex staff issues, including managing underperformance.
- Influencing and negotiating.
- Setting objectives to ensure accountability.
- Monitoring progress effectively.

**For details, visit [www.ascl.org.uk/ahead](http://www.ascl.org.uk/ahead)**

### Upcoming ASCL events for middle leaders:

- Wednesday, November 26: Coaching with rigour and stretch, London.
- Wednesday, January 14: The emotionally intelligent leader, Sheffield.
- Thursday, January 15: Five steps to building a school-wide coaching culture, Sheffield.
- Friday/Saturday, January 30/31 (residential): Heading for senior leadership, Kenilworth.



*This Guide To... has been produced by SecEd with support from the Association of School and College Leaders, the only professional association and trade union to speak exclusively for secondary school and college senior leaders. ASCL membership is now more than 18,000 and growing. Its members receive legal cover and support, an advice hotline, guidance and resource materials, updates on the latest education news and commercial discounts. Visit [www.ascl.org.uk](http://www.ascl.org.uk)*