



VIC GODDARD

COME TOGETHER

SOCIAL MEDIA SOLUTIONS ENABLE US TO SHARE IDEAS WITH COLLEAGUES AROUND THE GLOBE, SAYS VIC GODDARD – BUT WE SHOULD BE WORKING WITH OUR NEAREST NEIGHBOURS, TOO...

We've talked about collaboration in education for years. For a long time, though, hasn't the atmosphere, at best, actually been one of 'collaborative competition'?

I think our 'brave new world' is starting to change this, however – in a rather unexpected way. I am lucky enough to have worked in a town where collaboration has been formalised through an organisation called the Harlow Education Consortium. This arrangement really helped me in my early days of headship as it meant that I could look the other secondary heads from the town in the eye and make an agreement, knowing that we would all stick to it. I'll be honest, and admit that the process of collaboration has become much more difficult in recent years from a secondary point of view, with the pressures of falling rolls and less money. That's a potential negative, and one about which we should all be aware; but on the positive side, what has emerged is a new dynamic: strong, cross-phase collaboration.

We were, luckily, in the position to be asked to 'sponsor' two of our family primary schools as they had fallen the wrong side of the Ofsted date with destiny. The unrelenting drive to academisation, being very strongly felt across the primary sector, meant they were now vulnerable to the risk of being forced into becoming part of a 'uber-chain'. Thankfully they saw working with us as a better way forward. So now, regardless of what it says about who is now ultimately responsible for results, we are working in close partnership with our two neighbours – and I am delighted to report that this has had the knock-on effect of helping my own school immensely. Working together is not about revolution as much as evolution.

In short, our new, collaborative relationship is really growing into something strong. And the idea is definitely catching on – I've been asked to talk to schools across the country that are developing similar ways of cross-phase working, some of which have been clever enough to realise that this can be even done without the Ofsted carrot or stick – depending on your perspective. And the benefits are, of course, blindingly obvious when you take a second to think about them.

From a primary perspective the fear of the Big Brother secondary coming to tell them how to do things is sadly a real one in some circumstances. In my opinion this approach is not sustainable or for the best interests of the community that the primary serves. It's been my privilege



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to have worked in both the primary and secondary sectors (the primary bit almost killed me) – but I would never suggest that I have all the answers as to how to improve a primary school's results. The right strategies will always be found within the primary school itself, in my opinion. However, primary and secondary schools can certainly learn from each other – I've definitely picked up some important new things about my own establishment from the time I've been spending with my primary colleagues, not least how we can so easily expect too little of year 7.

Any opportunity to work more closely together and not allow the divide and rule of a market driven education system is one we must grab; collaboration is not a luxury, but a necessity.

Nowhere is this seen more clearly than the spirit of sharing that is evident on Twitter. Why is it, then, that so many of us have grasped the opportunity to support teachers from around the country via social media so readily when we have not been doing it in our own backyards? The answer is back to 'collaborative competition' I think. But always, the school in the community that is doing well and being offered more and more from the DfE must remember that it is only the loss of two or three key staff away from being the one needing support.

