



# VIC GODDARD

# SPLENDID ISOLATION?

YES, IT CAN BE TOUGH – AND LONELY – AT THE TOP, SAYS **VIC GODDARD**, BUT YOU’RE NEVER REALLY ON YOUR OWN WHEN YOU RUN A SCHOOL...

**T**here is no doubt that, when life is at its toughest and everything seems to be going wrong around you, being a head teacher can be very difficult. There are times when the going gets tough and, as head, you shouldn’t pass the buck, because it stops with you. The hardest part of this is, when you are confronted with one issue after another, you often don’t feel you have anyone to turn to.

What many heads underestimate, and I certainly did, is the support and strength you can get from the governors – if things are stressful and difficult, and you’re feeling totally isolated, just speaking to your chair of governors (with whom you, hopefully, have a good relationship) can be very reassuring. For instance, in summer 2013 our results took a definite hit. Everyone had worked as hard as they could, and it was the first time our results hadn’t shown progress and improved, as they had done every year during my headship. This was a first and I really struggled, feeling lonely and fearing that I’d failed my young people.

It was actually our chair of governors who helped me over that difficult period. My leadership team is great, but they were feeling just as low as I was and I didn’t want to put my own stress on them, as that would have been unfair. I’m a straightforward kind of chap and it was really useful for our chair of governors to sit down and say, ‘Look, what’s changed between the end of term and these results? What change has there been in the parents’ or governors’ faith in the job we’re doing?’ The question was timely, and I really was grateful to Paul Beashel, who handled it so well. He gave me the strength to pick myself up and say, ‘OK, it didn’t work out and these young people haven’t got the results they wanted or expected.’ It was a rubbish situation and I felt, rightly, that it was a failure on everybody’s part, especially mine, but what do you do? Do you walk away? Do you moan about your lot in life? Or do you roll up your sleeves and get on with it, and make sure it doesn’t happen again?

You can lessen the feeling of isolation by selecting a great team to have around you, and I have a fantastic SLT. I was very fortunate that, very early on in my headship, I was able to pick my own, which meant I was surrounded by people who I knew and trusted, who ‘got me’ and I got them. We know how to work together and everybody in the organisation wants to make it work. The feeling of mutual support and comradeship that comes from people who are working happily together definitely helps to mitigate the loneliness.



**VIC GODDARD IS HEAD TEACHER AT PASSMORES ACADEMY – AS SEEN ON CHANNEL 4’S**

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There is no doubt that, at times, those negative feelings bubble up. But it only takes one thing to snap me out of those doldrums: the ‘climate walk’. It’s the quickest fix in the world and it’s probably the same for any head. I get off my butt, get out of my office and walk around the school just to see what amazing things are going on with the young people in the organisation I lead. This gives me an amazing lift. Right now, if I walked around Passmores and down my humanities corridor, for example, I’d see kids actively engaged in learning, loving what they’re doing, smiling, pleased to see me, thrilled that I want to be part of their education and happy that I drop in during their classes. I have a thousand young people who rely on me. How can I be lonely in that situation?

I do understand that, just occasionally, heads shamble about, wringing their hands and worrying about their problems. I’m lucky enough to be in a school where, when I walk around the building or into a classroom, most people are pleased to see me. How many people can say that in their everyday life? Overall, I think that loneliness is a perception rather than anything more concrete. If heads ever feel lonely, then they might do what I do and start walking around and noticing all those young people who, they’ll be happy to discover, will be delighted to see them.

