



Taking care of your headteacher: a guide for governors

Headteachers are a precious resource. What can a responsible governing body do to support their headteacher while continuing to provide appropriate challenge?

Top takeaway

Governors have a clear responsibility for the welfare of their headteacher. Not only are there fewer and fewer leaders who desire headship, but it is also widely recognised that headteachers' wellbeing is at risk because of overwork, burnout or stress. This little guide is intended to help those involved in governance to support the wellbeing of their school's leaders.

Firstly, a warning

Although school governors are the largest volunteer workforce in the country, always be aware that being a governor can take over your life. Recognise if this is happening: talk to your chair, your clerk and your headteacher and take steps to reduce the pressure on you.

Ten questions for governors

1. When was the last time you discussed your headteacher's wellbeing with governor colleagues?
2. Would you recognise that your headteacher is under pressure? How?
3. How do you recognise the achievements of your headteacher and their staff?
4. Can you list five things that you know your headteacher worries about?
5. Is your management of the headteacher's performance management review affirming?
6. Do you know what the school's strengths are? And its weaknesses?
7. How big a problem is teacher recruitment and how are you helping to address it?
8. Do you know how the headteacher is regarded in the local community?
9. Do you encourage your headteacher to meet with other school leaders?
10. When was the last time you asked after your headteacher's wellbeing?

Ten ways to care for your headteacher

1. A leader of learning

Remember that your headteacher's key role is to be the leader of learning, the coach, the encourager. Help them to focus on the main thing. Standards are important, as are curriculum, attendance and behaviour. There will be others with finance and premises skills.

2. Don't extend the day

Headteachers are often the first to arrive and the last to leave. Encourage your head to ensure they cut off at the end of their day – no more emails, no more WhatsApp, no texts. Relax, it will all keep. Ensure all governors appreciate this and avoid adding to the pressure.

3. Respect their time

Always make an appointment if you wish to speak to the headteacher. Your head is a busy person so find out how long they will be available to you and don't overrun.

4. **When things are tough, your support matters**

Your headteacher needs to know that you have their back. Whether it's a tough visit from a trust CEO, a local authority officer or an inspection team, make it clear that you have confidence in the school leaders and will work with them to sort out any problems.

5. **Stand in the gap**

Sometimes the headteacher will appreciate the presence of a governor at a difficult meeting with a parent. It's not over-stepping the mark as the parent can see they are being taken seriously. When governors gather views and ask questions, it is all part of holding leaders to account but, done properly, it is also a support.

6. **Use your professional skill and expertise**

Headteachers are experts in their field, but they won't always be the experts on everything. Governors can support the headteacher by using their own professional knowledge. However, remember that this includes respecting the head's expertise and trusting their judgement.

7. **Be organised!**

The governing board itself can actually be a major threat to a headteacher's wellbeing. If governors' business is badly organised, or their work lacks focus, then it is the headteacher who bears the burden. For this reason, take the advice of your governance professional (clerk) and ensure that governors get the right training.

8. **Check in on the head's wellbeing**

When you have met with your headteacher, take a few moments just to check on their wellbeing. A gentle enquiry, a caring word, goes a long way.

9. **Watch for the difficult governor**

On occasions you may have a governor colleague – sometimes a parent - who is strong on opinion but low on knowledge and who wants to pursue their own agenda. Be aware and, if necessary, speak to the Chair. Does the colleague need a training plan?

10. **Know where to signpost the head for help**

There are several agencies which can support a headteacher under stress. Don't hesitate to recommend them, remembering to assure the head that they have your full confidence and support.

Reading and resources

- [Headrest](#): A free 24/7 wellbeing telephone support service for headteachers. **0800 862 0110**
- [Education Support](#): A national charity dedicated to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and education staff. Helpline: **08000 562 561**
- Article: [The Brutal Reality of Headteacher Stress: How to Keep Your Sanity Intact!](#)
- Downloadable interactive [staff wellbeing kit](#)
- Blog: [How can governors help the wellbeing of school leaders?](#)
- Blog: [Support and challenge](#) – how can governors balance the two to protect headteachers' wellbeing?
- Article: [Governors, stand up for your headteacher.](#)
- Blog about Ofsted: [Missed the opportunity: making matters worse](#)
- Blog: [Should you be a School Governor?](#)

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