

Chapter 1

The passionate teacher and the passionate leader in the passionate school

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It is the thesis of this chapter that for a school to be outstandingly successful and to have that purposeful buzz about it that everyone recognizes and might qualify it to earn the sobriquet 'passionate', you need teachers who are themselves passionate and, for that to happen to a sufficient and lasting extent, they in turn will need passionate leadership. The evidence rests on stories from schools and recent conversations with ten headteachers all of whom recognized the issue of 'passion' in schooling as one worth discussing. As one of them remarked: 'The absence of it need not be disastrous – I have a perfectly efficient head of science who isn't passionate but gets results – but its presence provides a step-change in what's possible. Suddenly, things you always thought just out of reach are brought within your grasp.' But as this quote also identifies the crucial need for high competence allied to such passion: indeed if you are doomed to have the one without the other, competence is to be more highly prized.

A clue as to what one might mean is to be found in the following extract from Robert Fried's (2002) book *The Passionate Teacher*:

Of some of our teachers we remember their foibles, their mannerisms, of others their kindness and encouragement, or their fierce devotion to standards of work we probably didn't share at the time. But of those we remember most, we remember what they cared about and that they cared about us and the person we might become. It's this quality of caring about ideas and values, this depth and fervour

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about doing things well and striving for excellence, that comes closest to what I mean in describing a 'passionate teacher'.

Such teachers – and in sufficient numbers to constitute a critical mass of the staff complement – are clearly a prerequisite ingredient of the 'passionate school'.

Fried's words however deserve closer analysis because the first two sentences by implication are not definitions of the 'passionate teacher'. Yet they describe 'good' teachers, or certainly not bad teachers. What they do not possess is a sense of being driven by what they are doing – sometimes to the exclusion of almost all else – and a 'brooking-no-denial' or 'come-what-may' determination that those they teach will succeed, and that everyone they teach is unique and can access the same significant pleasure. They value those they teach and the pupils know it. This is what the remaining sentences of the Fried quotation implies as the feature of the passionate teacher.

'Passionate schools' might best be described as places where the critical mass of the school community enjoys a shared passion for learning in whatever sphere of activity motivates them plus a determination to excel both against their own previous personal best and be benchmarked against the highest standards of excellence from time to time. Moreover, they live and work in a community where they come together in teams or groups engaged in a shared activity in a passionate quest for collective excellence. Each member of the school community shows evident enjoyment in the prowess of other members and while there is competition among peers, it's a competitive edge that is tempered by the knowledge that they belong to a community which enjoys a magic of achievement shared by almost all. In summary, the members of a passionate school, and especially its many leaders, would relate to and find resonance in George Bernard Shaw's (2000) words for a character in *Man and Superman*:

This is the one true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one; the being a part of a great enterprise and a force of nature rather than a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and that as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle, to me it is a splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment and I want it to burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.

This Shaw quotation conveys the meaning of ‘passion’ for all, whether it’s the schoolteacher, the school pupil or the school leader we are describing.

Passionate teachers

The earlier Fried quotation specifically has the teacher in mind. The condition is best encapsulated for me by recalling two visits three years apart to Rhyn Park, a secondary school in a former mining community on the Shropshire border with Wales. My first visit to Rhyn Park was to present prizes at their awards evening some bleak February day in 1989. I had recently arrived as Professor in the Education faculty at Keele University. It was a long and tortuous drive and I arrived to find a headteacher and school community with their tails between their collective legs, for that very day the local paper branded the school ‘the worst in Shropshire’, as their five or more higher grades figure at 17 per cent was worse than any other Shropshire secondary school. The headteacher however was defiant and determined, and we proceeded through a long evening with a backdrop on stage of a highlighted figure of the ‘super learner’. Each faculty or year leader said a few words as they introduced their chosen recipients of subject and other awards. Year 7 pupils sat wonderingly on a bench at the front. The evening closed at 10.30 and I stayed to talk with the head who was privately wondering if, not when, her efforts to transform the school culture would pay off. By the time I had driven home, it was well past midnight.

My second visit was three years later and followed a phone conversation when I took some persuading to repeat my role at their awards evening. ‘But you must come’ insisted the headteacher Janet Warwick, ‘you’ll find us a bit different’. So, against my better

judgement I went knowing with a heavy heart that I was doubtless in for another long evening. And so I was, but what a difference. There was exactly the same format: the 'super learner' figure as a backdrop and the subject and year leaders presenting their award winners. On this occasion however, the mood was so different. Everybody had their heads up – not down, and there was a constant buzz of fun and excitement in the hall. The tenor of the evening was exemplified by the head of maths whose speech, as he stood before the assembled throng of staff, governors, parents, pupils and dignitaries, went roughly as follows, 'Guess which school in the whole mighty county of Shropshire came first with 66 per cent of the age group gaining a higher grade GCSE?' He paused for dramatic effect. 'Church Stretton! And guess who was a miserable, pathetic second? We were. And ... he swivelled to look at the headteacher accusingly, 'what did she do? Well you know what she's like ... she said "Mr Smith, you get over to Church Stretton right away and find the explanation. We can't have Rhyn Park coming second." So I did, and discovered three possible solutions. The first I could dismiss straight away, namely the quality of the Head of Department. I suggested the second possibility to our Deputy Miss Voyles, but she said "Yes" they may prepare their lessons but I prepared my last in 1985 and if you think I am going to start again now, you have another think coming." And then I found the answer.' He paused for dramatic effect. 'The Church Stretton maths teachers are an average of half an inch taller than our department. Miss Black please stand up.' At which point a diminutive teacher on the front row got to her feet. 'Look at her. What can you say? Her chin is too close to her feet. But ...' He paused for dramatic effect. 'I have the answer. We appointed Mr Hudson last September. Mr Hudson is at the back.' Everyone turned to look at the new member of staff. 'He's six foot seven in his bare feet. I rest my case ... next year Rhyn Park will be top of the maths league table.' He went on to cite the many winners of various categories culminating in the maths school prize for the subject given to a bemused girl who when I presented her prize, confessed she had no idea why she had received it as she was very good at art not maths. Mr Smith had overheard the exchange and told the audience, 'Judith wonders why she got the prize, well I'll tell you. She got a "C" as a result of enormous effort

and I am telling you if Judith can get a “C” then everyone at Rhyn Park can and will get a “C” or better’.

At the conclusion of the proceedings I once again talked to the Head as I had done three years earlier. Her mood was changed too and when I asked her how the dramatic improvement – for the five or more higher grades figure was by then almost 60 per cent – she brought up Mr Smith, the mathematician as an exemplar of the ‘passion’ that now permeated the staff. She had appointed him two years previously and he had chosen to teach the second bottom set and asked them how many expected to get a ‘C’, to which the answer was none and then how many would love to get a ‘C’, to which all confessed a private wish. So he had struck a bargain and proceeded to enthuse and explain so that they came on by leaps and bounds. He even took them on the occasional Sunday maths picnic, as part of his campaign to include all in his own love of numbers.

We agreed that Mr Smith was pretty unusual but for schools to be successful and passionate you needed a few members of staff like Mr Smith, people whose burning interest was contagious and acted as a liberating example to others to give full rein to their own particular enthusiasm. Although he used the imagery for a different purpose, Alec Clegg (1980) captured these enthusiasms in his description of the sampler on his aunt’s living room wall:

*‘If of fortune thou be bereft
And of thine earthly store have left
Two loaves. Sell one and with the dole
Buy hyacinths to feed the soul’*

It’s the finding and giving full rein to personal hyacinths, whether of staff or pupils in the school, that conveys at least some of what I mean by ‘passion’.

Figure 1.1 sets out the beliefs, habits and behaviours of passionate and outstanding teachers.

They do not necessarily have all of these but they have most, allied perhaps to an obsession about what they are interested in, which is often though not always their subject, or which might be something as well as the subject they teach.

The list implies certain competencies which when allied to

Beliefs of passionate and outstanding teachers

- The transformability rather than the fixed or predictable ability of those they teach.
- Success is possible and expected for all pupils, and a failure to learn immediately is a challenge to their own teaching, not a sign of the pupil's inability to learn.
- Intelligence/talent is multifaceted rather than general and indicated by speed in problem solving, literacy and numeracy.
- A child showing great effort to learn is a sign of strong character, not of limited ability to learn.
- All the children they teach need a worthwhile relationship with at least one adult who may not be them.

Habits and behaviours of passionate and outstanding teachers

- Always reflect on and seek to improve their own story-telling techniques as a part of their skill in 'best explanations'.
- Store on DVD/learning platforms examples of their own and colleagues best explanations for student use.
- Refine and extend their questioning skills and train their pupils in questioning for use in group work.
- Seek opportunities to teach/learn alongside and behind as well as in front of those they teach.
- Treat teaching and learning as a 'co-operative' activity, using 'we' a lot.
- Introduce their own 'hyacinths' of learning.
- Use formative and ipsative rather than normative assessment, especially in their marking of pupils work.
- Talk about teaching and learning with their colleagues in faculty and staff meetings.
- Observe others' practice as well as seek video evidence of their own practice to inform their quest to improve.
- Teach in corridors and playgrounds.

Figure 1.1: *Beliefs, habits and behaviours of passionate and outstanding teachers*

passion are sure to bring success. The interrelationship of competence and passion necessary in the teacher and the school leader can be seen in Figure 1.2.

As we can see, the interaction of competence is crucial and the absence of both is a quick route to dysfunctional failure whether in the classroom or the school. Most schools will have some competence and some passion and will seek to build on both.

Nowhere is the combination of competence and passion more important than in the post of headteacher.

		Passion	
		Low	High
Competence	High	A 'good' school	Outstanding success
	Low	Dysfunctional failure	A school likely to have serious weaknesses

Figure 1.2: *Aligning passion and competence*

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Passionate headteachers

Traditionally the connection between being a teacher and being a headteacher has been seen to be a necessary and essential requirement to command the respect of the community called 'school'. Look at the following 1930s description by Sir Michael Saddler of someone whom we can immediately recognise as a distinguished headteacher and it starts with his being a teacher (Clegg, 1980):

Samuel Clegg was an artist, a poet, a radical pioneer, a stringent stimulating teacher, an undaunted soul ... he had faith and character. His work in school was an intimate echo of his inner life. He loved his fellow men, gave himself generously for others and by losing himself in his appointed task, gained new life and power ... Nothing but the best he believed was good enough for children and he strove to surround them with beautiful things and create for them

an environment that was charged with ... light. He believed that education was much more than success in examinations, though a long list of distinctions proved that the two were not incompatible.

He believed in the fundamental goodness of human nature, in liberty, in gentleness and in the silent but inevitable influence of cultivated surroundings ... He was a high voltage cable in a cordial and progressive society [his school], a lover of beauty in literature, art and landscape, an ardent believer in the capacity of almost all hearts and minds to win in Robert Bridge's words

New beauty of soul from the embrace of beauty

And strength by practical combat against folly and wrong.

Again there is the echo of the teacher's unshakeable belief in the capacity of all to succeed. The identification of that and the romanticism of the passage shouldn't obscure the need for the competences which are presented as a matching matrix in Figure 1.3, especially in the modern world where schools are less insulated from a society, where the pressures brought about by technologically driven and accelerated change demand a set of worldly-wise characteristics from our school leaders. Nor should it hide the barriers that now exist for headteachers to remain the credible 'teaching' leader of the school.

These barriers have arisen from the changes ushered in by the 1988 Education Act which both gave schools managerial control and substantial powers of virement over their budgets and simultaneously relieved them of decisions about the curriculum which became centrally prescribed in great detail. Matters affecting budgets and management formerly made by the local authority were now for the school to decide. In the summer of 1993 in Birmingham for example, headteachers regarded it as odd – albeit welcome – that they were being asked to consider their educational leadership role in school improvement. They knew that their counterparts elsewhere in the country were being encouraged to see themselves as chief executives. It is easy to forget that for almost a decade after 1988, central government acted on the assumption that the introduction of the national curriculum and tests would take care of their ambition to raise standards. Even when that misplaced belief shifted to an emphasis on 'school improvement' and laid a heavy emphasis on the headteacher's responsibility in securing it, there remained

many obstacles to headteachers finding the time to assume the role of professional leader, especially if that involves, as it certainly does in a school with ambitions to be 'passionate', the headteacher providing an example by being seen to be involved in learning and teaching. One has only to see a few case study files of children with special educational needs or ask about the bureaucracy involved in 'police checks' of school personnel or consider the advice on 'performance management' to see how in an age of accountability, the role of the headteacher has become more demanding of managerial competence. It is extremely difficult therefore for the headteacher to find time for teaching and learning. Yet doing just that is one of the essential competences which the 'passionate leader' needs to demonstrate when carrying out six activities and tasks. I briefly examine these below.

Providing a credible example as learner and teacher

It is probably not sensible, as it once was, for the headteacher in the medium- or large-sized school to have a regular, timetabled teaching slot, even though this will of course be the case in the thousands of very small primary schools. The headteacher gets dragged away too frequently for that to be sensible, though many headteachers do take over when they have been unable to make a satisfactory appointment in the middle of the year. Passionate heads however find other ways to demonstrate their interest. For example they take over somebody's lessons every week for a half term in order to allow the teacher to make focused visits to other classrooms in their own or another school. This is part of a faculty, phase or whole school quest to raise their individual and collective practice towards the elusive 'outstanding pedagogy' which is their ultimate goal. In doing so, not only do they release the teacher for a very persuasive form of professional development, they allow themselves to sample the standards in the classrooms where they are teaching so that discussions that follow can be grounded in a shared experience.

All 'passionate' headteachers know they have to be outstanding performers at assemblies and/or in going from class to class to talk persuasively to all the school about moral and often traumatic issues

that have arisen as a result of international, national or local events. They see these as vital times to reassert values. Passionate leaders effortlessly engage with and respect the different expertise of their staff. So they share an article gleaned about maths from the *Times Educational Supplement* with the maths department and want their views as to its value. They will visit the art faculty meeting to learn of their opinion of a local exhibition and whether there's more that they could be doing in organizing the school to give full rein to the art faculty's ambitions for the pupils.

Above all, passionate leaders are always seen to be learning. Not only are they good at asking open ended as well as highly pointed questions, they are also skilled exponents of 'speculative remarks' – all designed to encourage the extension of staff's reach to bring yet more within their grasp. They are what Michael Fullan has described as 'knowledge creators' often with research projects of their own.

Being an effective and inspiring storyteller and expert and enthusiastic questioner

Since classical times the ability of the passionate leader to be a storyteller has been well chronicled. In the recent past Hitler and Churchill provide contrasting examples of what might be called the 'skaldic' tradition best exemplified by Shakespeare's words for King Harry on the eve of Agincourt. The passion involved cannot be doubted but the context of warfare may not immediately appear appropriate for the school. 'Skald', however, is a Norwegian word for the eloquent poet who used to tell stories of past glorious successes to troops on the eve of or during the course of an expedition. Even though not the best image for school, it does evoke the need within the passionate school to tell and retell stories of the past, present and future achievements of different groups within the community. The headteacher is the lead storyteller and tends to cross reference any particular story to others which reflect on the shared values and differently brilliant actions of various members of the school community. An expert 'skaldic' headteacher links past to present and, speculatively, to future outstanding achievements, always talking about the

achievements as slightly ahead of where they really are – not too far ahead of course as to be unbelievable. The art of the headteacher as storyteller encompasses imagery, metaphor, simile, analogy, allegory and an unerring sense of timing and occasion. As with the teacher, however, the competent leader is careful not to be the person who provides the answers even when invited to do so. More likely they respond with questions of their own which encourage the questioners to find the answers for themselves.

Mastering the advanced skills of delegation and encouraging 'risk taker'

It is easy to have casual conversations about delegation and in the process make assumptions which mask the subtleties of what is a skill that is particularly hard to master. Figure 1.3 sets out a list used in industrial management and training courses in the late 1980s.

1. Look into this problem. Give me all the facts. I will decide what to do.
2. Let me know the options with all the pros and cons of each. I will decide what to select.
3. Let me know the criteria for your recommendation, which alternatives you have identified and which one appears best to you with any risk identified. I will make the decision.
4. Recommend a course of action for my approval.
5. Let me know what you intend to do. Delay action until I approve.
6. Let me know what you intend to do. Do it unless I say not to.
7. Take action. Let me know what you did. Let me know how it turns out.
8. Take action. Communicate with me only if action is unsuccessful.
9. Take action. No further communication with me is necessary

Figure 1.3: *Mastering the advanced skills of delegation and encouraging 'risk takers'*

At a quick glance Figure 1.3 enables you to see the range of possible positions so far as delegation is concerned. Most of us would cheerfully admit to our 'default' setting, that is the position to which we naturally lean if we don't think consciously about where we should be on the spectrum in any given situation. Yet we know

that to be half way competent we need to be at different points on the scale in different situations. Somebody new in a job for which they have prime responsibility will need you, as leader, to be prepared to be nearer the top – say at number five – rather than at number seven which a more experienced colleague undertaking a similar task might. The importance of the task and whether it involves more than one key member of staff, will affect the number ascribed to the nominated leader of the whole operation. Certainly, the effective, as opposed to the ineffective, passionate leader will avoid three behaviours in using the nine point delegation list. To be at the top on any occasion other than a matter of ‘life and death crisis’ would risk the passionate leader falling into the trap of being the dazzling heroic leader who disables others. To be at the bottom would fail to fan the embers of the enthusiasm or replenish the energy of someone entrusted with an unenviable task. Both the top and the bottom positions will not be places for the passionate leader to assume in exercising delegation. The third and worst mistake would be to start in one position, say seven, and then change your mind and not admit it by claiming you were at number five when something goes wrong. The passionate leader who is by definition strong in the affective domain, needs to remember that the first rule is to take the blame when it’s not your fault and give the credit when something goes well rather than steal the limelight for oneself. This means that the passionate leader is likely to encourage some risk taking among staff who see their leader as less like the conductor of an orchestra but more like an accepted leader in a jazz ensemble where each member receives the applause and something is created on the hoof.

Creating capacity and energy among staff

The passionate headteacher leader has to have an almost infallible ability to select and then develop staff with similar passion. They are unlikely to make an appointment ‘that will do because we didn’t have a very good field’, as one hapless and unfortunate headteacher remarked. Far more likely it will be a case of delaying despite pressing difficulties because, as one passionate and competent head put it, ‘at interview we didn’t find someone who would

quite fit. We changed the timetable of what we taught for a year because we couldn't get a good enough person in design and technology'. Having been incredibly fussy about appointments and looking among candidates for some evidence of a consuming interest in the successful appointment, the competent headteacher then seeks out extra opportunities for any new appointment to feel special and to have opportunities to give full rein to their passion whether it is in their subject field or in some aspect of extra-curricular activity.

They know that they have to display a keen and convincing interest in parts of school life which are not their own 'hyacinth' – indeed for them the activity in question, for example sport or opera may be a 'loaf'. All however need encouragement and they know that the best form of encouragement is to be present and to ask open ended questions and to celebrate officially and in public the success of the rich tapestry of their school community's passions. They talk 'with' staff a lot and only 'about' staff to others to tell tales of great achievement. They spend the time the school is in session before and after school as well as during lesson time in walking from classroom to laboratory, from kitchen to offices to faculty rooms and staffroom, demonstrating their thirst for learning about each and every aspect of school life. Not for them a perceived preoccupation with the inevitable intractable problems – which they know are best dealt with as far as possible later and in private – but rather a restless interest in what's good and what's possible given their support.

They are experts in sharing. So they ensure all staff job descriptions enshrine shared leadership roles with 'prime' and 'support' responsibilities. Continuous professional development for them is a key and well resourced part of the school's annual budget as well as an integral part of any formalized 'appraisal' or 'performance management' system and they share their own with all staff. They set a personal example too in sharing by taking over someone else's job from time to time to enable the person released to engage on some visit to learn of other practice and by allowing others to chair important meetings. They create time-limited task groups of young and older members of staff to keep the tireless quest towards outstanding practice bubbling along by harnessing the intellectual curiosity and energy of everyone. Above all they

never allow their own passion to cast an overwhelming shadow over the passions of others.

Seeking and charting improvement and constantly extending the vision

The wise headteacher knows that for a school to think that it has 'arrived' is a sure sign that they are dangerously poised to start a gradual decline. 'Outstanding' is the adjective most sought by UK schools today from the inspection of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) but they realize to earn it brings with it all sorts of challenges. Will it be possible to sustain it and how do you avoid complacency? The passionate school simply accepts that 'outstanding' is a shifting horizon. How can you ever know that either the individual or the collective has ever reached the limit of what's possible? Learning without limits is part of their credo. So the passionate headteacher needs the competence to reinforce such a belief without adding to the exhaustion that is never far from members of the outstandingly successful school. A vital part of that is to impart to new members of the community a sense of 'legacy'. 'I take all the year sevens each year' declared one headteacher, 'I explain to them the history of the school and the great deeds achieved by those who have been at the school before them, whether in sport, the arts, craft, practical and theoretical subjects – and I am careful to draw a distinction between those two aspects and stress they have equal value – or in service to others. I explain that in their turn they will contribute to that legacy. And I make sure the Heads of Year are always stressing how outstanding their year's pupils are and how proud the school will be of what they achieve. The general approach is re-enforced of course by the way that they and I at school assemblies celebrate the achievements of pupils as we go along.' Rather like the earlier story of Rhyn Park, her school awards days are times when a whole series and a wide range of human endeavour and success are rewarded. Another school ensured that part of its visual environment entailed the walls of the school hall being full of pen portraits of the achievements of past members of the school community as successful adults.

So a competence needed by the passionate headteacher is the

capacity to act as both a well informed guardian of the history of the school's past achievements and a futurologist with an uncanny knack of predicting the weather so that members of the community come to trust their view of what external factors are going to be important to the school. They only earn this latter trust by becoming sufficiently interested in all the passions that can form part of a school's life. The more the headteacher is able to ask searching questions about maths and science, history, geography and all the other humanity subjects, sport and the arts, modern languages and English and so on, the more likely it is that they can put together the interconnections of all aspects of school life with the external demands and form a good judgement about what lies ahead. Clearly the focus of such interest will vary from phase to phase. The headteacher of the primary school, where there are probably more examples of a school earning the soubriquet 'passionate', needs to show an interest in such matters at a different level than that necessary for the principal of a sixth form college. (One of the astonishing things I admired about the Vice-Chancellor at Keele University was his capacity to have worthwhile conversations with research leaders in each and every one of the many diverse disciplines that form the curriculum of that university.)

There is however no hiding from the necessity of using and encouraging the use of comparative collective data. It is possible to be passionate about data and other evidence: otherwise how can we be sure that we are using the right calibrations in our judgements about the value and worth of what is and what's not possible? So this competence of charting improvement involves encouraging the use of 'benchmarking', visits to other similar schools performing differently and the adoption of as many in the community as possible of a research theme affecting some aspect of their work.

Meeting and minimizing crisis and securing the environment

As anyone in school will know, crisis is never far from the surface of school life. Most frequently, factors external to the school precipitate its occurrence: an angry parent – or worse still, group of parents – , pupils who have brought into school some of the 'baggage' of challenged lives at home or in the community, staff who allow pres-

sure to upset then from time to time or who are suddenly ill, a fatality among pupils or staff or their families.

Someone once said that the successful headteacher needed four qualities:

- regarding crisis as the norm, and complexity as fun;
- having unwarranted optimism;
- possessing an endless well of intellectual curiosity;
- having no sense of self-pity or paranoia.

Certainly this fourfold combination will enable the headteacher to meet and minimize crisis effectively. Yet it is too glib a definition for it begs the question of how a headteacher comes to have these qualities. Well they will certainly be skilled at being able to act as a 'utility player' by deploying their own albeit limited skills in an emergency, for example by teaching a subject in which their knowledge is tenuous, to cover at least briefly the temporary or longer-term absence of a key member of staff. It means too that they need to develop the capacity to hover over events while in the thick of them, rather as the Victorian factory owner, perched in a windowed office above the shop floor, could see the whole and yet in a moment – and frequently – come down their spiral staircase to be among the workers. This competence does not recognize the need for separate 'time to think' for they are thinking all the time.

At the heart of all these competences is the absolute requirement that there is integrity in the passionate leader. People need to see that there are no joins or gaps in what they are, what they say and what they do. And that brings us finally to values and the passionate school.

Passionate schools

In the conversations with the ten headteachers on which this chapter is based, all were agreed that 'values' were at the heart of a passionate and successful school and that although they were something they personally held strongly, they were also something that were shared across the school community. 'Why' asked the headteacher who had taught legacy to year 7 'do you think I go to all

that trouble? It is because although we are buffeted by change, there are certain values which act as a moral compass for us all, including me.'

The headteachers involved expressed their sets of values with strikingly similar words. They would, I think, all subscribe with differing emphasis to the following two groupings.

Living one's life by the highest common factor from religious and humanist traditions

Notwithstanding the heated arguments that discussion of religions, of atheism and agnosticism involve, almost all schools rightly see it as their duty to provide an example for the young that highlights the importance of respecting truth, differences of opinion, of listening, of honest dealing and of treating others as you would yourself. Some would argue that it is easier for the faith school to promote these. After all they can pray in aid that part of the purpose of the school's foundation is expressly to ask for a shared subscription to such values. Certainly the headteachers of community schools will claim that it's harder for them to assert this particular set of shared values for human behaviour in an increasingly disputatious and contested world where, for example, some sections of the community will covertly resort to racism or see cheating the state as fair game. While that is true, it is also the case that faith schools frequently find the notion of pluralism as one that at least some members of their community find it hard to respect. Nevertheless this first shared value has to be present in the successful passionate schools otherwise the passion might come to be based on life values more akin to Hitler's Youth.

Striving for success for all pupils and staff rather than acting on the assumption that the reverse side of the success coin has to involve failure for some

All the headteachers were agreed that their own schooling had been unduly influenced by underlying professional assumptions of the need for failure. Many talked about frequent ranking of pupils in

streamed classes and therefore an undue emphasis on competition between pupils. They were of a view that internal practices needed to reflect an expectation of success. Indeed one headteacher with whom I had shared the Rhyn Park story outlined earlier remarked:

I agree with your take on passion, passionate teachers, passionate headteachers, but I might be more pragmatic or utilitarian in that the inspirational teacher, the one beloved by politicians, the one who breaks the rules is wonderful but doesn't really help us much. What we need are teachers who are passionate about pupils getting five or more A–C including English and maths, or whatever else is their potential. The maths teacher you describe from Rhyn Park reminds me of our head of maths. He is a good but not inspirational classroom teacher, but he is absolutely driven when it comes to pupil attainment. He knows every pupil in year 11 and year 9 for that matter. Exactly where they are with their coursework and what they will have to do to reach or exceed their targeted grade. He does before-school classes, Saturday classes, holiday classes, coursework catch-up etc. He has also had to deal with high staff turnover and very inexperienced teachers over the last ten years, yet he manages to hold it all together and achieve excellent results because he is passionate about the pupils succeeding.

That's not to say that the rest of the school don't care about the quality of teaching and learning. We have put a huge effort over the last few years into trying to improve that but in the end the reason we have had the success we have in raising attainment is because of the collective commitment to core values about individual pupils' success. On exam results day in August, we frequently have 30 plus teachers and support staff coming in and many more telephoning because, despite our commitment to a broad and balanced education and all the other extra curricular stuff which is so important, for our pupils and those in similar circumstances, the exam results are more important if they want to have any chance of competing for the opportunities that are out there.

This provides a vivid reminder of the need for an overriding passion for pupils' success which is so much more than a romantic 'Dead Poet's Society' view of what passionate teachers and passionate schools do. Another headteacher who believes that if you fan the

passions of sport, art, drama, music and outdoor pursuits, 'it is almost certain that you will strike a rich vein in almost all your pupils', would also agree the overriding importance of the staff being passionate about the pupils' ultimate success.

What's clear moreover is that both headteachers act out on a daily basis their passionate belief that all pupils can succeed in some area that will equip them for a fulfilling life. In short, they see talent as multi-faceted and therefore that their schools will be more inclusive places.

Although my sample of ten headteachers were with one exception drawn from the secondary sector, it's worth speculating whether passionate schools are more likely to be found in the primary sector. It is at least arguable that childhood offers more hope and less distracting complexity than adolescence when among other things there are more inhibitions and frequently the need on the part of the pupil to be an instant expert and not to look a fool in front of their peer group. And I guess therefore the passion that matters – the belief that all can and will succeed – is the easier to create among more staff. Nevertheless, both in special schools and particularly inner city and challenged secondary schools, there is increasing evidence that headteachers are much less accepting that there need to be limits on what they can achieve. Not for them the reluctant acceptance that the formidable circumstances some pupils face beyond the school mean their efforts will come to naught. They prefer to see them as challenges to extend that combination of passion and skill that will 'unlock the mind and open the shut chambers of the heart'.

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