

IAPS and Love Your Coaching Head teacher coaching initiative

Why coaching?



IAPS has chosen *coaching* as its preferred method for supporting their *new to IAPS head teachers*. There are many other choices, so why has coaching been the method of choice? Inside the education sector, we are only too aware of the many options there are for developing people. From insets to conferences, work shadowing to mentoring, e-learning to feedback. Each method has its pros and cons. And IAPS' conclusion is that, for head teachers amongst others, coaching leads the way. Let's look at their reasoning.

Limited impact of other CPD

Over the last 6 years, we have read hundreds of dissertations about learning and development, part of which asks the question "*examine the benefit and risk of a range of alternatives to coaching for developing leaders.*" The dissertations are fascinating, with forensic examination of a range of methods.

To generalise, the greatest risk of many of the methods seems to be *uncertainty about impact*. Insets may provide a high-quality training experience on the day, but it may not translate into a change in practice. 360' feedback may help a leader to see their strengths and weaknesses, but will it help them to address them? And e-learning may be cost and time effective, but does it engage?

By contrast, the focus for coaching leaders is always *embedded, sustainable change*. It is harder work for the leader than attending a conference, but it allows them ownership of the issue, and the direction of change.

Dual tensions for a new head

Becoming a first-time head teacher is uniquely challenging. On the one hand, the head has spent years building up to this moment, honing leadership and relational skills, and being prepared for headship. They are ready. And on the other hand, nothing can really prepare them for the challenge of the first headship – the isolation, the competing demands of many stakeholders, the ultimate accountability.

Coaching is a powerful way to bridge the gap, and to reconcile the seeming paradox of this tension.

A skilled coach will respect the autonomy of the head teacher that they are coaching and will help them come to their own conclusions. And at the same time, they will ask the important questions – questions to help the head understand exactly what the challenges are that they are facing.

One of the strongest elements of this IAPS initiative is that the coaching for new heads is being provided by *servicing head teachers, who are also qualified coaches*. The coaches know all the right questions to ask, from their own

Love your coaching.

Trading name of 10 Worlds Learning. Registered office Orchard Cottage, Westhumble Street, Westhumble, RH5 6BS.
VAT no: 256 325 700. Company number 10412938 www.loveyourcoaching.com
Contacts: charlie@loveyourcoaching.com; hello@loveyourcoaching.com 01306 264026; 0774 8515189

experience. And this gives our new head teacher the reassurance that they can work through all of their challenges with someone who can help them find their own direction.

Coaching and space

A major challenge for new heads is to find the space to think and plan. And yet, think and plan they must. Without planning time, it is likely that they will find it hard to make the best decisions and identify the needs of the school.

Coaching gives them *focussed space*. Space away from operational issues, yes. But more than that. Space with a thinking partner, with someone who will help them get to the heart of the matter on important topics, for them. Space to feel focussed, engaged, and be able to see the most helpful direction of travel for the school.

Full ownership

It is a rare person who enjoys being interrupted or being given unsolicited advice. The coaching relationship is probably the only relationship that a head has that can guarantee those two conditions. Imagine that! A new head will often be surrounded by many others with strong opinions, who may be ready and keen to offer advice, guidance and direction. This may come from a good and helpful place. And yet.... The head who comes to coaching benefits greatly from the protected time and space, free from interruption and advice that they may not want.

Coaching complements mentoring, rather than contradicts it

Sometimes new heads end up with more than one mentor. Perhaps their previous head, plus the outgoing head, or a senior head in their district. They may end up with two sets of advice, two contradictory recommendations. And so, they may not fully benefit from either mentor.

When a head takes on a coach, they can still have someone else who serves as their mentor. The coach helps the head work out the issues, understand their role in resolving them, and empowers them to take responsibility and make some changes.

And then the head can use the services of the mentor in any way that they see fit. They will be best placed to hear the mentor's words of wisdom and may be able to take what is useful for them and leave the rest.

Enthusiasm for coaching snowballs

Most heads who receive coaching see and experience the benefits of being coached well. And often, they develop their own enthusiasm and interest in wanting to learn coaching skills themselves. "When I was first coached well, I was a serving head, and I could see immediately how powerful these skills would be for my leadership," said Sue Webb, a retired head turned coach. "As soon as I could, I started my own coaching training, and it has been one of the best decisions I have made".

Coaching skills are learnable, of course. And some of them can be picked up in an instant. The head notices in a coaching session that their coach asks a good, brief question, then pauses. Later that day, they may be sitting with a colleague who is struggling with a topic. And of course, the head asks a good, brief question, then pauses.

Ownership, impact and accountability

These words tend to be the food and drink of aspiring and new leaders. The pathway through leadership can allow people who engage in this way to shine. And as a new head, impact is key, and accountability is at the heart of change. Coaching is gentle, and also encourages accountability by the coachee for the changes they want to make. This approach empowers the head to commit, decide, and take responsibility for their thoughts, actions and impact. This makes coaching an ideal approach to support new heads.

Boldness by IAPS

IAPS has had a long tradition of high-quality support for its member schools, especially for heads and senior leaders. This is a bold vision, and one that has taken careful thinking and planning. IAPS is in no doubt that coaching is the way forward for new heads. New heads, being coached by skilled coaches who are also heads, seems to be the magic bullet, and one that IAPS is proud to put its stamp on.