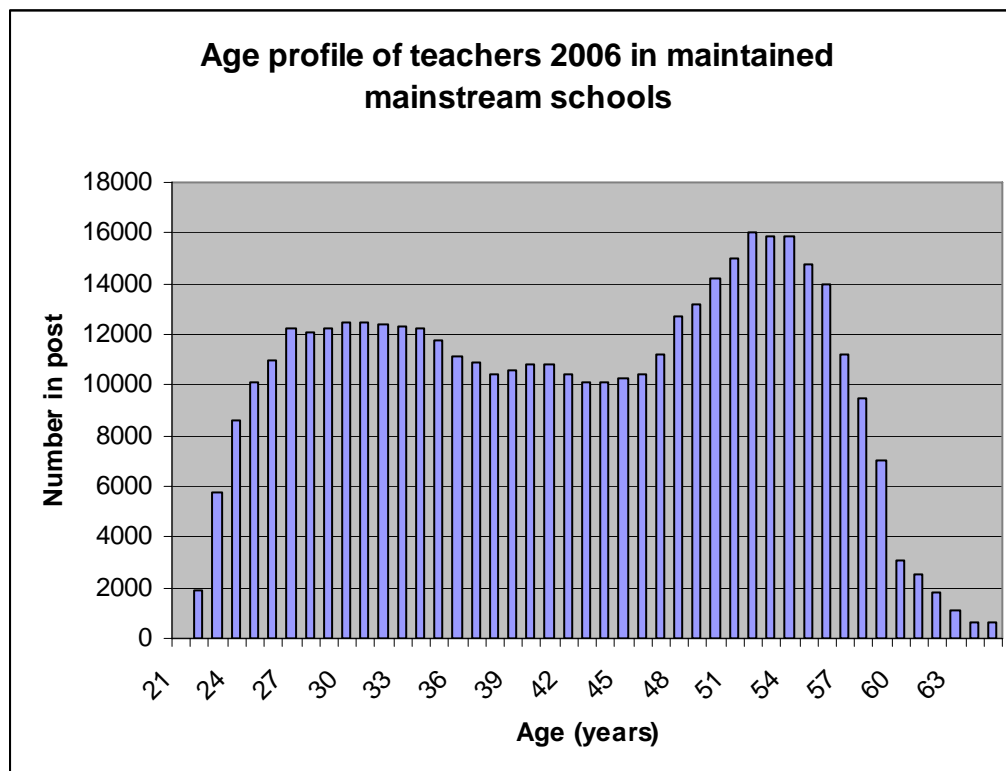


Get Ahead, Grow A Head !!!

Driving through Birmingham recently I noted the Mail's headlines plastered over the newsagents' boards proclaiming a "Crisis in Recruiting Head Teachers". This was the first time I had seen any 'public' acknowledgement of what is proving to be a national problem, and which is not restricted to Birmingham or to its immediate neighbours.

In order to understand the problem, and therefore to be able to deal with the (serious) issues it creates, the following diagram (derived from DfES Analytic Services data) may help. Although restricted to staff teaching in maintained mainstream schools it gives a good representation of the wider picture.



There are two "humps", one covering teachers in the age group from 45 years old to 65 and a rather lower one encompassing those between 21 and 45 years of age. Most Headteachers are to be found within the first category and the bar chart clearly shows that the fall-off of teachers 'in post' is quite dramatic from the age of 55 onwards. As it is very unlikely that Headteachers will wish to stay on beyond their retirement age of 65 (and indeed many are retiring far earlier than that) there is going to be the need to appoint successors.

So, you may say, "what's new?". Regrettably the age profile indicates abundantly clearly that the number of teachers in the age group who represent the "natural successors" to those scheduled to retire in the near future is considerably lower than the number likely to be leaving. The 55 to 65 group are the so-called "baby-boomers", born in the years immediately following the Second World War. Add to this the increasing tendency of staff to retire earlier than the "traditional" 65 years old and the problem is made so much worse.

Are there any other issues to consider?

Unfortunately the age profile represents only one part of the problem and the Early Retirement issue, whilst one additional factor exacerbating the overall situation, fails to be the *only* other factor.

Increasingly Headship has become more demanding than ever before with the welter of additional responsibilities being thrust upon post-holders, as a result of legislation, of new initiatives coming from 'on high', of League Table pressures, Ofsted, challenging parental expectations and of the rapidly changing and complex social issues. Add to this Extended Schools, the wider responsibilities coming from the Every Child Matters agenda and the environment in which a Head is expected to work is a very different one from what it was, say, 20 years ago. For many, Headship represented the opportunity to extend the classroom role which was, in turn, the reason why these same people entered teaching as their chosen career at the age of 21 or 22. Nowadays the work of the Head may encompass many elements which (appear to) have nothing directly to do with the fundamental teaching role; running an educational business, balancing books, feeding the ever-hungry administrative machine with returns from pupil numbers to an audit of paper-clips (or so it seems).

The traditional approach has generally been to appoint teachers with a minimum of 20 years or so experience into Headships. This long period of apprenticeship does not square with what happens in many other (non-educational) professions.

Some schools do have well-defined problems over the recruitment of Headteachers, notably in rural communities (even if Dudley may not have too many of these), small schools, faith schools and in some 'inner-city' schools. As governors, ask yourselves (if you have been involved in this vital selection work) just how many applicants there were for the most recent Headship vacancy in your own school. As a Chair, I have been involved with appointing Heads twice in the course of the past five or six years – in the more recent case we had only four applicants to consider although we were fortunate enough to be able to make an excellent appointment it might easily have been a case of advertising a second time. At a different school, some six years ago, we had a first-rate field of 13 to short-list, every one of whom was a serving Head or Deputy at the time and we were actually able to reject some existing Heads in making up the short-list as the field was so strong.

Are there any Solutions?

Given the nature and the extent of the problem we will need to be sometimes quite inventive in our methods of dealing with it. Here are a number of options but it may be that some Governing Bodies have other approaches and I hope that they will report these to the Association for subsequent publication since we all need to pool our ideas if we are to cope with what is a national problem; it is not really any great consolation to learn that the "story" is much the same in other European countries !!!

- Attempt to retain as many as possible of the 55 to 59 year olds who may otherwise be taking early retirement. Currently many are leaving the system far earlier than used to be the case. Could they be given additional support – for example are there flexible approaches to taking Teachers' Pensions whilst working in order to continue to work, but on a part-time basis? Is it essential that the Head Teacher

must be a full-time appointment? – the simple (and most apparently obvious) answer is “yes” – but sometimes the real answer lies well beyond the obvious.

- Can we provide additional support to enable Heads to deal with the “education and learning” issues with which they really feel comfortable by the employment of others who can absorb the responsibility for the “non-learning” aspects of the task; the employment of a bursar or business manager (who may be shared between two or more schools) is one such solution, although there are other possibilities. This may well reduce some of the disincentives which currently are ‘pushing’ more and more into early retirement.
- Many teachers in the 40 to 55 year old group may be late entrants into teaching and possess management and leadership experience from non-education roles “in a previous life”. Although they may not have the “traditional” 20 years background for Head Teacher employment they should be considered seriously for such a role, thus widening up a larger pool of suitably qualified applicants when vacancies arise.
- Are we doing enough to identify leadership talent early enough? – many individuals in, say, the 25 to 35 year old age groups may well have potential which could, and should be, nurtured. Whilst this requires collaboration between a number of schools to make it work, if a pool of teachers with identified talent were to be given opportunities to work (on a reciprocal basis) in schools, other than ‘their own’, might they not experience first-hand many aspects of leadership which could groom them for fast-tracking. This experience does not have to be as a Head or as a Deputy Head but may involve running any project or activity which affects the school community (possibly the development of the Extended School might offer opportunity here?). Such reciprocal opportunities might only extend over a few days but could be for considerably longer – the cost of doing so must be balanced against the potential gain.
- Should we be examining other models for Headship? The concept of “one school – one Head Teacher” may work well but is it the only model? What about cases where two or more schools have federated under a single Head Teacher but with Site Heads (aka Deputy Heads) at each school. Is co-Headship an option, where two (or conceivably, more) share the responsibility for a school, but with each undertaking different aspects of what is regarded as the ‘current’ role? Are there other possible variants on these models since there is little or nothing actually embedded in stone.
- Within one London Authority a particular school has 18 members of staff, each of whom aspires to Headship at some stage in the future. This group of staff meet every Friday afternoon on alternate weeks for development activities. This provides an in-depth training programme with a high element of interactivity. Whilst such a concept might be difficult for any one Dudley school to emulate is there any reason why it should not prove possible for a group of schools (say, within one of the five townships) to provide an equivalent?

Perceptions

Much was made earlier in this article of the increasing pressures upon Head Teachers which might well act as a disincentive to Middle Leaders to move higher up ‘the ladder’. It is said that the British do a good job of dampening enthusiasm and Bill Bryson is quoted as observing that when he asked Brits “How are you this fine morning?” he was told “Mustn’t grumble”(sic !!). We need to do more to accentuate

the positive. I have recently read some advertisements for Headships and seen some of the literature supplied to applicants; in some cases I felt that, were I seeking such an appointment, I would not want to consider applying since what I read did little to inspire me. Whilst it would be quite wrong to 'gild the lily' and to over-sell the school concerned I could not help but feel that those who produced the text did little to encourage potential applicants. Having said that, I also encountered some excellent and innovative materials which would have attracted a larger field for such an appointment.

Whilst we might well expect to see middle leaders as the obvious successors to the senior roles, more needs to be done to convert them. Currently, of every 100 middle leaders:-

- Only 28% plan to undertake NPQH (the National Professional Qualification for Head teachers) which is now mandatory for new Heads.
- Of this smaller group only 84% graduate from NPQH (about 23 of those 100 middle leaders)
- And only 43% of those who do graduate enter Headship within five years of achieving NPQH.

Of those 100, only 10 become Heads – why?

Next Steps

Whether or not you are likely to be facing a Headship appointment in the near future, it is vital first of all that you recognise that there really is an actual or an emerging problem.

Secondly, has your Governing Body considered the production of a strategy to encompass succession planning within your school; this really should address not only the issues of Headship but ought to incorporate other staffing roles and, needless to say, ought also to include Governor roles (including the Chair) in the process.

In the development of such a strategy do you genuinely believe that your school can 'go it alone' or do you accept that co-operation between two or more schools might prove to be ultimately for the benefit of all partners involved.

If the Local Authority has wider-reaching proposals, what are the implications for your school, indeed for your Governing Body? Dudley, as a member of the Black Country Consortium, is a pilot site for work being done by NCSL (the National College for School Leadership) which is driving national-level proposals to address this whole issue. What are their plans?

Do also recognise that the diagram, which appeared at the start of this article, refers not only to Head Teachers but to all teachers and points to a growing shortage across the board. What is your school doing to ensure that you can keep the staff you do have and to attract those you need? Against a background of falling rolls brought on by reductions in the birth-rate in recent years, money is not readily available to provide financial inducements so other options must be considered. Certainly there is a national problem to be addressed by the DfES to attract and, significantly, to retain younger staff – and indeed to bring in "older" entrants into teaching from other sources. These latter issues however cannot be dealt with at a local level but, as

governors, we do have a responsibility to address issues which impact directly upon our own schools and our local (i.e. Dudley) wider community.

If you have suggestions to make or ideas you feel would help other governors would you please address them to DAGB so that we can ensure that they are shared with the wider governing community.

Brian A S Patterson
Lutley Primary School, Halesowen