

# The Mercian Voice

A NEWSLETTER FOR ALL COLLEAGUES WITHIN THE MERCIAN TRUST

Edition 2: November 2017

## Leadership courses

In the first edition of the Mercian Voice, we shared feedback from MAT staff questionnaires. High up on the list of priorities that you identified was a request for quality CPD. And so, just over a month later, on the 7<sup>th</sup> November, we launched a new programme for aspiring Middle and Senior Leaders. The first cohort includes colleagues from all five schools and that's important: we want this to be an opportunity to learn *together*, to form networks for the sharing of best practice.

In our first session, we looked at models of leadership, drawing on Andy Buck's excellent book "Leadership Matters: how leaders at all levels can create great schools". Figure 1 below is one of the models we looked at from the book. We found it useful to pause and think about where we spend most of our time. Many colleagues agreed that we tend to gravitate towards the bottom left quadrant – perhaps rightly so: we need to get things done! But the CPD session forced us all to stop and reflect about making time for the quadrant on the top right, so that we can be clear on our vision and create teams of people who will work together to bring that vision to reality.

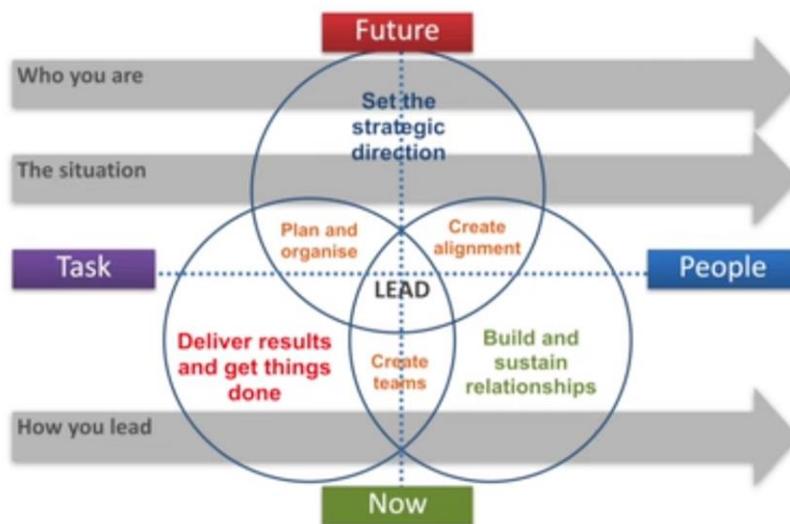


Figure 1



Eleanor Langston-Jones

Future sessions will include seminars from MAT colleagues. Sharing an area of expertise or special interest with others is a good form of CPD in itself. When we next meet Adele Biddle and Matthew Moore from Aldridge and Conrad Bourne and Nigel Jobling from Shire Oak will be speaking on educational research and teaching & learning.

We are also very fortunate to be working in partnership with a local Teaching School for this programme. Eleanor Langston-Jones from Earls School in Halesowen will be on hand at every meeting to offer advice and support.

## Introducing the MAT Team

The Heads from the five founding schools, together with other MAT personnel, meet once a fortnight to discuss strategy, share concerns and prepare for next stage of the Mercian's development.

We thought that you should know who they are and have the chance to put a face to a name!



Ray Beech



Alison Bruton



Ian Bryant



Richard Langton



Dan Parkes



Phil Lines



David Mountney



Tim Swain

**Ray Beech** is Principal of Shire Oak Academy. As founder of the Shire Oak Primary Partnership, he has taken on a role for the MAT engaging with Primary schools interested in joining The Mercian. Born and bred in the town, Ray is a keen sportsman and supports Walsall FC.

**Alison Bruton** is Headteacher of QMHS. As an NLE and LA Advisor, she has plenty of experience working with partners on school improvement and is geared up to take on a similar role for the MAT. She is a Star Trek fan and also a keen football supporter. Her team plays at the Molineux!

**Ian Bryant** was appointed as the new Head of Aldridge School in September 2017. Before then, he was Head at Kingsmead in Staffs, taking the school through two Ofsted inspections where they were rated good. He hopes to go one better at Aldridge!

**Richard Langton** is Head of School at QMGS. He is a member of the ASCL National Council and has worked there for the curriculum, qualifications, professional and research committee. He loves travel and has led expeditions to India, Chile and Tanzania. He is a strong advocate for those who suffer from problems of mental health.

**Dan Parkes** is the founding Principal of Walsall Studio School and is well known for his innovative and pioneering approach to improving education provision for all. In the team he takes particular responsibility for partnerships and new schools. He is currently overseeing work on the new Ladder School which we hope will be joining the MAT family of schools in September 2018.

**Phil Lines** is the Chief Finance Officer designate of the MAT. He holds the purse strings for The Mercian and is working hard to keep us all afloat financially. Outside work, Phil has recently found a new enthusiasm for amateur dramatics.

**David Mountney** retired as Head of Aldridge School last summer, shortly after leading the team through a successful Ofsted inspection. He is staying with the Mercian in a part time consultancy capacity, focusing mainly on CPD and developing links with local universities.

**Tim Swain** is the CEO designate for the MAT and is enjoying the challenge of working in partnership with all the schools after more than 30 years at QM. (He deserves a break!) Outside work Tim enjoys cycling up mountains – excellent training for getting the MAT formed!

## A new member of the Mercian family of schools



Over a year ago now, the DfE approved a bid by the Vine Trust Group and Walsall Studio School to open a new Alternative provision Free School in Walsall.

This was how the original pitch was made to the DfE. *'The Ladder' is an alternative provision free school proposed by Walsall Studio School that will provide students an effective 'step up' for those for whom mainstream schooling has been challenging and ineffective.*

*This new, much needed provision derives its name from the royal led, 'Ladder Apprenticeship campaign', overseen by Walsall Studio School's Chair of Governors.*

*The campaign's partnership consists of print media organisations, employers, public and third sectors, who have each agreed to support the creation of the Ladder school, as a fitting tribute to the campaign that has thus far, created over 2000 apprenticeship jobs.*

In some ways it has been a frustrating time since the government gave the original green light. The Education and Skills Funding Agency blocked any further progress until a site for the new school was agreed ... and that took far longer than we expected!

We are delighted to report that, at long last, it's all systems go! Dan Parkes and the Ladder School team are working hard to see if we can get the school open (in temporary accommodation initially) by September 2018.

That will be a huge step forward in our aim to provide the right education pathway for every individual pupil in Walsall.

## Twilight Training on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> November

Do the words *Twilight Training* make you groan?

Does the thought that you might have to travel across town to another School on a dark November evening spark off feelings of resentment?

Are you already convinced that our plans for the first CPD session involving *everybody in the MAT* is going to be a waste of time?

YES!

YES!

YES!

**If that's the case, this bit is for you!**

The MAT exists to prepare our students to live **life to the full**. There are lots of different ways we can help them to do that. Supporting them in getting the best possible exam results is just one way. As professionals, we are constantly looking for ways to improve what we do. But as teachers, we often find ourselves isolated from our colleagues. Our working day does not allow many opportunities to meet and to exchange ideas.

The Twilight Training session on Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> November provides a 75 minute opportunity to do just that. It's a chance to meet each other, learn from each other and share our enthusiasm and expertise. More specifically, we are going to invite you to look at the question of **pupil progress** in Y11. We are determined not to stay with generalities, so we are asking Subject Leaders to organise an exercise in comparing books and files so that we can learn from each other's practice and see what outstanding progress looks like in real work that is actually going on in our schools.

So, come *determined* to make a positive difference. The success of the venture depends on you!

### **Stop Press:**

*David Mountney has news of an exciting initiative between The Mercian and Birmingham University:*

#### **Teacher subject specialism training (TSST)**

"The TSST programmes are one year courses to supplement the knowledge and understanding of teachers delivering shortage subjects, and to support teachers moving to deliver, or support, these subjects for the first time.

The Mercian Trust schools are already supported by an excellent TSST course for Mathematics, delivered at the Walsall Studio School. On the back of this success the opportunity to bid for two further subjects was readily accepted, and now we can offer MFL and Physics within our schools, and further afield.

Building on our work with Birmingham University we are now in a position to develop a unique model for delivery of the programme for Physics; working hand in hand with the University departments of Physics and Education. This will involve release and work at the schools by Ph.D. and Undergraduates Physicists as well as visits to Laboratories and lectures at Birmingham University. There will be two distinct strands within the programme, to allow the specialist physicist to meet and discuss cutting edge research and training and support for those moving into Physics on the core ideas and challenges for delivery of this demanding subject.

Once the planning is complete we will be looking to launch the pilot programme at the start of 2018, so if you are interested, or know some who would be please watch this space. This is an opportunity that could be out of this world! ☺"