

Trish Dooley MA, CPCC, ACC Professional Leadership Coach

Leadership coaching in education

Education Leaders step into one of the most exciting, challenging and life changing roles. They are often inspirational, visionary and values driven leaders. In addition to leading and managing change, they need to be proactive and reactive in equal measure and are accountable to a raft of interested parties and competing priorities.

Understandably, some leaders can begin to feel pressure, become exhausted by their own and others' relentless drive, become vulnerable, unhappy and at times, feel isolated. They need a champion, an advocate who is coming to the relationship with no preconceptions of them or their organisations. One who provides a reflective and confidential space but who holds them accountable to their vision, their values and their commitments.

Leadership coaching can provide this and is supported by the DfE in its Women Leading in Education¹ – Leadership Coaching scheme, and, in The School Leadership Challenge: 2022² by Teach First, The Future Leaders Trust and Teaching Leaders. *“Leaders need on-going coaching and mentoring not just an initial development Programme”*. This is particularly true for the fourth of the four challenges they believe the profession is facing namely, *‘Leaders do not get the support or feel the motivation that would keep them in leadership roles and increase retention’*.

A coaching programme

The impact of coaching is clear as *‘Worldwide high performing schools provide ongoing coaching and mentoring for their leaders.’*³

It is cost effective, personalised professional training which helps grow, develop, retain and empower them. While corporate companies, particularly at CEO level, charities and the health service have believed in its impact and invested in coaching for quite some time. It is now beginning to become more widespread in the education sector.

As a coach, I work with headteachers/principals at their convenience either onsite, beyond the school day or virtually. I also offer 1:1 coaching across leadership teams both senior and middle, which could be arranged by weekly/fortnightly visits. The number of sessions for each leader would be determined by need although I generally suggest between 8-10. This would be supported by unlimited calls and emails between sessions. I am also able to facilitate sessions on Coaching Skills to help begin embedding coaching into the trust culture.

“Trish has worked with leaders at our Academy for the last year. Leaders have greatly benefited from her coaching model and style. She works closely with academy leadership teams both senior and middle, to make sure every leader has a tailored approach which best suits their professional development needs. Her approach allows leaders to draw on their own knowledge and strengths to solve problems, whilst supporting them to identify and develop areas for improvement. Trish’s work with leaders has built their resilience, self-awareness and afforded valuable time for reflection.”

Johanna Thompson, Principal, Oasis Academy Silvertown

How I coach

Each coaching relationship begins with determining how we want to work together in a confidential space and ensuring we are both coming to the coaching with a commitment and determination to bring and develop our best selves. We need the space to explore this with honesty and self-reflection.

We begin by: establishing their key values, those by which they live their lives and how they are currently honouring them, their vision for themselves as leaders and people, their dreams, who they are at their best and so on. They will set goals, some of which can be personal, and each subsequent session will vary in response to the topic the client brings. Using the coaching skills and principles like perspective coaching, powerful questioning, intuition etc. I am enabling them to make transformational change. The skills they learn enable them to create change, face pressures, plan priorities and make decisions in the long-term not just in the coaching period.

“Trish’s skill in asking direct but non-judgemental and non-threatening questions helped me to find the confidence to respond decisively and successfully to some difficult professional and personal challenges as a leader.”

Rosemary Leeke, Former Headteacher, Regent High School

As a senior leader in education for 19 years, 14 as a deputy headteacher in four different London comprehensives, I decided to retrain as a professional coach. I continue to be passionate about education and believe that all our futures are invested in this. My educational leadership experience enables me to come to this sector with an authenticity and credibility to support leaders in a coaching capacity. I want to continue to impact positively on leadership in education in this new role.

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My education leadership coaching experience

- Three secondary headteachers and a primary executive headteacher.
- All the middle and senior leaders on a 1:1 basis in an academy. This acts as their on-going and individualised CPD plan.
- The DfE 'Women Leading in Education' scheme. This empowers women to step into leadership roles or to be supported in their current leadership roles.
- A faculty leader and his team on 1:1 and team basis.
- A University Dean in the US and a Senior Lecturer in Brighton
- The CEO of an Academy Trust and a Director of a Learning Trust in Seattle
- Working with principals in the ARK Multi Academy Trust

I am an associate with three coaching companies focusing on education.

Some of the individual goals have included:

- Stepping into challenging conversations
- Understanding the perceptions of me as a senior leader
- Setting priorities while keeping focussed on the big picture
- Getting the best out of my team

And those reflecting the whole person:

- Finding adventure in my life
- Regaining my listening skills with my friends and family
- Keeping me focussed to stay fit and eat healthily
- Achieving a better life-work balance

"Trish listens carefully and with great empathy. She has a knack of asking just the right questions at the right times, opening doors to perception. She is gently insistent in her manner; positively curious. I really enjoy our conversations and always come away from them with a new way of looking at things."

Jon Nicholls, Director of Arts and Creativity, Thomas Tallis School

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/women-leading-in-education-get-leadership-coaching>

^{2,3} <https://www.teachfirst.org.uk/sites/default/files/The%20School%20Leadership%20Challenge%202022.pdf>