



## Kingsmead Leadership Approach

Sometimes it is challenging to hold both the desire for excellence **and** the desire for decency and integrity. They can create tension and personal turmoil. Sometimes we can swing too far in one direction or another. Sometimes whole schools are one or the other, or some departments or classrooms within schools. I struggled with this for a long time as a leader, but then realised it was a false dichotomy. If one wants to be both fair and sustain high-standards then one needs to provide three things.

1. Telling people what is expected and training them to meet that expectation.
2. Creating an environment in which colleagues feel trusted, know when to use their judgement and are encouraged to do so.
3. Ensuring that colleagues are held accountable in a supportive and forward focused fashion.

If an organisation does all three it creates a working environment in which:

- Everyone is clear what is expected of them and the standards they must meet.
- Given the opportunity to own and adapt their practices while retaining the key ingredients once they are sufficiently proficient in the basics. Trust is a key part of the institutional culture.
- Standards are maintained and colleagues are supported to be developed.

Below is an outline of what happens in an organisation where one or more of these elements are missing.

Clarity and Training	Trust and Autonomy	Accountability and Support	Result
N	N	N	Random outcomes and potentially toxic work environment in which professional development is left to the individual. Standards are not maintained.
N	N	Y	Sink or swim for colleagues and a potentially stressful and toxic working environment in which one learns by being caught doing the wrong thing.
Y	N	Y	Rigid, compliance based and potentially toxic working environment in which individual agency is erased.
N	Y	Y	Inefficient use of time, inconsistent practice, 'corrective' conversations after people have been allowed to decide what their job is. Stressful lack of shared understanding.
Y	Y	N	Inconsistent outcomes and lack of fidelity to systems and policies. Relaxed but stagnant working environment. Standards are not maintained. Colleagues have an inconsistent, subjective and likely incorrect view of the quality of their practice.
N	Y	N	Random outcomes and a work environment in which professional development is left to the individual. Standards are not maintained and colleagues have an inconsistent, subjective and likely incorrect view of the quality of their practice.

## Clarity and Training

It can be very challenging to have difficult conversations with colleagues if you feel that when they underperformed, they were working hard in difficult circumstances and so it was not really *their* fault. Context wins out and the conversation is ducked, or it is had and the person on the receiving end is surprised and upset because they are working so hard and only now being called on areas for improvement. Either way, the colleague is being deskilled and de-professionalised. That is why it is imperative to ensure that everyone understands what is expected of them as clearly as possible and that they get the training they need if they need it. That way, when the accountability comes, no one can be surprised! **At Kingsmead we commit to providing as much clarity as possible and making space for sufficient training so every colleague is equipped to succeed.**

## Trust and Autonomy

If one has been clear and provided training, the hardest decision to make is how much trust a colleague or group of colleagues should have and how much discretion they should be able to exercise. There are a few factors at play here: the urgency of the situation, the capacity and understanding in a person or team, the wider context. However, when people get this wrong they normally manage it in two ways. They either allow too much space for discretion when there is not enough prior skill/knowledge, or restrict it so much that expectations become inflexible and are only complied with. In the former, colleagues can become overconfident on their own expertise and make mistakes, and in the latter case, experienced colleagues can then cease to have professional ownership. The latter is especially worrying, as they may then be doing everything asked, but it is ineffective or inefficient because the active ingredients of the idea are less important than adherence to the delivery method. **At Kingsmead we commit to making clear why we are doing what we are doing, and why it works, then giving space for teams to adjust that and make ongoing improvements. We also commit to building discretion into policies where appropriate and making clear where discretion may not be used, and why.**

## Accountability and Support

If people have:

- Clarity
- Strong training
- An understanding of where they may use their discretion
- The opportunity to reflect and improve on methods

Then there should not be a problem with holding them accountable and providing support. The key here though is *how* that accountability and support is provided. There has - in teaching – been a historic preference high-stakes accountability on annual or termly cycles and focused on the performance of the teacher. Far preferable is lower stakes, frequent, impact focused accountability. Pre-2017 teachers at Kingsmead were held accountable in a top down fashion for

- One lesson observation per year,
- Whether they had followed the school marking policy
- The outcomes of their exam classes.

This led to a focus on performance on paper, prioritising the exam classes at the expense of other children, and at its worst, rampant egotism that led to defensiveness and denial. However, sustainable success comes instead through humility, consistency transparency and collaboration. It also led to multiple inefficiencies that were hugely damaging to wellbeing and professional development; the leaders of the organisation were super focused on fixing the short-term symptoms of underlying issues. They had little left to deal with the underlying issues causing the challenges year after year. **At Kingsmead, we commit to providing frequent, low stakes and focused support and accountability so that colleagues can consistently reflect and adjust their practice in keeping with the school motto 'Practise to Perfect'. We also commit to making that accountability focused on those expectations have been made clear so that excellence is achievable.**