



## VIC GODDARD

# THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

IF STAFF ARE FEELING PRESSURED, STRESSED AND UNAPPRECIATED, THEN HOW CAN THEY BE EXPECTED TO INSPIRE THE YOUNG PEOPLE IN THEIR CARE, ASKS **VIC GODDARD**...

**A**round a year or so ago, reasonably soon after his appointment as Chief Inspector, Sir Michael Wilshaw was reported in the Guardian as having claimed that a 'good' head would never be loved by his or her staff, adding, "If anyone says to you that 'staff morale is at an all-time low' you know you are doing something right."

Naturally, this provoked quite a powerful response from SLTs across the country (a few of us even did a piece for The One Show, filmed in our staffroom...)

In fact, I think Sir Michael stated that he was misquoted in reference to this – but his underlying message was that teaching isn't really that tough compared to many other jobs, and we should stop pussyfooting around those who do it. In some ways I agree; just the thought of being the surgeon carrying out a life or death operation on a child, for example, is enough to make me feel anxious, let alone actually doing it. However, I would suggest that trying to guide young people through their education in order to help them be fulfilled individuals who can make a positive contribution to the world is also quite a complex and important task, and therefore stressful in its own right.

To me, this means that at least part of my job as a school leader should involve keeping an eye on my colleagues' stress levels (as well as my own!) and doing what I can do support their wellbeing. Not everyone is of the same opinion; I shared a platform with the head of Eton, Tony Little, at the BETT show recently. He spoke passionately about initial teacher training, which I agreed with completely – but then he answered a question from the floor with a comment that surprised me. He said that he has no interest in his establishment being known as a 'happy school' and was indeed quite scornful about the notion.

Well, I would like to put on record that I try hard every day to make our school a happy place. I struggle to understand how anyone would not want that. Of course my responsibility is towards the young people I serve – but ensuring I have contented staff that have the emotional and intellectual capacity to cope with the demands of the job is equally important; on a daily basis they are the ones interacting with more children and if they are not 'on the bus' then we will all fail.

This doesn't mean not tackling under performance – in fact, I think it makes it easier to address. If all staff have a shared vision and common purpose then difficult conversations regarding performance are rooted in something that we all believe in.



VIC GODDARD IS HEAD TEACHER AT PASSMORES ACADEMY – AS SEEN ON CHANNEL 4'S 'EDUCATING ESSEX' SERIES

Now, some people may say that going round on a Friday afternoon with a treat or two to thank staff (including in their classrooms in front of the students) for their work that week is a step too far. However it makes sure I am around the school at a time that is traditionally challenging, and I reckon it's good for students to see that we are human and like being thanked and rewarded too.

At Passmores, we have a view that you can say nice things in writing but that challenging conversations need to be in person. I think staff appreciate this, and it also stops any tangled misunderstandings about 'tone' etc. I am sure that many schools operate the 'give individuals credit in public but blame in private' policy that we do – it enables everyone to feel confident in meetings, and other more public events, creating the right atmosphere for collaboration and support.

Finally, the biggest thing we can all do to make sure staff remain happy throughout the quite ridiculous amount of change that we are currently going through is to have a process for every step and shift. If staff don't understand the rationale/vision for change they get resentful of any new thing that a school tries to implement. This leads to increased stress and therefore less capacity for staff.

So I am afraid that I disagree, Mr Little. I *do* want my establishment to be known as a happy school. A school that understands the importance of the role it has in the community. A school full of staff that are prepared to go the extra mile for the young people we serve – and are thanked for doing so. We want to be a school that faces the challenges set in a collegiate manner, where every contribution is valued. Where – to paraphrase Pharrell Williams – everyone 'feels like a room without a roof'... because, quite simply, they are happy.

