



**THE BEST JOB
IN THE WORLD**

**VIC
GODDARD**

Praise for *The Best Job in the World*

Vic Goddard speaks from the heart but never fails to use his head. The man who defended his school against the tabloid press now tackles those who snipe at headship without understanding its value, its pressures or its rewards. Teachers need to be leaders. Vic shows them how.

Gerard Kelly, former editor, *TES*

Working with Vic is a rollercoaster, but one where the designer has missed out the downward bits but has managed to keep in the loops. Vic describes the Passmores' experience and his centrality to it perfectly. This book captures beautifully how Vic Goddard's school works. It is a special community to be part of and I was privileged to play my part.

Stephen Drew, head teacher, Brentwood County High School
(former deputy head teacher at Passmores Academy)

Chronicling his time as a teacher and head teacher, Vic's book gives us a unique insight into his career, the decisions he's made (good and bad) along the way and the reasons behind his ideas and methodology.

Vic's absolute love for his job is driven by his belief that every child matters and that the impact education has on that child can be life changing.

Tactics on how best to run a school, acknowledging one's strengths and weaknesses, improving your leadership ... this book is a practical guide packed full of personal wisdom.

Not only recommended for the teaching profession, but an inspiring read for anyone interested in making the most of their potential.

We can all learn something from Vic Goddard.

David Clews, head of documentaries, TwoFour

Any teacher wavering over whether or not to take the next step to becoming a school leader will get a confidence boost from Vic Goddard.

As well as providing insight into the school that was the stage for *Educating Essex*, Vic makes an entertaining case for head teachers to model themselves on a rather different TV success: the celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay (though, hopefully, without quite as much swearing).

Michael Shaw, TES

What I love about *The Best Job in the World* is its readability. Its narrative pings along at a pace and Vic's story of his life as a head teacher is compelling. But it's much more than a reality TV star's tale – it's about what it's like to be a head teacher in England right now and how head teachers like Vic are holding on to their moral purpose amidst tumultuous educational change. It's a rollicking good read; as an insight into headship I reckon it's unrivalled.

John Tomsett, head teacher, Huntington School, York

I loved this book. It is a frank, jargon-free and humane account of headship. Above all, Vic reminds us that schools are so much more than the last exam results or Ofsted grade. They are infinitely complex places, led by real human beings who carry the weight of everyone else's expectations. The best job in the world maybe but read this book and be grateful to those who do it.

Fiona Millar, *Guardian* Education columnist

THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD

VIC GODDARD



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Family comes in many forms

Dad, I wish you had been around to see the last couple
of crazy years – I hope you would be proud

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Chapter 1

If I Can Do It, Anyone Can

Long before the days of Channel 4's TV series *Educating Essex*, I was born and grew up on a council estate in Penge, South London, Penge sur Mer, the same place as the wonderful Phil Beadle. My dad was a plumber and I was the youngest of four with two elder brothers and a sister. For the first twelve years of my life, mum was at home looking after us and I went to the local Royston Primary School, where I did really well. I was always bright but not necessarily the most hardworking of pupils, which was a bit of a challenge for me. If it didn't involve sport or chasing a ball of one kind or another, I found motivation quite difficult. I was very fortunate that I had a teacher called Clive Streets, who was in charge of sport at the school, and to whom I owe a lot. He gave me the opportunity, at a very young age, of playing cricket, rugby, football and all sorts of sports that many primary schools didn't support at

the time. I came from a sporty family, but school was really the start of my love affair with sport.

When it came to secondary school, I went to the local comprehensive. It had been the secondary modern school when my two brothers went there and that was where you went if you failed your 11-plus and didn't get into the local grammar school. By the time I arrived, that system didn't exist any more, so I just followed in my brothers' footsteps and went to the same school. I was very lucky because the school was tough; all boys, culturally diverse, testosterone laden and lots of them bussed out to the 'burbs from Inner London. It was full of sporty teachers as well as the PE staff, so it was a fantastic environment for me. I was sport mad and the difference at this school was that, if I wanted to stay on at school doing sport, that was encouraged. I owe a huge debt to Frank Jennings, who was the head of PE, and to John Rothwell, John Hale, Geoff Bevan and Dick Masters. They weren't necessarily PE teachers but they ran teams, and if I wanted to try out new things or practice, they would support me, whether it was before or after school. They really helped me understand mastery and how dedication and commitment can help you achieve your goals, an ethos that filters through other aspects of my life.

Frank, in particular, encouraged me to become a PE teacher by putting me through refereeing and coaching courses. By the time I left school at sixteen, I was already a referee in four

different sports and was coaching six sports. So, I went on to study A levels at the local college, knowing where I wanted to be, knowing where I wanted to go, and I was pretty well qualified to start. That certainly was very evident at university, as I was well prepared with a good range of knowledge. I wasn't just a rugby player, I wasn't just a cricketer. I was able to turn my hand to lots of things and that stood me in good stead. I'll never forget the debt that I owe those teachers, because they were just massive in encouraging me to do what I needed to do.

I guess teaching became a family thing. My two brothers and sister are all teachers, although we've all followed different routes. Big brother Trevor has now been a head for about three years. He loves his job too.

Middle brother Malcolm taught just outside Runcorn. He was very much caught up in the Hillsborough disaster, where a couple of the youngest who died on that tragic day were pupils at his school and in his class. Malcolm found that really difficult and it gave me a real insight into the emotional stresses involved in teaching, as Malcolm had to give up being a teacher. He loved it but he couldn't cope with the mourning that was going on around him and, at the time, the union really failed to support him. When the going is tough, what you need is the union to put an arm around your shoulder and say, 'It's OK, you need to get through this and we can help you.' There were times when life did get in the way of the job

and he didn't get the support he needed. So, that's why he gave up being a teacher for thirteen or fourteen years but, I'm glad to say, he is now back teaching at a school in Cheshire.

Sister Tracey headed to grammar school, having passed her 11-plus. She did really well and is now head of humanities at a school in Somerset. This was all very unusual for a family whose parents were a plumber and a housewife. Obviously, there's a lot more to my mum than that, but both parents placed great importance on education and the schools we attended. They wanted them to be schools that met all our needs. I remember rolling my eyes at my head teacher on numerous occasions because he always referred to the importance of the 'family unit' at Kentwood School. I remember thinking, 'Oh God, this bloke's waffling on again about the family,' and yet, I hear myself saying the same thing all the time. I've lived with the awareness of what an impact school can have on children. It set me up and gave me structure.

Lots of friends I used to hang out with under the playground slide on the council estate took very different routes in life, and I suppose I was probably the 'boffin' among my mates. I was the one who was going to be a teacher and that aim stuck with me through to university. In my first year, we did some micro teaching that involved being videoed while you were teaching and watching it with a group of your peers. I remember listening to myself (it was one of my earliest recollections of hearing myself on tape) and thinking, 'Who is that com-

mon bloke? Who's that bloke who doesn't pronounce his aitches. He sounds a bit rough' and it was me. All the way through school, I had been the 'posh' one because I had aspirations to teach, my dad was the chair of governors, my mum ran the parent-teacher association and my brothers had gone to university. Around my friends and in my peer group, I was seen as a privileged person, until I went to a very middle-class university in Chichester where, suddenly, I wasn't. I was a bit of a rough diamond, which I guess would be the best description of me. It felt quite strange.

The teacher training journey was great. I was playing sport at a good level and could have gone to Loughborough, Exeter or another of those high profile sports universities, but I chose to go to Bishop Otter College in Chichester, which was then called the West Sussex Institute of Higher Education. There were a couple of reasons for my choice. First, the college was primarily interested in training me to become a teacher and not in the level of sport I'd played previously. This was really key because teaching is all I wanted to do. The playing side of it was great and I still love my sport, but it was all about my passion for teaching. I wanted to repay all those hours that all my teachers had invested in me through school. They had given me direction and nurtured me to be the young man I had become, so I was desperate to do them justice. I just knew that was where I needed to be.

The second factor that influenced my choice was the male-to-female ratio, which was one to seven and, having come from an all-boys school, that was quite significant. I seem to remember that the 'alternative' university prospectus gave you all the interesting bits of information, such as how many bars, social events and girls there were on campus, which probably influenced my choice, if I'm completely honest.

I did a good old-fashioned BEd PE course with maths as a second subject. I didn't have a maths A level, just government and politics, history, and economics, but they didn't offer any of those as a second subject. I avoided geography because I hated it, even though my geography teacher is a very good friend of mine from way back. So, I struggled through maths and it was a bit of a battle, but I was lucky because both my brothers were maths teachers, so I did have help at the end of the phone if I needed it. I scraped through. Basically, I had four years of doing my hobby, surrounded by other sporty people and I felt very fortunate to have made some amazing friends. In fact one, Jon Clark, ended up being my best mate through university, my best man at my wedding and is now my deputy head, replacing Mr Drew when he left to take up his own headship.

As I had always wanted to be a teacher, I didn't find the journey through university and teaching practice difficult. I remember the first week in my first real job at Angmering School, which is a great place with an excellent PE depart-

ment on the south coast. A sixth-form boy squared up to me and, luckily, I remembered the advice I'd been given by Frank when I was doing some coaching at school. He told me that, if somebody does that, you should put both hands in your pockets and take one step back, so I did. He was just bound-ary pushing and testing the new bloke's reaction. I was twenty-two and he was eighteen and he didn't think he needed to do as he was told.

I was very lucky that I went into a PE department with two brilliant male PE staff as colleagues. Dave Yates was head of PE and Kevin Grant led the A level teaching. The female PE staff members were great too, but it was all quite segregated. Kevin and Dave trained me and nurtured me, giving me opportunities to develop my skills and match my weaknesses, both as a PE teacher in lessons but also in coaching at a good level, including national basketball. Being involved at that level was absolutely amazing.

Even though PE was my passion, I deliberately made a point of teaching maths as a second subject, because I was aware that, some day, when my knees gave way and my belly got too big, I would need it (and before anybody says anything, both those things have happened). This made me very saleable as a teacher. It would probably make me even more saleable now. The academic rigour of being a maths teacher and the alternative perspective of people seeing me in a different role in school had a really positive outcome.

After a couple of years at Angmering, I went to Cheam High School in South London, which was a struggling school. I remember a young man riding his motorbike down the middle of a corridor on one of my first days. Luckily, the school had a very driven, focused head teacher called John Vaughn, who was very 'old school'. Everyone was called by their surname and he had very strong views on what people should do. He was a bit of a dinosaur in some ways but, for me, this was great, and he was incredibly supportive.

I remember being interviewed for the job on a very hot summer's day and one of the candidates was wearing just a shirt and tie with no jacket. Our interviews lasted about forty minutes but his lasted just ten. One of the first questions he was asked was, 'I see you haven't got a jacket. Is there any reason why?' I think he replied with something along the lines of, 'Fashion ... it's the fashion,' so his interview was short.

John Vaughn had very black-and-white views on many things but he loved his sport, particularly basketball. He was a statistician for a local national league basketball team, not that you'd ever guess it as he was slightly short and not someone you'd think was a basketball fan. I came in and, within a couple of years, we had an England basketball player in the school. I'd picked him up in Year 7 and worked with him. I did Saturdays, I did holidays, I ran basketball camps and got all the support I needed. What that taught me was that, if you just roll your

sleeves up and get on with it, without asking for the money or recognition first, it does get noticed.

I was fortunate to have worked there, as I know from speaking to other professionals over the years, that this isn't always the case in other schools. Sometimes people feel unloved and that the 'extra' they put in isn't recognised, so I try really hard to make sure I appreciate my staff. However, there is a little bit of me that still niggles about colleagues who come into the profession and want to organise this or that but, once I have said, 'Yes, go for it,' they are really only interested in the pay. If you want to do something, get on with it and the recognition will come. I think that's something that has been lost over recent years because, ultimately, many of us are in the job because it is a job and we're getting paid for it, but it should also be something that you have a passion for.

I was lucky that, at Cheam High, I was recognised for getting on with it when I taught A level students. We had an association with the local tennis centre that attracted some of the top junior tennis players in Europe to the school. They spent most of their time playing tennis but I also taught them A level PE. It was fantastic to see the potential of these aspiring champions and how hard they worked on their game, although it was quite difficult getting them to concentrate on anything else. Who can blame them?



'As much as I have been uncomfortable at times through the last two years, it is hard to be anything other than thankful that we did that TV show.' So says Vic Goddard, describing life after the multi-award-winning TV series *Educating Essex*, a fly-on-the-wall documentary about life in his Essex comprehensive school. But this isn't a book about a television series, it's about being a head teacher fighting tooth and nail to give children the sort of education that will genuinely help them to make something of their lives.

This is a book about running a school, about the purpose of education, about becoming a leader, about family, about love. It's a book about having the best job in the world.

Vic Goddard speaks from the heart but never fails to use his head. The man who defended his school against the tabloid press now tackles those who snipe at headship without understanding its value, its pressures or its rewards. Teachers need to be leaders. Vic shows them how.

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This book captures beautifully how Vic Goddard's school works. It is a special community to be part of and I was privileged to play my part.

**Stephen Drew, head teacher, Brentwood County High School
(former deputy head teacher, Passmores Academy)**

Vic Goddard is the principal of Passmores Academy and star of the BAFTA-nominated Channel 4 documentary *Educating Essex*. He is a proud South Londoner, having been raised on a council estate, then going on to train as a PE teacher and eventually becoming the nation's best-loved head teacher, thanks to his undeniable dedication to his school and the young people within it.



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