

Stephen Lane
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Beyond Wiping Noses

Building an informed approach to
pastoral leadership in schools



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Praise for *Beyond Wiping Noses*

Beyond Wiping Noses is a book that is refreshingly readable and actionable but also evidence-based and rigorous. As Stephen says, the journey of becoming more informed – ‘of moving away from mere practice towards deliberate, thoughtful praxis’ – is an interesting and intelligent one.

Professor Samantha Twiselton, Director, Sheffield Institute of Education, and Vice President (external), The Chartered College of Teaching

Stephen Lane has rightly identified the paucity in research on the pastoral side of working with children in today’s schools. In *Beyond Wiping Noses* he shepherds us through a wide-ranging tour of his thoughts on matters pastoral, challenging the long-held sense that it is best undertaken only by those with the instinct and feel for how best to support the welfare, wellbeing and emotional development of children. Colleagues in schools, and those entering the profession, will find this book a thought-provoking and stimulating read.

Jarlath O’Brien, author of *Better Behaviour: A Guide for Teachers*

An engaging and thought-provoking journey through the multifarious aspects of pastoral provision, offering readers a plethora of practical suggestions which may support classroom teachers to promote higher levels of school wellbeing.

Sarah Mullin, deputy head teacher and author of *What They Didn’t Teach Me on My PGCE*

Amongst the clamour and noise surrounding cognitive science, evidence-based practice and knowledge-rich curricula, little to no mention has been made of the pastoral dimension to education. Despite the slow emergence of the academic side of teaching into the light of research and evidence, pastoral work seems rooted in folk wisdom and gut instinct. This remarkable work by Stephen Lane bridges that gap, tying together these different worlds in a clear and well-researched book. Lane’s breadth of reading is truly impressive, and he writes with authority on a range of thinkers and academics, distilling with ease ideas from Foucault, Biesta, Kirschner, Counsell and more.

Beyond Wiping Noses should be the starting point for everyone involved in pastoral work – and, accepting the argument that Lane makes from the outset, that means all of us.

Adam Boxer, Head of Science, The Totteridge Academy

Before reading *Beyond Wiping Noses* I was completely in the dark about the research available to help teachers inform their pastoral practices in school. This book helps to cut through the confusion and mixed messages over the kind of pastoral care that schools can and should offer, and places it into a wider context of curriculum and pedagogical thinking that teachers and school leaders may be more familiar with.

Beyond Wiping Noses needs to not only be read by pastoral leads but by all teachers and school leaders who play a role in helping the children in their care through the trials and tribulations of school life.

**Mark Enser, Head of Geography and Research Lead,
Heathfield Community College, TES columnist
and author of *Teach Like Nobody's Watching***

Stephen Lane gives hope and strength to anyone who feels that schools can sometimes forget to relate to the whole child or leave some children behind in the drive for academic results. He approaches a fundamental but somewhat neglected area of school life, and shines a light on these vital issues with rigour, sensitivity and reference to evidence-based practice. In doing so he has created a bible for any teacher or school leader whose concern is the wellbeing of their pupils. A particular strength of the book is the way he marries a comprehensive overview of the theory with practical suggestions for day-to-day school life. I would urge all schools to have a copy of *Beyond Wiping Noses* in their staffroom.

Peter Nelmes, school leader and author of *Troubled Hearts, Troubled Minds: Making Sense of the Emotional Dimension of Learning*

Beyond Wiping Noses is a comprehensive exploration of what pastoral care is in schools. It also offers a detailed and balanced examination of how a pastoral curriculum could become an evidence-informed provision in schools, something which is often neglected in discussions around pastoral provision.

Too often, evidence focuses solely on teaching and learning and neglects the pastoral. This book very effectively bridges the two:

showing how research evidence can be applied in pastoral care, while also exploring a range of interesting sources of research that all pastoral leaders need to know about.

This is a must-read for anyone working in or aspiring to pastoral leadership. It is also important reading for anyone aspiring to senior leadership, where a balanced and nuanced understanding of pastoral provision is essential.

**Amy Forrester, Director of Pastoral Care -
Key Stage 4, Cockermonth School**

What is clear about this book by Stephen Lane is that there is an overdue need for all those involved in pastoral care and leadership to question what is right, what is needed and how to create schools that place humanity and the safeguarding of children and young people at their heart.

From behaviour management, bullying and restorative practice to computational thinking, cognitive load theory and much more, this book is jam-packed with gems of brilliance. A balanced critique of literature and educational approaches to ways of supporting children and young people is crucial, and this is Stephen's mission: getting us to reflect on what we offer and how we offer it, and suggesting ways to develop an even better pastoral care system in our school. His support of the four Cs - care, curriculum, cultivation and congregation - will resonate in my heart and mind for a considerable time.

Beyond Wiping Noses is a gem of a book. Read it and make use of it to question the pastoral care system in your own school and how you can ensure it meets everyone's needs.

**Nina Jackson, education consultant, Teach Learn Create Ltd, author,
mental health adviser and award-winning motivational speaker**

Beyond Wiping Noses is a much-needed and wonderfully refreshing, thought-provoking and uplifting read. Such a careful and intelligent explication of the theory, philosophy and policy that lie behind pastoral practice is an essential resource for any school leader, and indeed all staff, involved in pastoral work.

Lane weaves together strands from key thinkers such as Dewey, Biesta and Foucault to present a model of pragmatic pastoral praxis - providing substance to an often ill-defined area, giving shape to what research-informed pastoral work might look like, and offering an

inspirational and deeply human call to 'extend beyond the utilitarian to develop a hopeful optimism'. In this un hiding of the pastoral curriculum, Lane challenges us to reflect on the nature of our assemblies, form time, everyday interactions with pupils, the curricular links between these elements, and the links with other subjects such as PSHE and SMSC.

The reflective, intentional and integrated approach manifested throughout *Beyond Wiping Noses* is an invaluable contribution to the education literature and will undoubtedly contribute to something of a revolution in the way pastoral work is thought about and enacted in our schools.

**Ruth Ashbee, Assistant Head Teacher - Curriculum,
The Telford Priory School**

Beyond Wiping Noses carefully navigates the paths through the pastoral life of a school leader and weaves theory with practical suggestions for a wide scope of issues - including bullying, behaviour systems, the pastoral curriculum and character education, as well as many other relevant and contemporary pastoral issues.

Stephen Lane explores the pertinence of educational research but acknowledges its limitations, especially when applied to truly human contexts. He is also insightful in his appreciation of contextual differences and the challenges that these may present. Although the text is often grounded in the debates and discussions seen on edu-Twitter, this need not alienate those who do not tweet, for the issues raised in *Beyond Wiping Noses* are pertinent and the Twitter debate is often reflected in 'real life' staffrooms nationally.

This book is detailed, thoughtful and very *human*; there's a sense of the person behind the writing, and an appreciation of the human behind the eyes of the reader.

**Sarah Barker, English teacher, Orchard School Bristol,
writer and blogger**

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This book is dedicated to Mrs Sputnik.
No words can fully encapsulate why, but thank you.

And to my daughters. Because.

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I wish to thank my Twitter buddies. All of the encouragement, support and friendship there has been phenomenal. Cut through all the nonsense of edu-Twitter and you can find some genuinely good folk.

Huge thanks to David and the team at Crown House Publishing, whose work is extraordinary. Particularly, eternal thanks to Louise for bearing with me and making these words carry some semblance of sense.

I would also like to say a big thank you to Claire Stoneman, who got me thinking about all of this.

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Foreword

I loved being a form tutor. I had the same group throughout their progression through the school from Year 7 to Year 11. As I was a newly qualified teacher (NQT) at the time, I felt I grew up professionally with them. They taught me a lot. I became aware quite early on, however, that while I'd had pretty good support both as an NQT and early career professional as far as my subject was concerned, the same did not hold true for my pastoral role. When I asked the senior leader who 'led on CPD' (and who discharged his responsibility for this aspect of his work by putting the odd flier about subject-specific courses in our pigeonholes) whether there were any courses on being a form tutor, he looked surprised and said that he didn't think there were as he hadn't come across any, before also commenting that it was probably a good idea. Nothing further was heard or done about it.

This was the early 1990s and there was no internet, certainly not in schools, so if it didn't land in your pigeonhole, your sources of information were pretty limited. Fortunately, there were good folk I could call on, compare notes with, and I generally bumbled through - but there was nothing systematic that I could draw on. A further indicator of the fact that this role was not taken seriously was that being a form tutor did not come up in any of the professional conversations and appraisal of my teaching work. It was as though it just 'happened'.

And it turns out that not a huge amount has changed in the decades since. At the end of a webinar with school colleagues yesterday afternoon, there was a question about further professional reading, including whether I could suggest any texts that could develop the role of pastoral leaders. Fortunately, I was able to recommend Stephen's book, but it has to be said that there is a dearth of literature on this important aspect of school provision. And it is for this reason that *Beyond Wiping Noses* is very welcome.

As Stephen notes, the status of the form tutor has not really been discussed for over twenty years, either formally or informally (on social media or otherwise). It is a shame that this role which has the

potential to make a difference to young people has been neglected for so long. Ofsted's (2019b) *Education Inspection Framework* might help to open up conversations and more opportunities for tutors to reflect on this aspect of their work. In the personal development judgement it refers to the extent to which the curriculum and the provider's wider work support learners to develop their resilience, confidence and independence - fertile ground I would suggest for thinking about this in relation to the role of the form tutor.

Stephen provides some fascinating insights as he gets to the heart of what a pastoral role entails, and in considering the role through a range of different lenses - from the 'golden rule' to character education to cyberbullying - and offers us ways in which we might amplify this aspect of school provision. And, in doing so, he makes the case for building an informed approach to pastoral leadership in schools.

Having established that the pastoral role is a remarkably under-researched area of provision, Stephen considers some of the insights from cognitive science and learning research which might throw light on pastoral work. These are particularly fruitful, and it is good to see that decades-old wisdom - for example, from Michael Marland's (1974) classic work *Pastoral Care* - is referenced in this book. And it is Marland who was one of the founders of the National Association for Pastoral Care in Education (NAPCE).

Each chapter concludes with some top tips to help embed this work - for example, the exemplary advice from Bill Rogers and others in encouraging teachers and form tutors to think in advance about their responses to challenging behaviour and to prepare a 'script' which could be used to frame these difficult conversations.

Ultimately, *Beyond Wiping Noses* will take us some way towards opening up discussions about what a pastoral role might entail. This is important because for much of the sector it is a 'hidden' curriculum of social practices and expectations - and in becoming more deliberate about our work in this area, we will enhance the status of this aspect of pupils' experience in school.

Mary Myatt

Safeguarding

Before we begin, a note on safeguarding. If you have not received any recent safeguarding training in your school, go speak to your designated safeguarding lead (DSL) right now. If you don't know who your DSL is, go speak to your head teacher right now.

Safeguarding policy is the single most important thing that all those working with children and young people need to know. If you are working in schools in any capacity then you are required to at least be familiar with the publication *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (Department for Education, 2019c).

It is not within the intended scope of this book to discuss the topic of safeguarding any further than to insist that you ensure your safeguarding training is up to date and that you have read the key documents. If you are a school leader, you must ensure that your staff - all of them - have read these documents and received the required training. If you are reading this book in school right now, stop. Email a copy of *Keeping Children Safe in Education* to all your staff with a read receipt request. Get your HR person to check the records to ensure that everyone on staff has received the required training. If you are reading this after hours, have safeguarding as your first action point for tomorrow. Put safeguarding on every meeting agenda. Put safeguarding at the heart of every conversation.

Introduction

I have been a keen advocate of research- and evidence-informed practice in teaching for a number of years. I have established a reputation with colleagues as quite well-versed – authoritative, even – on the subject. After all, I have attended and spoken at conferences, offering my plus-one tickets to colleagues; I have shared research papers with colleagues and delivered INSET on topics such as cognitive load theory (CLT); I have adapted my classroom teaching to include retrieval practice, dual coding and interleaving; I have argued on Twitter over what constitutes ‘research’ and whether teachers could ever truly be ‘researchers’; I have mentored trainee teachers and discussed with them the power of the testing effect; I’ve written training materials about how to apply Rosenshine’s (2012) principles of instruction in the English classroom. But when I was asked to deliver a session at researchEDBrum on how I use research and evidence in my pastoral role, I was hit by an unnerving realisation: I don’t.

The truth is that teaching is generally not (yet) a research- or evidence-informed profession. The frequently trotted out analogy of medicine, whilst problematic, at least gives some interesting points of contrast. Nurses, for example, are required to demonstrate a commitment to relevant ongoing training in order to maintain their registration.

A key word search for the term ‘research’ conducted on the teaching vacancies section of the *TES* website, compared with the equivalents for the *BMJ* and *Nursing Times*, is pretty revealing. On 4 September 2019 – the day I happened to be looking into this – there were ‘over 2,833’ jobs advertised on the *TES* website.¹ Of these, four contained the key word ‘research’. However, three were from the same school, which happens to have the word ‘research’ in its name. The remaining position was for a ‘database and

¹ See <https://www.tes.com/jobs>. Data gathered 4 September 2019. *TES* total number of jobs advertised was 2,833; number of jobs containing the term ‘research’ was 1: 0.04%. *BMJ* total number of jobs advertised was 575; number of jobs containing the term ‘research’ was 167: 29.04%. *Nursing Times* total number of jobs advertised was 155; number of jobs containing the term ‘research’ was 26: 16.77%.

research manager' role, designed to support fundraising activities. So, one job in 2,833 – that's 0.04% – uses the word 'research', but this is not directly related to any aspect of the actual work of teaching – academic or otherwise.

By comparison, both the *BMJ*² and *Nursing Times*³ websites advertised far more job listings featuring the word 'research': 29% and 17% respectively. Whilst a small number of these may be due to the term being part of a hospital name, for example, the vast majority do in fact refer to research in the job outlines. For instance, one vacancy on the *Nursing Times* website says: 'You'll demonstrate good clinical practice at all times and be accountable for own actions and contribute to the setting of clinical standards, policy and procedures and research based care and other practice development initiatives.' I've yet to see any job advertised on the *TES* that includes a specific commitment to research-based practice.

Goldacre (2013, p. 7) has been a vocal proponent of research-informed practice in education, seeing it as a 'huge prize waiting to be claimed by teachers', but it seems that his call for education to follow in the footsteps of medicine has not yet been heeded across the field. Thankfully, there is clearly a growing interest in, and support for, research-informed practice in teaching, as evidenced by the huge success of researchED, the rise of Research Schools, and access to research journals through the Chartered College of Teaching and its in-house journal *Impact*. The Department for Education has thrown its weight behind research-informed practice too, with Nick Gibb speaking at a number of researchED conferences to highlight its importance (e.g. Department for Education and Gibb, 2015, 2018).

However, much of the discourse around research-informed practice in education is about domain-specific pedagogy – that is, teaching subject knowledge – and is increasingly dominated by CLT, retrieval practice and the definition of learning as adding to long-term memory (Clark et al., 2012). Whilst this domain-specific pedagogical application of research is clearly important, it seems to me that an

2 See <https://jobs.bmj.com>.

3 See <https://www.nursingtimesjobs.com>.

essential aspect of teaching is potentially being neglected – the pastoral aspect. If pedagogy is still lagging in terms of the application of research to practice, then the pastoral aspect of teaching is woefully poorly served. In my experience – having worked in many different schools over two decades – pastoral work is often ad hoc and reactive. Many schools have systems and routines in place, such as tariffs of sanctions for misbehaviour, but none in my experience have adopted a research- or evidence-informed approach to the pastoral. With the exception of safeguarding, there is no body of literature to which teachers can make reference in their discussions, no procedures which rely on case studies, and no equivalent of the British National Formulary, whose publications ‘reflect current best practice as well as legal and professional guidelines relating to the uses of medicines’.⁴ There is no equivalent of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), the medical regulatory body which publishes industry guidelines, to supervise interventions. And yet the ways in which teachers respond to pastoral issues can have long-lasting consequences for the children in their care, and the lack of consistency between – and even within – schools is potentially problematic.

The problem also works the other way around: trying to find relevant literature by searching on an online book retailer’s website for the key term ‘head of year’ yields very few results, and doing a literature search through my university’s library portal yields only a few items of relevance. The term ‘pastoral leader’ returns just as little. All of which suggests that the notion of being a research- and/or evidence-informed pastoral practitioner is still entirely novel.

This is worrying and yet unsurprising. In Chapter 1, I will explore how many teachers regard the pastoral as less important than the academic: they don’t like being form tutors, and they find the pastoral hard. And yet, with the increased focus on mental health and wellbeing, along with the increase in concerns over cyberbullying and the negative effects of social media use, the pastoral is arguably more important than ever. Schools, at least, do acknowledge the importance of the pastoral: it is common to find responsibility

4 See <https://www.bnf.org/about/>.

for it designated to a member of the senior leadership team (SLT), along with other common pastoral roles such as heads of year, heads of house and, of course, form tutors. But, whilst the educational discourse is alive with discussions about research-informed approaches to classroom pedagogy, alongside the recent prominence of curriculum, the pastoral is seriously under-represented.

My journey in teaching began back in 1998, when I embarked on a BEd in secondary English at Newman College of Higher Education in Birmingham (now Newman University). I loved it. I enjoyed the subject specialism aspects of the course - literature, linguistics and a bit of drama too. I loved the pedagogy aspects of it: discussing approaches to teaching and learning, and the modules on professional studies - just being involved in that discourse was exciting, challenging and stimulating. But I distinctly remember being particularly fond of the pastoral aspects of the course, especially the modules on the social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) elements of schooling. The pastoral aspects were a significant feature of my initial teacher training (ITT), but over the decades I have worked in schools that are increasingly subjected to accountability measures which have moved the language of meetings and 'training', and the daily discussions of the staffroom, away from the pastoral needs of students and towards the requirements of statistical analysis and the inspectorate. Performance management has been centred upon percentages of students attaining target grades, themselves based upon dubious statistical claims. Teachers have been judged using Ofsted grades, based on observations of the unobservable. School leaders now speak of 'buckets' and Progress 8 scores (see Ing, 2018).

Moving into the independent sector was startling. I was taken back to the cruciality of the pastoral, with students seen as 'glorious individuals' (to quote my current head teacher). Of course, there are many schools where this might be the case. Since joining Twitter and engaging with the network of educators that it enables, I have been reassured to see many school leaders proclaiming their visions for schooling, pedagogy and the curriculum with the aim of empowering students to engage in the great conversations of humanity (Arnold, 1869). It has been invigorating to see the rise of the researchED community and the Chartered College of Teaching

championing the power of research-informed approaches. I have been an ardent supporter of the research movement.

I am now a regular at researchED events and am a founding fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching. I have adapted my own teaching practice, and shout from the rooftops about Rosenshine and CLT. So it was with a dawning sense of humbling embarrassment that I realised, when I was asked to give a talk on how I use research in my pastoral role, that my work as head of year was frequently reactive and instinctive, and that I had not read a single paper on pastoral care since I completed my BEd in 2001. I set about addressing that, and discovered - amongst other things - a set of resources through the journal *Pastoral Care in Education*. Immediately, I began to see ways to improve my practice in relation to a particular pastoral issue and, by extension, to improve the experience of the students in my care.

This book is a reflection of the journey I have taken towards a more informed response to pastoral matters. Although my route takes in some scholarly scenery, this is not an academic treatise. It has not been peer-reviewed, and I do not claim to have conducted rigorous or thorough literature reviews. There are no claims to definitive answers here, but the book serves to support the reader in building their own research-informed approach to pastoral leadership. Each chapter points to some key themes, ideas and sources, before offering suggestions for changes to practice.

Pastoral Roles

Introduction

All teachers are pastoral leaders. This may not be welcome news for some of them though. Judging by a Twitter poll I ran in December 2019, over a third of teachers do not like being a form tutor: many of the comments I received in reply articulated negative feelings.¹ Some respondents find the pastoral hard, and some demonstrated a clear distinction between the academic and the pastoral, suggesting that the latter should be left for those with a 'passion' for it. I think this reflects a worrying tendency in many schools for the pastoral to be treated as a bolt-on to what is seen as their main work - academic attainment, especially in the secondary sector (where I am based). Here, teachers are subject specialists, having most likely completed a subject-based degree before a one-year teacher training course. Some of these courses include strong pastoral elements, but many do not. Many ITT providers are based in schools where pastoral provision might be patchy at best.

Every teacher - indeed, every adult in the school - has a pastoral duty: an obligation to put safeguarding at the forefront of their work and to be mindful of the students' wellbeing. In a conversation about this on Twitter, one contributor pointed out the vital role played by her daughter's school librarian in doing more to keep her daughter 'happy, safe & able to attend school than any other member of staff'.² However, there are roles within the school designed specifically to focus on pastoral care.

1 Twitter poll, 17 December 2019. Available at: <https://twitter.com/sputniksteve/status/1206990556590673920?s=20>.

2 See <https://twitter.com/eleonorasfalcon/status/1213431798014853121?s=20>.

The Form Tutor

Not all teachers are form tutors. Often, those with managerial posts, such as heads of department, are 'relieved' of the requirement to be form tutors in order to give them additional management time. In my current role as head of year, I do not have a form. This enables me to visit other teachers' forms in the morning and affords me time to deal with any pastoral issues that may have arisen. Sometimes, part-time teachers might not have a form. There may be a whole variety of other reasons why teachers might not be form tutors.

The form tutor role usually involves greeting the students at the start of the day for formal registration in 'form time', during which administrative tasks are often carried out - checking planners, checking uniform, conveying messages and so on. But its importance goes beyond the administrative. For some, form time represents the buffer zone between *out there* and *in here*, where *in here* is the school day. Form time is the transition time between *not school* and *in school and learning*. Some tutors like to cultivate an informal space, or perhaps a semi-formal space, where the transition occurs during the ten or fifteen minutes available. For others, the transition occurs at the threshold of the form room: as students enter, they are expected to immediately transition into 'school mode', adopting the appropriate mental stance, ensuring their uniform is correct before coming in and so on. In some schools, form time is expected to be busy, with some personal, social, health, and economic (PSHE) education activities, a topical discussion or similar. In other cases, form time is for social cohesion: a time when students can chat, and the tutor joins in.

Students are often encouraged to cultivate a sense of ownership of the form room, perhaps by creating a wall display. The form tutor adopts the role of a nurturing guide - some more formal than others. Furthermore, the form tutor is often positioned as the first port of call if a student has any issues or questions, and the first port of call for parents too. In some schools the form tutor is more heavily involved in the students' daily affairs, but the role is fairly universally understood.

It is actually a fairly difficult role to balance. As a form tutor, the relationship you have with your students is not quite the same as it is if you teach those same students in your subject lessons. Judging the degree of formality can be tricky. Fostering a supportive, relaxed and warm atmosphere in form time, one which is also conducive to establishing a sense of preparedness for learning, can be as contradictory as trying to perform Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy as a comedic mime. My solution as a form tutor was essentially to treat form time as a lesson, albeit a slightly more relaxed one.

Beyond the constraints of form time, though, the form tutor is, or at least should be, the first point of contact for pastoral issues that arise during the day. This can be very challenging, especially on days when you have a full teaching timetable, break duties and lunchtime meetings. Firstly, when do you find time to listen to your tutee's concerns? Secondly, when do you find time to pursue any follow-up, let alone complete any necessary paperwork? And what if the concern is a safeguarding one? What if, at the end of break-time when you've just come out of a staff briefing, you find little Gertrude is waiting outside the staffroom to tell you that she wants to die? But you've got double Year 11 next, and they're just three months away from their exams and the head teacher has made it very clear that Year 11 lessons must not be cancelled or missed or delayed and your performance management targets demand that 90% of them get grade 7 or above and they're the bottom set and if you're late they're going to be causing mayhem in the corridors and ...

The pressure on teachers just to attend to their classes is immense; additional issues which can arise unexpectedly and have the potential to wipe out a day's teaching add fuel to an already precarious mix of volatile emotions. Hopefully, in most schools there is a good network of pastoral support structures: perhaps there are non-teaching pastoral support workers who can help a child in trauma; perhaps the head of year has a sensible timetable enabling them to support the child; perhaps there is a member of SLT who can assist. At the very least, you may have a sympathetic departmental colleague who could cover your Year 11 class for a while.

But, ultimately, the form tutor role is inevitably a bolt-on to being a 'teacher'. In job descriptions, pastoral aspects of the job are always included as core elements, but they are almost always listed after the academic elements. The status of the form tutor has not really been promoted in the literature either. Very little has been written specifically about the role since the 1990s or early 2000s and, like the pastoral in general, it has not been a significant feature in discussion on edu-Twitter or in the wider discourse of research-informed education practice. The more I think about it, the sadder I feel about this apparent neglect of the form tutor role, especially given its clear potential to have a positive impact on children and young people.

Head of Year

I love being a head of year, fraught though it is with the emotional carnage of childhood or - in my Key Stage 3 context - that vicious twilight zone of the emergent teenager. It's difficult to list all the things that we actually do in pastoral leadership roles - to precisely articulate the nuance of the situations that might arise, to catalogue the multitudinous decisions that we have to make on a daily basis, to fully chart the navigation of tempestuous social relationships, to index the infinite complexities of the endless variations in social, emotional and mental wellbeing that our students experience. And then there is the school context. Whilst there are, no doubt, a hundred commonalities across diverse school communities, there are surely thousands of context-dependent needs and demands that form tutors, heads of year and pastoral leaders must try to understand and negotiate in order to best serve those in our care.

Nevertheless, there is obviously a need to define the role of head of year (or pastoral leader), if only in order that such posts can be advertised and qualified in job descriptions. So, how would you do it? If you were going to write the job description for a head of year role, what would you include? What would be the first bullet point on the list? What would you prioritise? And, perhaps more interestingly, what would you omit?

Perusing the job adverts and accompanying descriptions on the *TES* website is, again, revealing. Many reflect a desire to find someone who can 'motivate' people; who shows 'enthusiasm, sensitivity, resilience and strong interpersonal skills'; someone who is 'inspirational'. Of course, they must be 'an outstanding and talented practitioner' because everyone must be 'outstanding' - it's a word which has probably done more harm to the teaching profession than any other. And this is the problem with this kind of language - or jargon - as it appears in so many of these advertisements: it's a sloganised managerialism full of clichés so cold they've been rendered ultimately meaningless. Do a search for the term 'passion' in teaching job adverts and behold the banality. This kind of wording says nothing about the job. Sure, it presents a kind of idealised set of aims, including the desire to improve 'young people's life chances', but there's nothing much there in terms of specifics. Meanwhile, job descriptions often include a lot of 'co-ordination', ensuring 'student progress' and reviewing attendance data. Whilst these tasks are perfectly reasonable and important, it strikes me that they are somewhat ... administrative, managerial, dry. There's also nothing there about commitment to professional growth or learning, and nothing at all about developing research- or evidence-informed policy or practice.

It could be argued that such job descriptions perpetuate what Lodge (2008, p. 5) sees as the persistence of 'dysfunctional interpretations' of the role of head of year: 'using the system for administration, as a watered-down welfare service, or for behaviour management'. Lodge goes on to present a phrase used by a group of head teachers with whom she was working which she claims 'poignantly captures two of these distortions: "wiping noses and kicking butts"' (p. 5). Lodge articulates frustration at the notion of the head of year role being about behaviour management - kicking butts - and we will take a look at this particular aspect of pastoral care in a later chapter. The notion that perhaps we ought to be moving beyond a view of the pastoral as 'wiping noses and kicking butts' is one that I can support.

Despite the vastness of the tangled web of all that the pastoral encompasses, it is nonetheless valuable to draw out some of these strands in an attempt to define what a pastoral leadership role

About the Author



Having worked in education for over two decades, **Stephen Lane** has experience in both subject leadership and pastoral leadership. Stephen has become a trusted voice through Twitter and researchED for his critiques of the language of teaching and for his desire to strip teaching job adverts of their reliance on the terms 'outstanding' and 'passion'. He is also well known for his concern about the apparent lack of the pastoral in discourse about educational research, and is a keen advocate of schools who seek to strengthen their pastoral leadership through engaging with research. @sputniksteve

Sets out the crucial role of pastoral care as part of the function and purpose of schooling – and shares practical insights on how schools can get it right.

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