



# Case Study

---

## TEACHERS WHO ARE NEW TO THEIR LEADERSHIP ROLES

### **Steve Farmer – Assistant Head at St James School in Exeter**



Steve would be the first to admit that his career – and his path to senior leadership – has been an unusual one, especially in terms of speed of promotion.

This is only his 8<sup>th</sup> year of teaching and he has been at St James since he arrived as an NQT. He teaches ICT / Computing and is Assistant Head, responsible for data, assessment, reporting, community engagement, pupil premium, pupil voice and innovation across the school (amongst other things!).

During his relatively short career to date, Steve has fulfilled a variety of leadership roles, starting in middle leadership at the end of his NQT year, and including being an Innovation Fellow for the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust. Each year he has taken on more responsibilities and his role has constantly grown and developed. This is a summarised version of his leadership journey:

### **What inspired him to move into senior leadership?**

Each incremental step in his leadership journey has seemed like a natural progression. Every year of his career to date, Steve has taken on additional leadership responsibilities and opportunities.

People seem to recognise in him his constant enthusiasm for what he is doing and this makes people believe in him. Some of these people have been significant influences on his career and actively fostered the right conditions – both in personal qualities and in experience and qualifications – to set him on an accelerated path to senior leadership.

### **What supported him to move into senior leadership?**

Many of the factors that have supported Steve's leadership journey have been found within: a strong work ethic, being calm under pressure, reflecting constantly on his practice, taking his CPD into own hands, being active on Twitter, to name but a few, but he has also received tremendous support from head teachers (past and present) that have seen these qualities in him and have opened doors.

These leaders not only gave him opportunities for development, right from the start, but also believed in his ideas and trusted him to implement them. The school has a number of mechanisms – for example the Toes In Water scheme, that allows middle leaders to shadow senior leaders for half a term or a term, to get a feel for the role – that have enabled Steve to progress confidently.

He has undertaken leadership training (NPQSL), which he found to be very worthwhile and which helped him to sharpen his focus.

Steve is also very motivated by his passion for his school and his pride in the part – however small – that he has played in the tremendous journey that it has been on in recent years.

### **What barriers have there been to becoming a senior leader?**

Steve's rather meteoric rise to senior leadership would indicate that he has allowed many things get in the way of his professional development... but this isn't an accident. Such total commitment to achieving your goals and such powerful personal drive and determination can bypass most barriers.

### **What might be helpful to others that are looking to move into senior leadership?**

Steve has a number of pieces of advice for someone looking to move into senior leadership:

- Own your own CPD – take responsibility for taking yourself where you want to go.
- Know who you are and what you want out of your career. If you don't know what your options are, find out. Be proactive in pursuing the experiences, qualifications and skills that will get you where you want to be.
- Play to your strengths – don't do a role because you are interested in the title – do it because you believe passionately in what you would be doing.
- Use all the free CPD resources out there – Twitter, Facebook, etc. – to keep up to date with research and development in your field.
- Identify somebody in your organisation that can be a coach / mentor – informally or formally.
- Don't get too hung up on or hurt by mistakes – but be humble and accountable for mistakes that you do make (and all leaders make mistakes!).
- Know how to manage your time and commitments. You will have a lot of balls in the air at any one time!
- Get involved with ECTSA (Exeter Consortium and Teaching School Alliance). They run so many useful courses, events, symposiums, etc. that can keep you up to date with the latest thinking.